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NEW STYLE SECTION: MORE COVERAGE OF THE FINER THINGS IN LIFE

THE WINE GENERATION

THERE IS A CHANGING OF THE GUARD WITHIN THE AUSTRALIAN WINE INDUSTRY,
AND THE CHILDREN OF THE GRAPE ARE FULL OF PASSION AND PROMISE.

STORY BY WINSOR DOBBIN

Peter Lehmann walks into the winery he built against the odds almost 30 years ago, looks around and smiles. At 77, Lehmann is no longer involved in the day-to-day winemaking of the wines that bear his name, but the 'Baron of the Barossa' remains a guiding light, having a say in his winemaker Andrew Wigan's final blends. Lehmann's legacy lives on – much to the relief of the growers he helped save from potential ruin in 1979, when there was serious grape overproduction. Penniless Lehmann established a consortium and built his winery, providing a market for grapes from locals who still provide fruit to him today. In the past 28 years, the company has risen to be one of the top 20 Australian producers. "We don't make ordinary wines," Lehmann thunders, but he's no traditionalist, having eschewed corks for screw caps. "I've seen too many great wines destroyed by bad corks," he says. Lehmann's wife Margaret is a brand ambassador, son Doug is the managing director and another son, Phil,

will rejoin the company as winemaker after a stint with Yalumba.

Winemakers working with their offspring is one of the key themes of the industry with other leading lights including Gary and Nick Farr at By Farr and Farr Rising at Geelong; Doug Bowen and his daughter Emma at Bowen Estate in Coonawarra; and Garry Crittenden and his son Rollo at Crittenden Estate on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria.

Farmer Doug Bowen established Bowen Estate in 1972, building a reputation for generously flavoured shirazes and cabernets. Emma, who graduated from Charles Sturt University with an oenology degree in 1999 before working overseas, has added a further dimension to the wines. "Working at Bowen Estate with my parents is a lifestyle choice," says Emma Bowen. "In the winery my father and I have similar ideas and principles in the way in which we approach making our wine. This makes for a congenial work environment. My main role is as the 'hands on' winemaker

Bowen Estate, Coonawarra





Doug and Emma Bowen



Fran Austin



Usher Tinkler

and this allows Dad to spend more time managing the vineyard. Together we spend time at the tasting bench, as two palates always create better discussion."

Garry Crittenden, who was at the forefront of making wines from Italian varietals, now operates under the Crittenden Estate umbrella with labels including Pinocchio and Geppeto. His son Rollo, formerly chief winemaker at Dromana Estate, recently began working with his father again.

"Australian wine drinkers have become increasingly adventurous, but that wasn't the case a decade or more ago," says Crittenden. "When I started making Italian varieties in the early 1990s it has hard work. We found people were happy to buy a glass of wine made from a variety they hadn't heard of, but were unwilling to splash out on a bottle. After they'd tried a wine, they'd come back and buy a few bottles. It was an interesting marketing exercise."

Crittenden says he's enjoying working with his son again and "he'll be responsible for all aspects of the wine-making, except for those I interfere in." Crittenden expects Rollo, the first second-generation winemaker on the Peninsula, to eventually take control of the business.

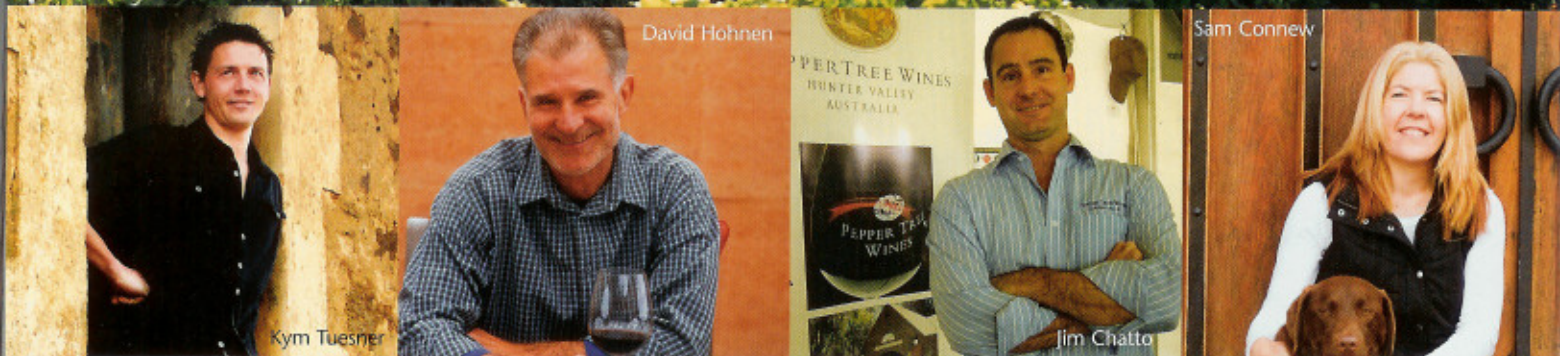
Gary Farr, known for his candour, was formerly the chief winemaker at Bannockburn. He despises screw caps and makes wines that divide the critics. He makes no bones about his individualism, saying: "I make wine with personality and a bit of attitude thrown in." Nick is more laid-back.

