



WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR

2009

A diverse array of unique talent defines the first four **O**f this year's eight finalists.

It's year 12 of the *Gourmet Traveller WINE* Winemaker of the Year Awards and all of us at the magazine shake our heads asking: "Who knows where the time goes?" The judges – Peter Forrestal (chairman), Peter Bourne, Nick Bulleid MW, Andrew Caillard MW, Huon Hooke and Sophie Otton – are a long-established group, contributing to the magazine and serving on its tasting panel. Next year will see the number honoured as finalists in the Awards pass the 100 mark.

One of this year's finalists, Larry Cherubino, was chief winemaker for Houghton when he was a finalist in 2003. He is one of several outstanding winemakers who are re-inventing

themselves away from the corporate world and rejoicing in the freedom and hard work involved in creating a family enterprise. It is the quality of the wines Cherubino makes for his own labels that is primarily responsible for his nomination. Julian Alcorso, on the other hand, leads Winemaking Tasmania that specialises in contract winemaking. The impact he has made on the quality of the wines they produce for their clients is responsible for his deserved nomination.

Our first tranche of finalists is made complete by Ray Nadeson and Maree Collis from Lethbridge Wines and Peter Schell of Spinifex – two newer, small family wineries

that have impressed the judges with the sheer quality of their wines over the past year or so.

Each of the following overviews touches on the centrality of collaboration and co-operation as vital elements of the wine-making process and celebrates the creativity, intellect, attention to detail, determination, and sheer hard work of those men and women who toil in our vineyards and wineries.

The Awards focus attention on the pursuit of excellence in winemaking – with the key criteria that informs the judges' discussions being the quality of the wines released by the finalists in the immediate past.

PETER FORRESTAL



WINEMAKER OF THE YEAR



LEADER OF THE PACK
Winemaking Tasmania
and Julian Alcorso (left).

Julian Alcorso Winemaking Tasmania

The man behind some of Tasmania's most respected wines prefers to keep a low profile but his talent as a contract winemaker forces him directly into the spotlight.

Julian Alcorso is probably the first Winemaker of the Year finalist who doesn't have a wine of his own. As head of the contract winemaking company Winemaking Tasmania, the 61-year-old son of the founder of Moorilla Estate, Claudio Alcorso, and his team make wine for about 55 clients. "I hate putting myself forward, that's why I don't put my name on any label. I get more than enough satisfaction from seeing the wines we make for other people do well in shows and in the market," Alcorso says.

And they do. Wines made by Winemaking Tasmania won seven of the 14 trophies at the 2009 Tasmanian Wine Show, and all six Tasmanian trophies at the 2008 Royal Hobart International Wine Show, with 2008 Moores Hill Estate Riesling, 2008 Bream Creek Sauvignon Blanc and 2006 Kelvedon Pinot Noir.

"I get 100 per cent of my satisfaction out of making really good wine. I got as much pleasure seeing Laurel Bank get the chairman's trophy at the Tas Wine Show this year as anything else." Part of that may be due to the fact that Greer Carland, daughter of Laurel Bank's owners, Laurel

and Kerry Carland, is one of his three assistant winemakers. The others are John Schuts and Matthew Wood. "No other winery in Tassie employs four winemakers," he says with pride, acknowledging that every wine the company makes is a team effort. That said, Alcorso is very much hands-on, putting in the same 12-hour shifts as everyone else, often 18 hours during vintage.

The passion for making wine is obviously still very much alive, even after 32 vintages.

Alcorso grew up at Moorilla and worked

winery at Cambridge, just outside Hobart. The first vintage was 2002, with 130 tonnes of grapes from six or seven clients.

Most of Winemaking Tasmania's clients are small vineyard owners, but The Wine Society is a notable exception. Its riesling has been one of Alcorso's consistent successes, winning many trophies and gold medals.

Although he and his winemakers spend a vast amount of time visiting vineyards prior to harvest, Alcorso says he knows little about growing vines, and doesn't own a vineyard.

"Julian Alcorso may well be enjoying the most influential stage of a distinguished career in which he has served the Tasmanian wine industry over the past 30 years." – PETER FORRESTAL

there from 1978 to '95, then after it was sold he took two years off, did a vintage in a co-operative on Corsica making vermentino and sangiovese, returning to Tasmania to do the 1998 vintage for Joe Chromy, who was just starting Tamar Ridge. Four vintages later, he received an offer he couldn't refuse: Honey Bacon, wife of then Premier Jim Bacon, called him, saying she wanted him to come to the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra Ball. It was still vintage, and Alcorso had to sneak away to Hobart for the night, unbeknownst to his boss, the demanding Joe Chromy. He met an accountant who said he wanted Alcorso to start a new contract winemaking business, that he had clients and could raise finance of \$1.4 million. Alcorso and his wife Keryn Nylander desperately wanted to move back to Hobart. He resigned from Tamar Ridge in July and with 14 partners they started Winemaking Tasmania, building the

At the same time he acknowledges: "Quality is about the fruit – it comes from nowhere else. I'm fascinated that you can have three growers less than 40 metres apart, and the fruit off their vines is dramatically different. Care and attention are one thing; soil and site are another." He constantly tastes the fruit; flavour being the only determinant of when the pickers are called in. "Growers ring me and say their fruit is 22 Brix. Can we pick? And I'll say: 'Tell someone who cares.' It's flavour that matters."

One of his quality safeguards is to insist on taking all of the fruit from a grower's block, "so they can't give us their 10-tonne-an-acre stuff and keep the 4-tonne-an-acre stuff for themselves." By the same token, not having a brand means he doesn't compete with growers in the shows or in the market. "That way, they know I'm not secretly keeping the best barrels of their wine for myself!"

HUON HOOKE

VITAL STATISTICS

REGION: Tasmania
YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 31
ANNUAL CRUSH: 1200-1500 tonnes
STANDOUT WINES: riesling (eg. The Wine Society Tasmanian Riesling; Pressing Matters; Moores Hill) and pinot noir (eg. Laurel Bank; Kelvedon).

