

Ian Home – a sparkling life

Ian Home was one of the unsung heroes of Australian wine. He died on 8th May 2016 with few wine lovers knowing his name. Ian Home was a visionary wine man, a successful businessman, a winemaking innovator (Ian founded Yellowglen), an inspired marketer and the catalyst for many of the revolutionary changes that have occurred in the new age of Australian Wine. Ian Home was a great mentor – encouraging and supporting many who have gone on to great things. Ian Home was also an absolutely charming man from the old school, well dressed, well-spoken, full of laughter and fun with a perpetual twinkle in his eye – a true *bon vivant*. Ian's love of good food and wine began well before the current fashion for both. His love of Champagne set Ian on a pioneering path to create a high quality Australian sparkling wine with Yellowglen, the brand he launched more than 40 years ago now a vinous icon.

A self-made man, Ian Home was born in 1929 in the majestic Victorian city of Ballarat. Orphaned at 17, Ian worked as a jackeroo and wool-classer before commencing work in 1952 with his soon-to-be father-in-law at his Ballarat grocery business. Ian's creative flair was soon revealed with the formation of a buying group of seven Victorian stores and the transformation of his (now) father-in-law's store into Ballarat's first self-service grocery. Fast forward 20 years and Ian and his wife Dorothy have three daughters and he is chairman of the burgeoning independent grocery group SSW with interest in 11 stores, which incidentally included a successful liquor division. Always the innovator, Ian introduced early computers and many US inspired management systems. However, fuelled by his involvement in the Ballarat Food and Wine Society and a growing love of fine wine (including the aforesaid Champagne), Ian and Dorothy purchased the original 70-hectare Smythesdale farm his ancestors had settled on in 1838 on their arrival from Scotland. Ian planted 21 varieties on a vineyard he named Yellowglen after a disused gold mine found on the property. These grapes were to play a key role in the next phase in Ian Home's adventurous life.

Ian's savvy marketing eye saw a perfect niche between Champagne and everyday Australian sparkling wines of the day such as Seppelt Great Western and Penfolds Minchinbury. In 1978, Ian launched Yellowglen to instant acclaim. Yellowglen Non-Vintage Brut was pitched at \$7.95, half the price of N.V. Champagne and twice the price of Australian 'champagnes' - as they were still known. The packaging was suitably smart and quickly Yellowglen assumed the mantle as Australia's premier sparkling wine. Ian Home's marketing strategy was simple and combined his love of good food, good wine and good times. He and Yellowglen dined out with all the gate-keepers – wine press, retailers and restaurateurs at suitably prestige establishments. With a minuscule marketing budget, Ian Home used yesteryear's version of social media to push Yellowglen sales to 125,000 cases within a decade. In 1979, French winemaker Dominique Landrigan joined Ian at Yellowglen with fruit sourcing of the key varieties chardonnay and pinot noir already a looming issue. It's hard to imagine that 40 years ago these mainstream varieties (for both table and sparkling wines) were just being pioneered in cool sites like Geelong, Yarra Valley, Mornington Peninsula and Tasmania.

Over the next decade the firsts for Yellowglen were numerous with the nagging need for grapes and infrastructure solved when Yellowglen amalgamated with Mildara - a traditional spirit and sherry producer with substantial vineyards in Coonawarra. Mildara's marketing maestro Ray King and Ian Home forged a formidable team with Yellowglen sales continuing to soar. Ian, who was instrumental in the expansion of Mildara, helped to bring labels like Wolf Blass and Balgownie Estate into the portfolio. Ian remained on the Mildara board until 1994.

Many things had changed in the 20 years since the first vines destined for Yellowglen were planted but the creative side of Ian Home could not be stifled. In 1987, Ian joined a group of business associates to create Tuck's Ridge on the Mornington Peninsula.

Ian's first wife, Dorothy died in 1989 and Ian re-married in 1992, his new wife Sue (nee Maberly Smith) was a successful publicist who worked with wine and spirit merchant, Swift and Moore on many highly successful marketing campaigns. Ian and Sue moved to Red Hill and formed a partnership with well-known Melbourne restaurateur Leon Massoni and his wife Vivienne – who already had a plot of chardonnay. Like so many lovers of pinot noir, Ian was hooked on Burgundy and relished the challenge of crafting a Mornington pinot of similar structure and style. His involvement with Tuck's Ridge had kindled that dream, Ian's partnership with the Massonis adding fuel to the fire. Quality pinot noir was thin on the ground and the Massoni Pinot quickly found a niche in top end restaurants and with the emerging cohort of consumers proudly claiming themselves as 'pinotphiles'. At Pinot Noir Australia promotional events in Melbourne and Sydney there was always a throng around the Massoni with Ian, looking just like a French vigneron in his ever-present beret, pouring generous serves of his Pinot Noir from a suitably lavish decanter while entertaining the crowd with his cheeky anecdotes and that permanently twinkling eye. Ian continued to expand Massoni after the Massonis retired in 1995 before selling the flourishing Massoni Home brand in 2000.

