

Grant Burge

The baron of the Barossa



Grant and Helen Burge

While Grant Burge has a great winemaking heritage behind him, he became a pioneer of modern Australian winemaking in his own right, helping to forge the worldwide reputation of the Barossa Valley.

Grant Burge always knew he was going to be a winemaker. “I’m honoured to be a fifth generation member of a great winemaking and grape growing dynasty,” he says.

Burge’s ancestors settled in the Barossa Valley, South Australia, in 1855 when John Burge – a tailor from Wiltshire, England – migrated to the region with his wife Eliza and their two sons. “John worked as a winemaker at Hillside Vineyards and his love of viticulture was passed on to his son Meschach, who continued the tradition,” explains Burge. Meschach, who made his first wine in 1865, became a prominent local leader, and his son Percival, one of

eight children, established the Wilsford Winery near Lyndoch in 1928.

Burge grew up helping his father Colin and grandfather Percival make wine, so it was only natural that he would become a winemaker; Burge created the Meschach Shiraz, now the flagship of Grant Burge Wine, in honour of his pioneering ancestor. But while Burge has carried on the family tradition, he has also helped to develop the modern Barossa Valley wine industry.

After learning winemaking, Burge teamed up with winemaking partner Ian Wilson. In 1972, aged just 26, he and Wilson bought a run-down Barossa winery called

Krondorf. In only a decade, they transformed Krondorf into a winery whose wines were some of the most anticipated upon release, and which won multiple awards, including the Jimmy Watson Trophy, Australia’s highest award.

Krondorf attracted so much attention that Mildara Blass, which later became part of Foster’s (now Treasury), bought the winery in a hostile takeover in 1986. Undaunted, Grant and his wife Helen founded Grant Burge Wines in 1988.

The early 1980s was such a difficult time in the Barossa that the government of the day paid growers to pull out vines and leave the land vacant, rather than produce unwanted grapes. Unfortunately, some of the uprooted vines included pre-phylloxera vines. Alarmed, a small group of local winemakers that included Grant Burge, set out to save the vines by creating wines made from old vine material, to showcase



what the vines could do. Not only did they save many vines, but the old vine wines helped to propel Australia's dramatic wine export boom of the 1990s and 2000s.

Burge also bought top-quality vineyards as they became available, making him the largest individual vineyard owner in the Barossa Valley. He also acquired the historic Basedow winery at Tanunda. As he grew, the accolades, trophies and medals kept coming. In 1990 and 1997, respectively, Grant Burge and wife Helen, were made Barons of the Barossa. An invitation to the Barons of the Barossa, founded in 1974, is only extended to people who have made an outstanding contribution to the region. Membership is for life.

Then Burge enjoyed what might have been the sweetest triumph of all – in 2000, he bought back the Krondorf winery from

Foster's (now Treasury) though not the brand name. The winery is just 50 metres from his Barossa home, which apparently caused some problems for the family dog. "After Mildara bought the winery, I trained all the kids not to go in there," he told the Australian media at the time, adding that when the family finally returned, "my dog looked at me rather intently. I could tell he was thinking that we weren't supposed to be going inside!"

Today, the old Krondorf winery (named Grant Burge @ Krondorf) is used for making whites, while the Tanunda winery produces the reds. While Burge continues to make a major contribution to the region – most recently founding the Colin Burge Vineyard Sustainability Project – his reputation has ultimately been made by the quality of his wines. These include iconic old vine Shiraz,

along with the Holy Trinity Grenache Shiraz Mourvedre blend, which is so good that legend has it that the Archbishop of York blessed it.

Today, the wines are made by Grant and Craig Stansborough, who in 2014 was declared Winemaker of the Year by the Barons of the Barossa. Meanwhile, Helen Burge remains managing director, eldest son Toby is the company's vineyard technical officer, youngest son Trent, part of winery operations and promotions and daughter Amelia is on the board.

When asked what he's proudest of, Burge says "the numerous international awards, including winning the Decanter World Wine Awards Fortified Trophy for the 20 Year Old Tawny," over several years, pointing out that it's almost unheard of for a non-Portuguese producer to win such an award. Another point of pride is "seeing my children developing a passion for the business, industry and region like I have." The family business is in good hands.



Toby, Amelia and Trent Burge

INFO



Grant Burge Wines Pty Ltd
Krondorf Road
Tanunda
South Australia
Tel: +61 8 8563 3700
Fax: +61 8 8563 2807
www.grantburgewines.com.au
admin@grantburgewines.com.au