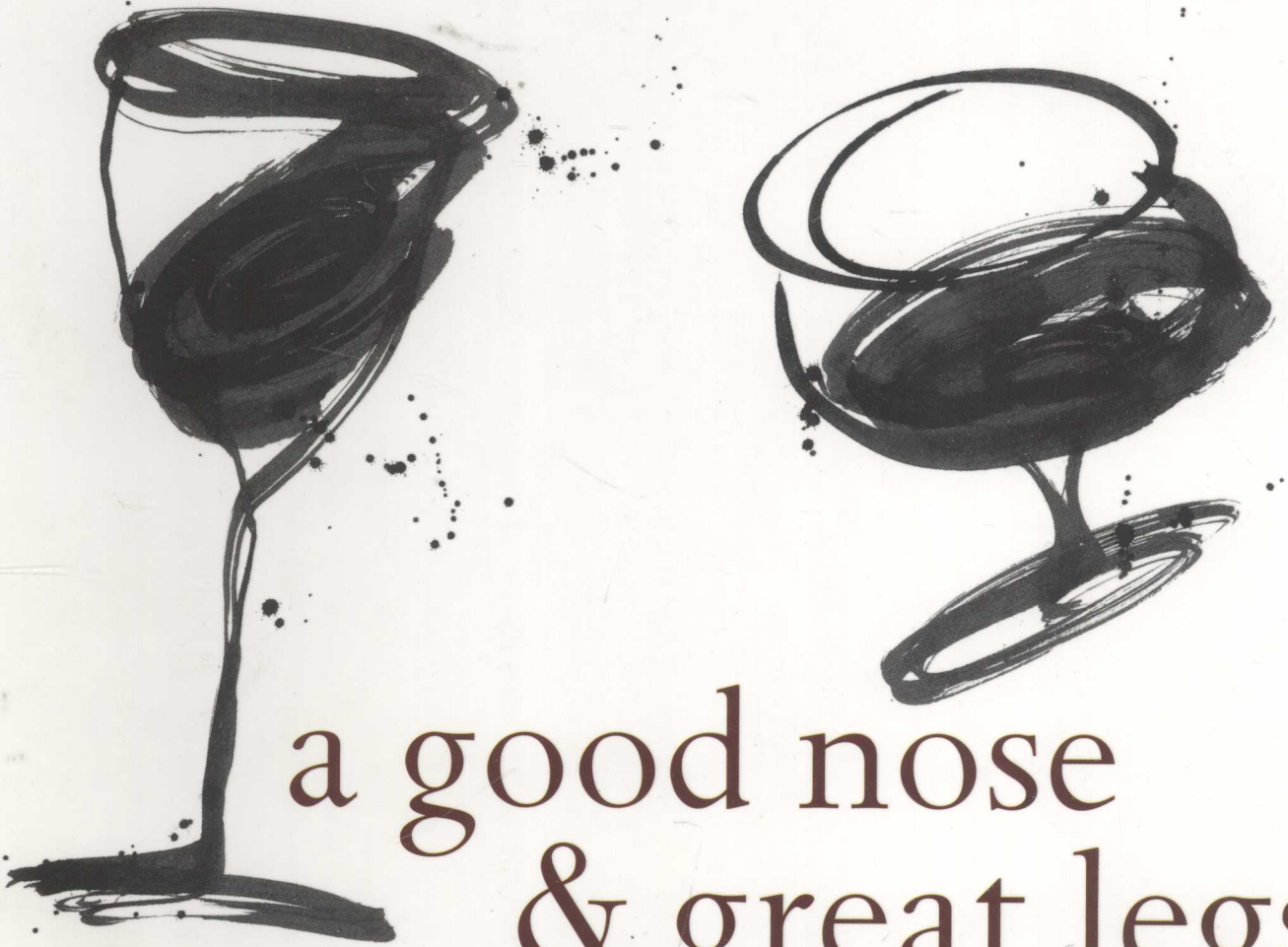


THE ART OF WINE  
FROM THE VINE TO THE TABLE



a good nose  
& great legs

Robert Geddes

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Master of Wine

MURDOCH BOOKS

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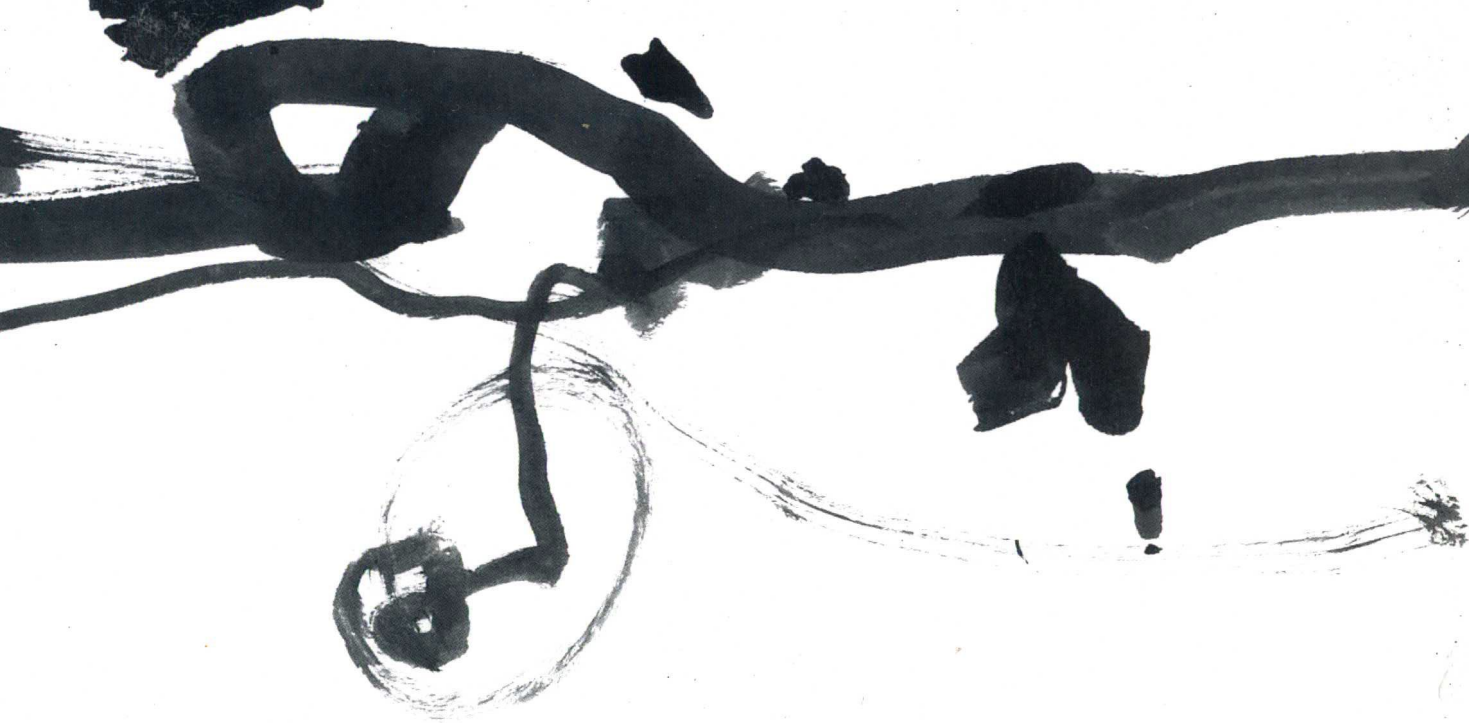
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# Introduction

It was a **hot, dusty, smelly day** in the sheep yards of our farm in the Clare Valley; flies were clinging furiously onto any bit of moisture that was about. My mind was racing and the hairs on my arms tingling with excitement as **my back strained** to hold the young ram that was bucking about while my father and I examined its fleece.

As Dad parted the fleece he talked about its quality and explained how this sheep produced wool that suited the environment where it was raised. It dawned on me that if the wool responded to the climate, then we could identify and select specific sheep for a particular region to produce the wool we wanted. We could use adaptation beneficially.

It was not long after this event when a revelation came to me while I was drinking homegrown Clare riesling, that environmental adaptation could equally be applied to grapes and wine. I could taste differences between bottles of the same variety from different vineyards due to subtle variances that the soil and climate had on the grape. It was a magical moment. A door opened—wine became the land talking to me.

