

Balgownie Estate

EST. 1969

The Balgownie Estate Story.

Like many things in life - a combination of fate, good timing and happen-stance saw local pharmacist Stuart Anderson plant 10 acres of carefully selected vines in Maiden Gully, just outside Bendigo, in 1969.

It was in 1967 that Stuart Anderson struck a deal with Mrs Ethel Victoria Small to buy a property at Maiden Gully, near Kangaroo Flat at \$35 per acre. Being of Scottish descent, he announced the vineyard's name to be 'Balgownie' after the 'Brig o'Balgownie' which is a 13th century bridge over the River Don, near Old Aberdeen.

The first vines were planted in 1969 – 5 acres of shiraz and 5 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon, with a further 5 acres of Cabernet Sauvignon planted in 1970. 1971 saw fledging plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir struck from cuttings sourced from the CSIRO Merbein facility.

Balgownie Estate's red wines were inspired by the classic wines of Bordeaux and this was further stimulated by Dr Max Lake, who founded Lakes Folly in the Hunter Valley of NSW, in 1963.

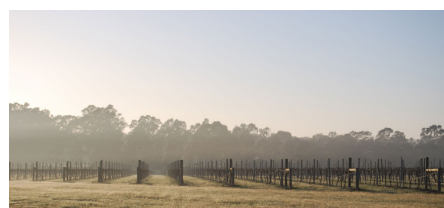
Balgownie Estate Cabernet Sauvignon and Hermitage (as Shiraz was known at the time) were highly sought after – not only for their quality but their image and their distinct, uncluttered labels, which remain virtually unscathed to this day.

The rudimentary winery was built in 1970 and the first Balgownie Estate wines made in 1972 were aged in three 3 barrels, purchased from an Adelaide cooper, Schahinger. The wines were instant success on the fledging Victorian wine scene and Balgownie Estate's barrel store was added in 1975, along with the main home (now winemakers residence) which was built by Stuart and Shirley Anderson in 1978.

"And the wines? Simply outstanding - by any measure. The Balgownie Estate wines were a serendipitous blend of raw enthusiasm, Stuart Andersons innate understanding of science from his pharmacy studies, a good site and excellent planting material." Peter Bourne, August 09.

The style of Balgownie Estate was set through this period with intensity and complexity with rich yet savoury rather than fruity flavours. Moderate alcohol and the intelligent use of oak endowed these wines a rare combination of vibrancy and a genuine sense of honesty. With inspiration from the 19th century, and tempered style with a scientific understanding of winemaking and better and better oak – increasingly sourced from the quality French cooper, Seguin Moreau.

The Balgownie vines were tended in a semi-organic way - with no herbicides and only mulch as fertilizer- there was plenty of chicken manure from the nearby poultry farms and the spent marc (dried grape skins) were turned to compost on-site. This is similar to the approach used today – albeit with less annual rainfall now to what was then.



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Almost 10 years on, brothers and passionate wine lovers Des and Rod Forrester heard rumour that Mildara Blass were selling off some of their boutique wine brands; Balgownie Estate being one that sparked particular attention. Digging out a couple of prized bottles of Balgownie Estate Cabernet from Rods cellar – they found themselves hatching a plan to buy the vineyard and build it back to its former glory. The Forrester brothers and their long term family friend Bill Freeman submitted a tender that same day, and with little to-ing and fro-ing the vineyard was theirs.

Des and Rod Forrester and Bill Freeman purchased Balgownie Estate in its run down state recognising it's potential and excited by the opportunity to rebuild an iconic Victorian wine brand. With the foundations already laid, the new owners vision was to make Balgownie Estate wine better than ever before; and so they immediately set about refurbishing the vineyards and winery.

Des Forrester's personal passion for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay prompted the purchase of a second site in the Yarra Valley in 2002. The vines planted there are now producing young vibrant grapes and the characteristics are an impressive true reflection of the site selected. Branching out to the Yarra Valley also provided the opportunities for Balgownie Estate to produce two popular summer whites; Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris. The Black Label was created to home these new quality wines. With substantial investment this new site now boasts; vineyard, cellar door, restaurant, 65 room resort, conference facility and day spa

Winemakers at Balgownie have been notably loyal and long standing. In the total 40 years, there have been just four; impressive in an industry with a holy-grail-like pursuit for excellence in wine and where winemakers are prepared to travel the globe in search of it. Winemakers to date start with founder Stuart Anderson. He was succeeded by Mildara Blass Winemaker Lindsay Ross. Tobias Ansted was the first winemaker under current ownership, starting in 1999 and leaving just before his 10 years were due in Dec 2008.

In January 2009 winemaker Mark Lane joined the team. 2008 WineState Magazine Winemaker of the Year, Mark has been working in Margaret River since 1997. He was lured back to his home-state of Victoria by Balgownie Estates respected vineyards and impressive wine credentials. He joins the talented Balgownie Estate team; Vineyard Manager John Monteath (at Balgownie Estate since 2001) and Assistant Winemaker Tony Winspear (since 1994).

In 2009 Balgownie Estate celebrated its 40th Year since the planting of the vines. In recognition, winemaker Mark Lane released two limited release Estate Wines; the 2008 Merlot and 2008 Viognier. These spectacular wines demonstrate very clearly that this site was chosen perfectly and we are seeing only the beginning of what will be very exciting times ahead.

