



Family owned, distinctly Margaret River.

## HOTEL AND CATERING REVIEW

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WINE

# Australia's Athlone Wine Maker

**BILL MARTIN FROM ATHLONE ONCE SOLD CAMPBELL'S SOUPS AROUND THE WEST OF IRELAND. NOW HE AND HIS FAMILY RUN ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL WINERIES IN SOUTH WEST AUSTRALIA ALONG WITH A BUSTLING RESTAURANT AND BANQUETING CENTRE.**

'One day we decided to go to Australia. It was a question of Do It Now - or Don't Do It At All', he tells me over coffee in the Shelbourne Hotel.

Bill was back in Ireland as part of the Australian Wine Promotional Tour which held a fair in Croke Park and he was on his way to visit Ray Byrne at the Wineport in Glasheen.

'Ireland has changed', he says. 'There is a lot of knowledge now about food and wine.'

Born and educated in Athlone, Bill married Ena, a local girl and started working for Campbells out of Galway, where they also ran a bed and breakfast. It was a good time to be in food distribution. 'We had the first of the supermarkets like Five Star and Quinnsworth and also the Spar shops which captured business from places like Liptons.'

But Bill and Ena decided on the big move to Australia in 1974. 'We had to go for an interview at the Australian Embassy because they wanted immigrants to be professional people. When I said that I was in sales, I was told that Australia had enough sales people-so I told them I was also in the hospitality and tourism business-and that enabled me to be accepted.'

On the advice of a colleague, Bill, Ena and sons Shane, Conor and Brian moved to Perth where Bill was soon back in sales, working for drinks distributor Dalgetty. When the company

was acquired by Seagram he decided to set up his own business and produced a range of speciality breads. 'We had bakeries produce these added-value breads to our recipes and we built up a distribution network through supermarkets and multiples', Bill recalls.

It was a tremendous success, achieving national distribution in Australia. His next step was to export the concept to the USA and it was successful enough there to be snapped up by food giant Sarah Lee.

'The development did not happen over night. It took 17 years to reach that stage', says Bill.

He used the proceeds to buy a large tract of land in the Margaret River wine region, about three hours south of Perth.

'The Government had identified Margaret River as the best location for vines in South West Australia, so it made sense to buy there', says Bill.

The 573 acre farm is located about 30 kilometres north of the Margaret River township and the vineyards are perched 120 metres above sea level close to Cape Clairault. The cape itself is named after Alexis Clairault, an 18th century mathematician who recalculated the arrival date of Halley's Comet and whose maths are used to meas-

ure the movement of greenhouse gasses to-day.

The vineyard was relatively new with the first vines planted in 1976. Only 30 acres were under vine when Bill bought the land in 1999, but he added a further 35 acres in 2000 and is now up to 120 acres.

From the outset however Bill and Ena saw the enterprise as involving more than just wine production. They set about

building a large restaurant and banqueting room as well as a Cellar Door wine shop. Business grew rapidly and two of their sons joined the company. Brian started to work in the vineyard and has become an expert viticulturalist. 'He took to it like a duck to water', says Bill. 'He is very interested in organic production and we are moving to producing certified organic grapes. It will take about four years to complete the programme, but already our vineyards are looking healthier than ever before.'

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can stay overnight. We are already a very popular wedding venue', says Bill.

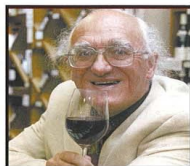
With no background in wine making Bill hired South African viticulturalist Nick McPherson and winemaker Peter Stark from Victoria. Together they have successfully grown cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, merlot and cabernet franc grapes from which they produce a series of varietals and blends sold under the Clairault brand. The wines have been popular with visitors and are now also distributed in Australia and in export markets, including Ireland where they are distributed by Febvre and Company.

Bill Martin with his family at Clairault, Australia.

'We are a multi-faceted business', says Bill. 'We are in wine production, wine making, cellar door sales, distribution and exporting. We are involved in tourism which has meant a lot to this area of Australia where unemployment was very high until fairly recent times after the local logging industry declined.'

Bill is delighted with progress so far. 'We are at the quality end of the wine business with interesting new styles. Some 80% of our wines were not there five years ago.'

The wines have been well received in export markets that include Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, UK and Canada and Bill is particularly proud of the gold medal they won at the London International Wine



Wine by Frank Corr

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▲ Pictured at the launch of the Mareau Chablis Fish Dish Competition are (from left) John McKenna, Noel Flynn, Grants of Ireland and the 2004 winner Mark Doe, executive chef, Portmancock Hotel and Golf Links

### Challenge.

Clairault wines listed by Febvre include cabernet sauvignon and chardonnay varietals, a cabernet merlot blend and Clairault Reserve (cabernet sauvignon/cabernet franc/merlot) plus 'Swagman's' sauvignon blanc and cabernet merlot.

