

PRESIDENTS REPORT 2009

2009: A year that saw the National Sommelier Community come together.

The years of 2008 and 2009 have seen monumental change in the structure, membership and aspirations of Sommeliers Australia. As a community we have come together to work at raising the standards of the industry, and raising the profile of the role of the Sommelier around the country. As a not for profit organisation that receives no government funding this has been a massive undertaking.

Before progressing, it would be remiss of us not to thank the Westin for their amazing level of support. They have come to the party in helping us with our education program, this National AGM, and will be there for us next year when we hold our Inaugural symposium. On behalf of all of our members, our deepest level of gratitude goes out to your organisation.

THE BEGINNINGS – The tyranny of distance

In 2008 both active Associations in New South Wales and Victoria moved to join forces to combine their membership, with the aim of including our colleagues from each of the other states in the future. In theory a simple idea, in practice difficult to fulfil. Australia is a big country, and the tyranny of distance combined with the lack of funding has made communication amongst our committee difficult and slow going to say the least.

However, we have managed to hold on to our momentum and make change, and lay the foundations for a new look organisation with a singular vision. To get this message out to our members, a unified approach with Co-Presidents from the two founding Associations was adopted as the way forward. This helped alleviate concerns of a single state's dominance, and provide a smooth platform for entering the rest of Australia with the ultimate benefit for our members remaining in focus. Simply put, our aim is to become the peak reference body for Sommeliers and associated industries in the hospitality sector. We still have a long way to go, but we have achieved a great deal already.



EDUCATION AND ACCREDITATION

Central to raising the profile of Sommeliers in Australia, it is essential that we implement a national program of education and accreditation that embraces the unique character and role of our working members in Australia. To this end we have recognised the good work the WSET does in laying down the basic foundations of knowledge, but also understand its limitations in helping aspiring Sommeliers understand the need for in-depth communication, service, business and evaluation skills. Hence the Sommeliers Australia Education Scholarship was born.

The aim of the scholarship is two fold; firstly to give those involved in putting the course together the time and insight into creating a course that will be run by our organisation nationally; secondly to give the up and coming cream of the crop of Sommeliers around the country the opportunity to work together in increasing their level of knowledge and expertise. After two successful programs, we are on the cusp of putting together a series of courses that will undoubtedly raise the level of service and knowledge around the country. Hopefully a by-product of this will be a greater recognition of the skills of our members, and increased remuneration as a direct result. We will always have this as one of our main objectives for our members.

The Court of Master Sommeliers as an examining body has been warmly welcomed by our members, with many of them going on to complete the certified exam successfully. In addition to this we have had some of our members take the big step of heading overseas to gain the Advanced Level, with Franck Moreau returning to our shores triumphant in his endeavours. Those others who were not as successful have returned with a greater understanding of what the Court requires, and also of the unique opportunity we have in Australia to forge our own destiny.

MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE

As an association we strive to be inclusive in everything we do, as we understand that the support of the whole wine community is necessary to ensure our future success and very survival. In our membership we have members who support what we do but do not work in the industry; we also have winemakers, retailers, wholesalers and wineries signing up for memberships, because all of them realise the crucial role sommeliers play at the coal-front of wine sales in this country. At a time when Australian wine is copping a hammering



internationally, it is imperative we give our own industry time to put their case forward. After all, we are all in this together.

We are unapologetic however, about putting together a membership structure that is aspirational in its intent. The year 2010 will see our membership divided into three tiers;

1. ENTHUSIAST

- Anyone can join as an enthusiast member, and their role in the association is to support the professionals who enhance their love of our vibrant industry.

2. PROFESSIONAL

- These members work in our industry, either as working Sommeliers, or providing services to these members. Many people who have moved to wholesaling, winemaking, retail and more, have originated in restaurants, and deserve to be recognised for the time they have spent in the industry. A National Executive sub-committee will put the guidelines for Professional membership together, and all applicants from 2010 onward will have to submit credentials to become a professional member.

3. CERTIFIED SOMMELIER

- Certified Sommeliers will have to be Professional members of Sommeliers Australia in the first instance, and then they will have to meet the **minimum** requirements as set out by the Membership sub-committee to become a Certified Australian Sommelier. These requirements will be posted on our website, so all members understand what is needed to achieve this title. Certified Sommeliers will get preferential treatment to attend tastings, as they will have earned this right, and it sends out a message to our members and beyond, that our members take their status very seriously indeed.

In addition to this, we have welcomed cabin crew from **Qantas**, our national carrier, to join our organisation and to further their understanding of not only wine, but of how to talk about it and to serve it. This is a wonderful opportunity for getting the word out about the work we do.

There will be special tastings run by Sommeliers Australia members for Qantas Cabin Crew and for our Enthusiast Members around the country.



EVENTS & MASTERCLASSES

A broad range of events continue to happen across the country, and we are incredibly pleased with the efforts of our new State Chapters on taking up the challenge and making things happen. Our first complete National Roadshow commenced in Perth, with a celebratory theme in keeping with the current direction of our association, Sparkling wine and Champagne.

Tasmania is next cab off the rank with Melbourne, Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide to follow. We hope to include the ACT at some time in the not too distant future.

Beyond this our members have jumped in and been involved at the Good Food & Wine Show in all four states, and their contribution has been tremendous and greatly appreciated. It provides another wonderful opportunity to let the drinking public know more about what we do, and how we do it.