It was my headmaster who started me off. I had always seen the trucks laden with purple grapes disappearing into the winery, and now it was my turn to follow them in. I was a bookish boy who loved geology, hence the headmaster linked it to wine; so in my final days of Year Four at Clare Primary School he did something parents would hate today, and gave me a note for permission to visit the local winery for a look around. Guided by family friend Mick Knappstein, my senses came alive to the smells, the noise and the sense of industry with humour. I loved every minute of it.

My teenaged friends in the early 1970s also had access to a vast cellar of Clare Valley wines from the 1950s to the mid-1960s, so we discovered the joys of wine appreciation. Our random wine selections, often sampled in outrageous locations, gave us a rough-and-ready knowledge of the local styles and varieties and considerable experience with old wines.

In 1950, in the company of some winemaking students at Roseworthy College, I found myself very earnestly tasting and discussing a dozen bottles placed in brown paper bags so that we couldn't see the labels. As I tasted three of the wines I was reminded of the wines of Clare. The taste seemed so familiar to me that without fear I volunteered that they were from the Stanley Clare Valley Bin 56 Cabernet Malbec, the Stanley Clare Valley Bin 49 Cabernet Sauvignon, and the Stanley Bin 61 Shiraz. To me it didn't seem such a remarkable thing to do, but as I was leaving one of the winemakers put a very brotherly arm around my shoulder and said, 'You've got a talent—don't waste it.' Those words changed my life.

## A GOOD NOSE & GREAT LEGS

I was studying agriculture at the time and knew that I was not going to embrace a passion for sheep farming like my father. Instead I began to study wine socially, making a pest of myself with any winemaker who would chat while I was completing the course. Thankfully many did, such as Scott Collet, Don Bird, Darren De Bortoli, Neil McGuigan, Graham Buller and Keith Mugford. The Roseworthy wine courses were held in high regard and continue to be under the aegis of the University of Adelaide. The students there were willing to be my teachers. I learned a lot.

Over two summers I managed to acquire work in wineries during vintage in the Clare and Hunter Valleys, in between sandwiching a job as an extra in a motion picture. What followed was a period of eight years running the Wine and Brandy Producers Wine Information Bureau in Adelaide. Then a phone call from my brother Jim, who described a bottle of very ancient wine in the window of Berry Brothers & Rudd in London, persuaded me to visit (in what would eventually become an extended stay) the United Kingdom. A kindly employee from the Australian Embassy alerted me to a tasting in London and I met David Gill, a Master of Wine. A job followed, as did David's comment: 'If you can write the way you speak, you could make a Master of Wine.'

Several years of study, accompanied by many bottles of wine, boon companions and much help from older Masters of Wine, and many lonely kilometres visiting European growers on a shoestring budget, fostered my winemaking education. Walking among (and occasionally sleeping in) various European vineyards, tasting their wines and eating their food crystallised in 1992 when I passed the Masters of Wine theory exam. Later that year I moved my family to Griffith in New South Wales, courtesy of the Riverina Grape Growers and Winemakers when I became their first regional public relations officer.

In 1993 I passed the Masters of Wine tasting exam, becoming only the third Australian to do so. This position introduced me to Griffith's rich Italian traditions and the laconic De Bortoli family. Through Darren De Bortoli and his wonderful Noble One wine, I learned that every place has its own story and reaffirmed for myself that wines do come from a unique set of circumstances.

One of the greatest lessons I have learned from this is that, contrary to its image, the wine industry is one of the toughest in which to survive. No matter how skilled winemakers may be, they are at the mercy of nature's elements and in recent times the retail markets. Wine production is moving away from a large group of families in an industry to a few corporations in a business. It is transforming from the limited production of a farmer's product to endless flows controlled by multinational corporations. Winemakers still get one shot to show their stuff each year but the environment in which they operate is more challenging.

*More astronauts have visited space and returned than  
people have passed the Masters of Wine exam.*

DAVID STEVENS MW

## Masters of Wine

The Institute of Masters of Wine (IMW) was founded in 1955 and for many years members were drawn from the English wine trade. During the late 1980s the IMW shifted from a UK trade body to an international organisation with regular activities in the United States, Australia and continental Europe, as well as maintaining their original operations in the United Kingdom.

