


BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

## Andrew Caillard: *The Australian Ark: The Story of Australian Wine*

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This is a publication for those who want to read numerous stories about the myriad people and wineries that have contributed through good and bad times to New World wine industry development. It is nothing less than an encyclopedia of who did what and when in the Australian wine industry from the start of European settlement in 1788 to the present.

In the process of telling those stories the author also provides a verbal history of the ups and downs associated with the industry's growth over those 235 years. And grow it did, even when measured as the volume of production of wine relative to that of all goods and services (as captured in real GDP). That contrasts with comparable trend lines for Old World countries, which are mostly downward sloping from their mid-19th-century highs. However, around that trend for Australia are very wide fluctuations, representing several boom-slump cycles (Anderson, 2018). It is the cycles even more than the growth trend that enrich the stories conveyed in this seminal publication.

The author has been gathering material for this book over the past 40 years, beginning soon after his emigration from Britain to Australia in 1982. Despite growing up in the UK, his (Reynell) family roots stretch back to one of the first vineyard plantings in the colony of South Australia. So while his jobs have involved working in the secondary wine market, in the corporate retail world, in wine media, in film (*Red Obsession*), as an artistic painter, and as author of several books, including *Penfolds: The Rewards of Patience* (now in its seventh edition), he has interacted with an extraordinary number of people in Australia's wine industry and evidently kept copious notes.

The text is presented as decadal chapters. Volume 1 covers up to 1900. Volume 2 covers the first eight decades following Federation in 1901. The final volume covers in more

detail the most-recent four decades: they are ones where the author was there either as an observer or a participant, so the narrative of this third volume is in the first person. For Caillard, that period began with him enrolling in the wine marketing course at Roseworthy Agricultural College (now a campus of the University of Adelaide), close to South Australia's Barossa Valley wine region.

Volume 1 covers the period before irrigation was possible via the main rivers, so most vineyards were close to the urban centers of the mainland's temperate-climate south eastern and south western coasts. The first 125 pages cover up to 1830, during which time the new settlers struggled to put food on the table, so vines were mostly just part of household gardens. Perhaps the first large harvest came from William Macarthur, whose vineyard near Sydney provided 250 gallons of wine in 1830.

The wine industry got a major boost following a visit by James Busby to France and Spain in 1831, during which he collected 437 varieties from the Montpellier Botanical Gardens and 133 varieties from the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris. Of those, 362 healthy cuttings arrived in Sydney in 1834. Some went to the colony's Botanic Gardens, others to Macarthur's farm, where they were commercialized, and cuttings were widely distributed throughout Australia's colonies.

South Australia was among the beneficiaries, where free settlers began arriving from 1836, including Dr Penfold, who bought 524 acres close to Adelaide in 1844. Wine was of low quality prior to 1860, and exporting back to Britain was difficult initially because of high trade costs and an import tariff twice that faced by South African wines. But during 1880–1900, the share of wine production exported rose from 1% to (briefly) 25%. Most of it was still red wine, whose reputation was rising following the International Exhibitions in Vienna in 1873 and Bordeaux in 1882. Typically those imports were in barrels. Some was blended in London with lighter lower-alcohol wines from Europe, but the Australian product was more expensive than Italian, Spanish, and Algerian wine, and much was bottled under the Emu Wine Company's brands.

Volume 2 begins in 1901, when the Australian colonies federated. That had a major effect on the wine industry because it was accompanied by the removal of what had been high tariff barriers on trade between the colonies (now states). It allowed South Australia to more fully exploit its comparative advantage in wine production, which put downward pressure on production in New South Wales and Victoria. Soon thereafter, South Australia accounted for more than half of the new nation's wine output and an even bigger share of exports, a position it has retained ever since.

After World War I, returning soldiers seeking work were encouraged to go inland and take up land where newly developed infrastructure provided irrigation opportunities. In 1919, Britain offered preferential access to its market for fortified wine, which led to a 50% increase in vineyard area in just 5 years. Varieties such as Doradillo were planted and a glut soon emerged. The federal government responded in 1924 with a lucrative bounty on exports of fortified wine. That was enough to boost the share of production exported from 6% in 1923 to an average of 20% in the 1930s, but the quality of those fortified wines was low.

Following World War II, Britain raised its tariff on fortified wines fivefold, and Australia abandoned the fortified wine export bounty in 1947. Exports collapsed, and the area under vines hardly changed until the 1970s. But the low price of wine began to

attract domestic consumers, whose incomes were rising and whose preferences were broadening under the influence of new immigrants from southern Europe.

Per capita consumption began to rise from 5 L per year in 1963 to 10 L by 1973 and 20 L by 1983. Initially, consumers transitioned from fortified wines to still red wine and then also to whites. This was a period of much technological change in both vineyards and wineries, and wine quality improved greatly. Exports were close to zero over the first four decades post-World War II though, as were wine imports. And with the plateauing in domestic wine consumption in the 1980s, wine prices dropped to unprofitable levels.

Thus, Volume 3 picks up the stories at another low point in the industry's fortunes. A trigger for change came in 1985 from a sponsored tour of Masters of Wine from the northern hemisphere. They were astounded at the high quality of Australian wines, the industry's rich history, and its old vines (phylloxera did not reach South Australia, so some vines planted in the mid-19th century were—and are—still in production). The publicity that followed that tour was a crucial factor in Australia's export renaissance, along with the weak value of the Australian dollar in the mid-1980s. And so began the spectacular export-led takeoff that accelerated through the 1990s and continued until the global financial crisis of 2007–08. Vineyard expansion outpaced the capacity of wine marketers to find new export markets though, hence prices gradually fell yet again.

A sense of crisis returned in the early 2010s but was soon forgotten when China's market for red wine blossomed for a few years. However, growth of that market began to reverse in 2017, and the bubble burst for Australia when China imposed punitive tariffs on imports of wine from Australia in late 2020 (Anderson, 2023). With the rest of the world also awash with red wine, Australia's industry is now back to another low-profit point.

The final chapter acknowledges the challenges currently facing the nation's vignerons but expresses confidence that the optimism and trust put into their next generation over the past two centuries will continue, and that myriad stories like those reported in this book will be able to be written in the decades ahead as the industry continues to ride the next set of waves.

The book includes no footnotes and no citations to a list of references. It does, however, have an 11-page bibliography, an 11-page list of newspaper articles that were drawn on, and a 4-page list of around 100 interviews with significant players. The interviews were recorded during 2000–03 (by Rob Limb and lodged in the State Library of South Australia). Also, each of the three volumes has an extensive index, totaling 62 pages.

This is not a book to read on an airline flight, as even the paperback version weighs 5.15 kg, thanks to its glossy thick pages, nearly half of which have at least one color photo. The reader should also be warned that, because of the decadal chapter breaks, there is much repetition between (and sometimes even within) chapters, and paragraphs jump from one topic to another without any section headings. Also, the many photos often bear little resemblance to the nearby text (especially in Volumes 1 and 2). Nonetheless, many readers will get pleasure simply by flipping through the pages to glance at the photos.

## References

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- Anderson, K. (2023). What's happened to the wine market in China? *Journal of Wine Economics*, 18(2), 173–183.