Once again, Sommeliers Australia will be running a series of Satellite Events for the Melbourne Food and Wine Festival in 2010, not least of all the long Sommelier Lunch, which sees 200 people with a strong wine and food bent come and celebrate the skills of our members. Our members will also be involved in the Masterclass program at the Langham and at the Melbourne Convention Centre.

SYDNEY

PERTH

BRISBANE

Our **Inaugural Sommeliers Australia Symposium** is back on the agenda, and the massive body of work the Llawela Forrest and the committee have done to get this off the ground will be realised in May 2010. The final date is to be confirmed, but it looks likely to be early in the month. We will need all hands on deck for this event, so if you want to contribute then please register your interest now to help lighten the load.

WEBSITE

The year of 2009 also saw the launch of our new website, with a content management system that allows us to reach all of our members, and keep them up to date with the goings on of the whole association, and also about events in their own states. It is still a work in progress, but



the girls and boys at Swearwords have done an amazing job, and their on-going support is invaluable to our association. On behalf of all of our members, we thank them most sincerely. Llawela Forrest from Run Forrest also deserves special recognition for being the glue that keeps our CMS from falling apart.

We hope in the future that the Sommeliers Australia website becomes the home page for our members, with up to date news on not only our own concerns, but other dates for trade tastings and the like being posted. If you have not done this yet, we highly recommend it.

RUN FORREST

Llawela Forrest has played a pivotal role in ensuring the vision of our committee has had some chance to be realised, and we are indebted to her for going above and beyond what has been asked of her and her team. Her continued involvement is crucial to our future success, but this just highlights our need to have a staffed office for our members and the industry to be able to find out what our Association and members are up to. Raising funds is going to be critical in the year 2010, and if you have any ideas on how to contribute to the on-going success of your Association, then please get involved to make it happen.

THE ASI & SOMMELIER COMPETITIONS

In 2008 we became an observer country of the Association Sommelerie Internationale (ASI), with a view to join as a full member in Chile in 2010. We have been involved in General Assemblies in Russia, France and Japan, and we are starting to understand how and why the ASI exists and works. David Lawler has been at the forefront of maintaining this relationship, and the work he has done will be considered amongst some of the most important to date. On behalf of the members you have represented time and again David, thank you for your selfless and diligent work.

As for competitions, they are at the very forefront of what ASI is all about, with education at this point running a very distant second. This is something we hope to see changed in the near future. Despite this, our involvement at the ASI Asia-Oceanic competition was an unmitigated success due to the great work done by David Lawler and Franck Moreau. Both men did an outstanding job, and a former Sommelier du Monde, Satoru Mori, narrowly pipped Franck at the post and he has done our Association very proud indeed.



The future of Sommelier Competitions in Australia is bright, with a rather large hurdle standing in our way in the form of a second language. Given our isolation from the rest of the world, speaking a second language is not often of great concern, but those wishing to compete at the highest level will have to embrace French or Spanish. There are worse things that you could do!

Regardless, 2010 will see us lay the foundations of our own Sommeliers Australia, Sommelier of the Year competition run under the guidelines of the ASI. There will be other competitions, but it will be from this that we choose our representatives to travel overseas and compete. The future in this regard is exciting indeed.

FUTURE FUNDING

In a perfect world we would be able to create enough revenue through membership, events and education to be completely self-sufficient in our monetary requirements. This however is not the case and we look to our supporters to help us achieve our goals. To date many parties have come to the table and have supplied our Association with cash and stock, and for their efforts we are deeply grateful.

The future will require a great deal of funding to realise the potential of a National Education Program that is recognised by government, and ironically it will be in the form of government funding we hope to achieve our ultimate goals. Brian Croser OA, is just one member of the wine industry that has put his hand up to help in this regard, and in 2010 we should see more support coming forthwith.

EXTRA THANKS FOR HARD WORK

Although all of the members of committees in each State does great work to keep the ball rolling, there needs to be some special recognition of going above and beyond;

Tim Stock has done a great job in playing Devil's advocate, striving to get the best possible result from the creation of a unified national association.

Trish Redman has worked tirelessly to assist in this endeavour, and she is the glue that holds NSW together.



Chris Crawford, David Lawler & Dan Sims, have spent countless hours on the education program, and have laid the foundation (and a few tears to hold the cement together) of a very healthy education system.

Jo Duff has made sense of the train wreck left behind with our financials that were in the hands of a previous relationship. You have done a wonderful job, and we hope you will be there to assist in the future.

James Omond has given us pro bono, his valuable time to get the legals right for our National Constitution. Without him the National dream could not become a reality.

WHAT DOES 2010 HOLD FOR SOMMELIERS AUSTRALIA

The foundations for a bold move in to 2010 have been laid, and it is our hope that we realise some of the potential our Association doubtlessly has. The National and State Committees have given up many hours to work toward a future that involves giving our members the best opportunities to further their personal goals, and those of their Association.

The point cannot be hammered home enough: This is YOUR association, and the Committee and our members strive to put your needs first and foremost. Sommeliers represent the pointy end of the wedge when it comes to wine sales and for consumers and producers alike, they represent opinion leaders and a route to market for their wines.

Our job is to raise the awareness of the role of the Sommelier, and to also raise the standards of service in our industry. It is up to us to never forget that we work in the hospitality sector, and our job is to be hospitable, inclusive, backed by knowledge and never arrogant. The future is indeed bright, and with everyone pitching in and pulling their weight, our objectives for the future are sure to be achieved.

Ben Edwards