The IMW undertakes a wide range of activities, including a symposium every four years, annual study courses with accompanying exams conducted across three continents, and classic tastings each year in London. Presently there are 255 Masters of Wine in 16 countries. Members of the institute travel widely to keep abreast of technical issues and new developments in the industry, as well as purchasing wine. It is an important way to gain insights into the producers, vineyards and wines of the world. There have been more than 19 official visits to various countries, including the celebrated 1985 Australian visit, which was a turning point for the recognition of the quality and diversity of our wines, especially in the United Kingdom. Australia and California in the United States are the only places to have hosted a return visit.

The Masters of Wine qualification is gained through seven exams undertaken over four days. Exams test knowledge and expressions in wine tasting, and different aspects of the wine industry from the vineyard to the market place. The three tasting exams use wines of representative quality and style from anywhere in the world and demand a reasoned explanation and description of their quality. A very small pass rate reflects the exams' standards and the expectation that the IMW's graduates understand the world of wine, in particular fine wine.



## THE BOOK

This book was written for its own sake. It was born during a mid-life period of unemployment, and continued through to my current position where I am running my own media relations and marketing services firm for the wine industry.

It's a moot point whether a deeply knowledgeable person is able to write or adhere to a code of honour and impartiality when writing. I could quite easily have turned my back on the project and walked away, but wine for me is as much about the people I know as what I know.

I found myself drawn to completing the book because the more you do the more you learn, and in wine you learn by tasting and listening. There were debts to be repaid. The journey has given me a great opportunity to test and measure what I know and what I have learned. I hope my efforts within these pages increase your knowledge.

To me a bottle of wine is a coded message from another place, and I hope to give you the key to the code that unlocks the message. I want to share with you the mystery in every sip of wine, so that you can understand the leaps of imagination created by honest men and women of the soil who keep refining the code every year, giving us better and better wines. That code in every bottle of wine has three stories:

- ☞ where it comes from—the place
- ☞ who made it—the person
- ☞ what it is made from—the grape varietal or varieties.

The first part of this book introduces you to these three elements: the place where the vine is grown, the process of making wine, and lastly the vine varieties that go into wine and their special properties.

In the second part I will concentrate on you, the consumer of the wine. You will learn to discern what you like in a wine so you can purchase with confidence, as well as learning to appreciate the nuances that go with the wine lifestyle, in particular matching food with wine. Part of this process is learning to discern wines of high quality. That is, that they are well made, possibly award winning and low-volume produced, often from a single vineyard, hand-picked and privately owned. These are wines made with passion and extraordinary commitment, wines which have a worthy place on a table or in the cellar of any wine collector anywhere in the world.

So how do you unlock the information about these good wines and bring your level of understanding up? That is the challenge set here.

## MEMORABLE WINE

I want to illuminate for you the fundamentals that go into making the many varieties of wines so that you can enjoy them all the more.

Rather than simplify what happens in winemaking and tasting I want to take you straight to the core—the defining, essential part of wine that is memorable.

Wine is a living, changing expression of life itself. It has a birth, it reflects the places it is raised, it matures in its making and declines with time. Wandering through the art and science that makes this delectable drop, you will find a rich tapestry of human existence.

Wine is a marvel. While it is not essential, it gives such pleasure and has been a part of human existence for thousands of years. It has travelled with civilizations, inserting itself where the climate is suitable for viticulture, creating its own rich history. In many ways, its expansion around the world is the story of humankind's diaspora—wine has gone where we have and evolved as we have. Today, wine provides us with tastes and tasting opportunities that have never existed before. Wine gets complex in its antiquity, flavour, diversity, colour and quality—it is at once simple but, oh, so complicated.

Telling the story of wine allows the wines to speak to you, especially those that have a special quality which you savour and remember. Even if you don't recall a wine's name or its exact flavour, you'll remember the occasion and how much you enjoyed drinking it. These are wines that enhance the occasion they celebrate and make them memorable, and they help shape our own, individual stories.





