



the **ARCHIBULL** PRIZE

HERITAGE WINERY THINKING FORWARD TO THE FUTURE



Peter and Carolyn Auld were among the original 'tree-changers,' seeking to escape from the hectic city of Sydney to a more simple life and to raise their children in a peaceful, rural environment.

The Aulds first discovered the derelict winery known as Tizzana in 1966; buying it and the surrounding two hectare property two years later.



The property was originally part of a 162 hectare property purchased in 1882 by Dr Thomas Fiaschi, surgeon and innovative winemaker. After an initial experiment with two hectares of vines, Dr Fiaschi planted 22 hectares to wine grapes. In 1887 the winery was built to process the harvest.

The building consisted of a three-storied sandstone structure to process the grapes, connected to a two-storey residence and cellars. The gravity-fed process saw grapes crushed on the top storey of the building and flowing down to the cellar for bottling and storage.

However, the winery and the vineyards were destroyed in a fire lit by vandals in 1955, leaving only the shell of the building. That's how it remained until Peter and Carolyn found it.

Initially Peter and Carolyn focussed on restoring the two storied section of the building to its former glory.

"For obvious reasons, with a young family, we re-established the living quarters on the second floor and restored the cellars to a condition as close to the original as possible," said Peter. "Our efforts to restore the building have proved a great success and the building has been heritage listed."

The winery recommenced operations by purchasing grapes from other vineyards to crush and blend for sale at the open cellar door under the Tizzana label.

"In 1980, we purchased a second block of 10 hectares, and decided to put two hectares under vines," said Peter. "The same land was producing grapes in the original vineyard so we knew it was proven as wine-growing land."

"As soon as we bought the second block I went back to university to study wine-making," said Peter, who also has a degree in industrial chemistry.

"By 1999 we had built up production to the point where we needed to expand the cellars back to their original size," said Peter. "And there was so much interest in the building itself that we thought there might be a return on doing it up as a bed and breakfast."

From the moment Peter decided that they would grow their own grapes he knew that they would be unable to compete with the big producers.

"We knew that we had to grow the more unusual varieties to create a niche market for our wine," he said. "We are currently growing Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Petit Verdot, Tannat and Aleatico.

"The Aleatico is only grown at three other vineyards in Australia so is rather unusual. We make it into a rose, which is well recognised and has very good flavour."

New varieties of grape for the vineyard are chosen by planting 10-12 varieties over four to five years and testing the resulting wine.

"The grapes that have prevailed have been the varieties that are most popular with our customers," said Peter. "But we still continue to try new varieties."

The soils on the property are light sandy loams, produced from the breakdown of local sandstone.

"The soils produce lighter wines than you get from regions like the Hunter Valley," said Peter.

Soil testing is undertaken every few years, and show that the soils are reasonably acidic due to the breakdown of the sandstone. Lime and dolomite are applied to combat this problem.

Any new areas put under vine are fertilised with horse and chook manure and dolomite.

Once vines are established, they do not need very rich soils to maintain production. Fertiliser is applied to give the soils a boost every few years and micronutrients are sprayed onto the leaves as are sprays to prevent mildew in the summer months.

Most of the property's water requirements are met by natural rainfall. The area gets about 75cm rain a year.

"The established vines don't need extra water, except maybe on the days of extreme heat, but new vines are watered one or two times a week in summer from water collected in dams on the property," said Peter. "After that, they are on their own."

The majority of the rain falls in summer and there is less in winter.

"The summer rain/winter drought climate is opposite to the traditional Mediterranean wine-growing rainfall pattern," said Peter. "The summer rains can bring problems with mildew in the fruit.

"Mildews, such as botrytis, can devastate a crop within one or two days. This means we have to spray the fruit with fungicides to keep it under control. We check weather maps carefully to make sure we are not being wasteful by spraying when it is going to rain."



The main source of labour on the farm is the family. Peter's son Jonathan and daughter Gillian are involved in the business and a part-time worker is also employed.

The harvest takes place from late-January or early-February and finishes in mid-March.

"We get family and friends out to help. We pick from early morning until about 11am and then have a big lunch and sample the previous year's vintage," said Peter.

In addition to their own harvest, the winery processes the grapes of about half-a-dozen small vineyards from the area.

"They grow the grapes, and we can convert them into bottles of wine," said Peter. "We can also sell people's product for them at our cellar door. We like to do what we can to help out other growers."

Peter has been on a program to encourage others to plant vines in the area.

"The more the better," said Peter. "People like to visit a number of wineries and sample a range of wines. If we have more wineries and more vineyards in the area, we will all get more business."

Peter said that most of the marketing is done at the cellar door, but recently he has been expanding into local restaurants and farmers' markets.

"We get lots of tourists here. The building obviously sets us apart from other wineries in the area, but I am always encouraging others to get in to the business," he said.

Peter says that his philosophy has always been to enjoy the place.

"We will continue to expand in the future and to work with other vineyards. This means continually upgrading equipment and keeping knowledge up to date. Other farms are changing and we need to consider that in our operations also."