Ian continued mentoring many young winegrowers. Apart from his immense achievements, it's the sharing of his knowledge, experience and passion for wine that his friends and acquaintances will remember Ian Home. He loved the people who made up the Australian wine industry and gladdened the hearts of all he meet - from his early days with the Ballarat Wine and Food Society right up until his death. Yellowglen was his greatest achievement, but Ian's time with Mildara was one of immense change with the emergence of new winegrowing regions, new varieties and creative brands - and Ian Home was in the thick of it. He mentored young guns (and now industry stalwarts) like Gary Farr, Rick Kinzbrunner, Bruce Tyrrell, Gary Baldwin and Neil Robb. Ewan Jones (the founder of Dalwhinnie) was his brother-in-law with the current winegrower, his nephew David benefitting from Ian's wisdom. Ian's latter years at Red Hill saw new associations such as Peter Bessey his close colleague at Massoni, Tony and Michael Lee of Foxy's Hangout and local viticulturist, Hugh Robinson.

Every restaurateur in Melbourne knew Ian as a customer and a friend. The who's who of Australian and international winegrowers knew and admired Ian yet it remains a conundrum as to why so few consumers have heard his name. Yellowglen is the largest sparkling wine brand in the country but (sadly) Ian was not acknowledged as its founder until Treasury Wine Estates re-connected with Ian Home in 2012. As Yellowglen's brand ambassador, Ian gave counsel to its winemakers, Chilly Hargraves and Trina Smith with the Exceptional Vintage XV project a recent highpoint. I was honoured to assist David Phillips, Marketing Manager at Treasury Wines at the time in creating a video with Ian Home and his history with Yellowglen.

Wine was the focus of Ian's life and it found its way into his other passions. Cricket was one and Ian would turn up to test matches with a sumptuous hamper to share with the likes Stuart Hooper (the founder of Bannockburn) and Murray Tyrrell. Murray's son, Bruce recalls that secreted in the hamper were grand wines decanted into soft drink bottles to creatively avoid the 'no alcohol to be taken onto the ground' ban.

Fishing was Ian's favourite pursuit. Whiting caught on a light gear was his thing and not content with store-bought rods, Ian made his own with 20 rods in his rod holder with many more generously

made for his fishing friends. Ian loved fast cars and was a rally driver in his younger days and was still manning "controls" at various rallies until quite recently. Always a man of style, Ian looked for all the world a Frenchman behind the wheel of his Peugeot - complete with black beret *naturellement*.

In the words of Sue Home, "If Ian had been a woman he would have been described as 'high maintenance'. The jumpers and jackets were cashmere. The shoes Church's. Travel was always at the pointy end of the plane. He changed cars more often than was really necessary and boasted that he never had a restaurant bill where the food cost more than the wine."

I first knew Ian in my Sydney retailing days when Yellowglen was hand sold by him. He'd come to my store in Surry Hills and we'd talk and laugh a lot and I sold plenty of the stuff—especially the ground breaking Yellowglen Crémant. However, it wasn't until my involvement with Pinot Noir Australia that I formed a deeper friendship with Ian. He inspired me and stimulated my enthusiasm for all things vinous. We revelled in the past and marvelled at the future. Ian's charisma was all encompassing, his generosity boundless. Ian Home was a gentle man in every respect.

Our last meeting was in 2015 when he and Sue hired a motorhome and came through Orange on their sojourn. Despite a freezing night, they turned up to at Lolli REDINI for an Austrian wine tasting with some deliciously matched food. Ian charmed us all with his anecdotes and decisive criticism of the wines. Several of the guests were astonished when I told Ian's backstory. We felt we were in the company of vinous royalty. After a wonderful night, he and Sue continued their vinous tour to the Barossa and Clare Valley, then Langhorne Creek on the way home to Red Hill.

Ian Home died on Sunday 8th May, 2016 at the age of 87. Ian Home was an extraordinary man - a most respected and trusted mentor who I admired greatly. He was a man of ambition, vision and commitment. I can't find better words than in a charming tribute from his friends at the Probus Club of Main Ridge: "Ian had presence. When he spoke, people listened. He held strong views on standards and protocols that should be observed. Mediocrity was not a concept he embraced." We need more men like Ian Home. I doubt we will.

Peter Bourne