Brian Croser, one of the most influential figures in the Australian wine industry over four decades, is no longer involved in the Petaluma winery he and his wife Ann established in 1976, but he retains a close emotional attachment "it's like one of your children". Croser is now producing wines under the Tapanappa label; a stunning chardonnay from the Adelaide Hills and a superb red blend from the Whalebone vineyard at Wrattenbully are among the early releases.

Croser established Argyle winery in Oregon in 1985 and he and his family have established a riesling and pinot noir vineyard in the Eola Hills just north of Salem in Oregon, which will produce its first vintage in 2007, and a pinot noir vineyard at Foggy Hill on the Fleurieu Peninsula which has him 'really excited'. "You can't stand still," says Croser, who says it is his "lifelong mission to nurture the most expressive and unique terroirs of Australia."

Other industry leaders who have turned their backs on big labels to create their own individual styles include former Orlando chief winemaker Robin Day, now hand-crafting minute quantities of wine at Domain Day in the Eden Valley, and David Hohnen, the founder of Cape Mentelle and Cloudy Bay, who is now working with his daughter Freya and his brother-in-law Murray McHenry at the boutique McHenry Hohnen winery in Margaret River. At his high altitude vineyard at Mount Crawford, Day nurtures small quantities of more exotic varieties like saperavi, lagrein, garganega and sagrantino. "There are so many exciting grape varieties that people haven't really looked at in Australia," says Day, 59. "People ask me what the difference is between now and then, and I say 'everything'. I'm basically a one-man band and my past doesn't count for anything. Most of the people I try to sell wine to have no idea who I am. It's a continuum of difficulty, challenge and indulgence."

Many of today's brightest young winemaking talents have had the good fortune to work under, and learn



SUMMER MAGIC

Four leading winemakers highlight their chosen wines, perfect for enjoying over Summer:

THE YOUNG GUNS

Emma Bowen, Bowen Estate, Coonawarra:
Bowen Estate 2005 Shiraz; Rymill 2007
Sauvignon Blanc; Balnaves of Coonawarra
NV Sparkling Cabernet Sauvignon

Usher Tinkler, Pooles Rock, Hunter Valley:
McWilliam's 2000 Mount Pleasant
Elizabeth Semillon; Tyrrell's 2006
Four Acres Shiraz; Pooles Rock 2005 Chardonnay

THE OLD GUARD

Peter Lehmann, Peter Lehmann Wines, Barossa Valley:
Peter Lehmann 2007 Eden Valley Riesling;
The Willows 2004 Barossa Semillon;
Yalumba 2006 FDW7C Adelaide Hills Chardonnay

David Hohnen, McHenry Hohnen, Margaret River:
Plantagenet 2004 Shiraz; Freycinet Vineyards
2004 Riesling; McHenry Hohnen 2005
3 Amigos Marsanne, Chardonnay, Roussanne

from, veterans. Young guns tipped to be industry leaders include William Downie, who works under winemaker of the year Steve Webber at De Bortoli Yarra Valley and makes fine pinots for both De Bortoli and his own label. Usher Tinkler works with veteran Patrick Auld at Pooles Rock in the Hunter Valley, and PJ Charteris works alongside Iain Riggs at Brokenwood.

Other outstanding young talents include Samantha Connew at Wirra Wirra, who trained as a lawyer in New Zealand before being bitten by the wine bug; Fran Austin at Bay of Fires in Tasmania; Jim Chatto at Pepper Tree in the Hunter, recently crowned *Gourmet Traveller Wine Magazine* young winemaker of the year; and Kym Teusner from the Barossa Valley.

The Wirra Wirra winemaking team led by Connew was recently named International Red Winemaker of the Year at the International Wine Challenge in London.

"I'm blessed because I get the chance to make wines in McLaren Vale, one of the best places on earth to grow grapes," says Connew.

Making the wines is easier for her than accepting awards. "I was terrified," she says. "Anyone who's anyone in the wine industry seemed to be in that room – it was like the Oscars of the wine industry."

Teusner previously worked at Torbreck and Rolf Binder but is now concentrating on his own Teusner Wines label. Like many of the younger brigade, he's keen to make wines that are more approachable. "I saw an opportunity to make earthy, Rhone-styles in the Barossa – we have a similar climate, the same varieties and similar soil types," he said. "Travelling through Europe I came to appreciate lighter style wines – wines that are less influenced by oak and match brilliantly with food."

Tinkler, 28, believes the new generation bring "optimism, creativity, new techniques and a more global approach" to the wine industry, but admits a debt to his mentor, Auld, and Croser "a real dynamo who is always thinking of new ideas." ■