

# Behind the Wine

SOMETIMES ASKING A WINEMAKER ABOUT WINE CAN BE AS BEWILDERING AS ASKING STEPHEN HAWKINS FOR A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME. THANK HEAVENS THERE ARE PEOPLE LIKE CHRIS BARNES AT HAND!

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As consumers, when we think of the wine industry the first images that usually come to mind are of endless rows of vineyards tended by dedicated vigneron and winemakers.

But it is possible to get involved with wine without ever having to get your hands dirty. Working behind the scenes are marketers, consultants, educators, writers and judges who are all essential to making sure your wine experience is complete.

Among them is Chris Barnes, a wine industry 'Jack of all Trades' whose passion for wine and all its elements makes him an invaluable resource to the Australian Wine Industry.

Chris graduated from Roseworthy in 1987 at a time when he claims "the industry was so small that they were desperate for anybody", so if you were "warm and vertical" you were accepted. Despite starting with very little knowledge of wine, ("I had no idea you could actually study wine, I literally thought it was something you were born into") apart from the fact that he enjoyed drinking it, he graduated with honours in Wine Marketing.

But restricting his career to simply wine marketing would be far too straightforward for Barnes, who's gone on to dip his finger in a variety of wine pies.

As well as acting as a marketing consultant to several wineries he's a wine writer, wine show judge at both national and international levels and an educator to the general public as well as undergraduate and postgraduate university students.

And it's in the area of education that his real passion lies. As he describes, "I enjoy what I suppose you would call the hard edge education – teaching undergraduates and postgrads. While it's quite formal teaching, I really enjoy doing it because you get a very structured result out of it. However, I also enjoy just meeting people in my role as a wine educator. Whether they're younger people just being introduced to wine or they're in a boardroom with chief



executives, it's very satisfying opening people's eyes to new wines and new styles and varieties."

So for someone whose career has been so diverse, is it possible to bring all his wine experience down to a single favourite moment? Well it certainly is when you've been to Champagne heaven. "The best wine experience I've had in recent years would have to be at Moët & Chandon, you know, being looked after and having the VIP treatment at Moët is being hit with the luxury stick and I was lucky enough to do that last year. When you drink a bottle of your birth year Dom Perignon – that's pretty amazing."

And when your working life is spent sampling some of the country's best wines, I just had to ask what Chris' last wine and food combination would be if he only had one day left on earth. "A bottle of Neagles Rock The Frisky Filly Riesling and a dozen fresh Cockle Bay oysters. But that assumes that the last day on earth is summer. If the last day on earth was the middle of winter, then it would be a La Chapelle (Rhône Hermitage) with, I know it's not terribly politically correct, but steak and kidney pie."

But at the end of the day, Barnes is very much of the belief that a wine is not great unless it is shared. "I think the important thing is that great wine experiences are as much about who you are with, where you are and the people, the place as the wine you're drinking. Great wines are never drunk on your own in front of the television". ■