So is this a little piece of Ireland in South West Australia? 'Well, our home place is called Claddagh', says Bill.

### SMART NEW CADET

Expect a rash of news items over the coming months from French wine producers who are taking a 'New World' approach.

Stung in pride and pocket by the decline in French wine sales and the success of Southern Hemisphere upstarts, the French aristocrats are planning their own revolution. Watch out therefore for new brand names, snazzy packaging, and market-driven products from at least the more progressive wine producers of France.

Up there in the vanguard is Baroness Philippina de Rothschild (and they don't come a lot more Patricia!). Her Mouton Cadet has long been an established brand, promising drinkable wine at a sensible price. But the brand may have been slipping in recent years because the marketing people at this Rothschild company, began doing market research.

'We were aware of the growth of New World wines, the increasing dominance of wine brands, the fragmentation of French brands and changing consumer tastes', said Edouard Thouvenot, area manager, during a visit to Dublin.

So they went out into the market and asked thousands of wine drinkers what they thought about Mouton Cadet and how it could be improved. Then they went back to the winery and put some of the suggestions into practice.

How very Oz.

The result, says Edouard, is a softer, fruitier Mouton Cadet, which can be drunk younger, is of improved quality and has new stylish packaging. The wine makers have changed the blend a little, re-defined the sources of supply, tweaked the vinification process, cut maturation time and bottled the wine earlier than before. The most significant development however is that they are reducing dependence on the open market for grapes and are concentrating on 300 farmers in clearly defined areas to supply their fruit needs.

In this market where Mouton Cadet is well established, and distributed by Findlaters, the changes should help it compete more aggressively with New World producers. The 'rouge' has an rrp of €12.50 and the 'blanc' rrp is a somewhat odd €11.79.

### CHEERS AND WHISPERS

Nobody was allowed on the pitch, although many of the exhibitors pleaded for a chance to kick a ball over the famous Croke Park goalposts.

They were Aussies of course, who had seen their heroes do battle on this sanctified sward in the 'Compromise Rules' series.

But there was to be no compromise this time, either on the part of the guardians of Croke, nor the hundreds of wines on offer, which once again underlined what a large, boisterous, friendly and relatively uncompli-

cated wine industry exists on the far side of the globe.

John McDonnell, head of the Australian Wine Bureau Ireland, weaved his magic, bringing together 30 importers, 70 producers and 'half the countryside' in buyers, to this Ozfest.

It was a swirl, gulp, 'how-ya' kind of tasting, with 'low-ya' wine makers, chatty customers and a noise level befitting the location. It was also too big, too full and too general for those who did not arrive with a specific mission.

It did however make some points - the first of which was

## JULIA'S WINE

What a joy it must be to have a wine bear your name. Well that is just what Julia Zuccardi experiences every day as she hovers away over her books.

The only daughter of Jose Alberto Zuccardi is a student who plans one day work in the family business. Right now however she is living the student life and enjoying things like shopping on Grafton Street. At least that is what was on the agenda when we met in the Fitzwilliam Hotel where Jose was talking about his wines.

'Yes - it is true', he says, 'our Santa Julia wines are called after my daughter.'

'We know something about that at Jemma Publications' I told him.

The Zuccardis are from Mendoza, that part of Argentina that lies just to the West of the Andes mountains. Cross over and you are in Chile.

The estate was established by Jose's father in 1953 in land that is dry and hot and close to being desert. 'We must irrigate all the time', he says. The vineyard lies at the foot of

Mount Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Andes. The sun shines on more than 300 days of every year and mountain water is used for irrigation. A combination of dry weather, big differences in day to night temperatures and a pure environment enable many varieties to thrive and the family has successfully grown

malbec, cabernet sauvignon, shiraz, tempranillo, merlot, chenin blanc and chardonnay.

The vines are cultivated on pergolas which stand six feet high and all grapes are hand picked. 'There is a plentiful supply of labour and we try to create as much employment as possible', says Jose.

Most of the wine is made in stainless steel tanks apart from the 'O' or 'Reserve' range which spends up to six months in barrique. The winemakers have a fairly free hand on what they produce with a minimum of regulations. 'Vinification must however always be natural. We are an organic vineyard' says Jose.

The company exports about 60 per cent of its production to Brazil, the UK, the USA and some 25 other markets. The wines sell here through Edward Dillon and Co and have done well on the back of the 30 per cent rise in sales of Argentinian wines on the Irish market in 2004.

Jose and Julia were in Dublin to launch their Zuccardi 'O' and Santa Julia Reserva wines which are aimed primarily at the on-trade. The Santa Julia Reserva Malbec and Chardonnay have an rrp of €12.99 and the Zuccardi 'O' range, which includes Tempranillo and Chardonnay has an rrp of €18.99.

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