



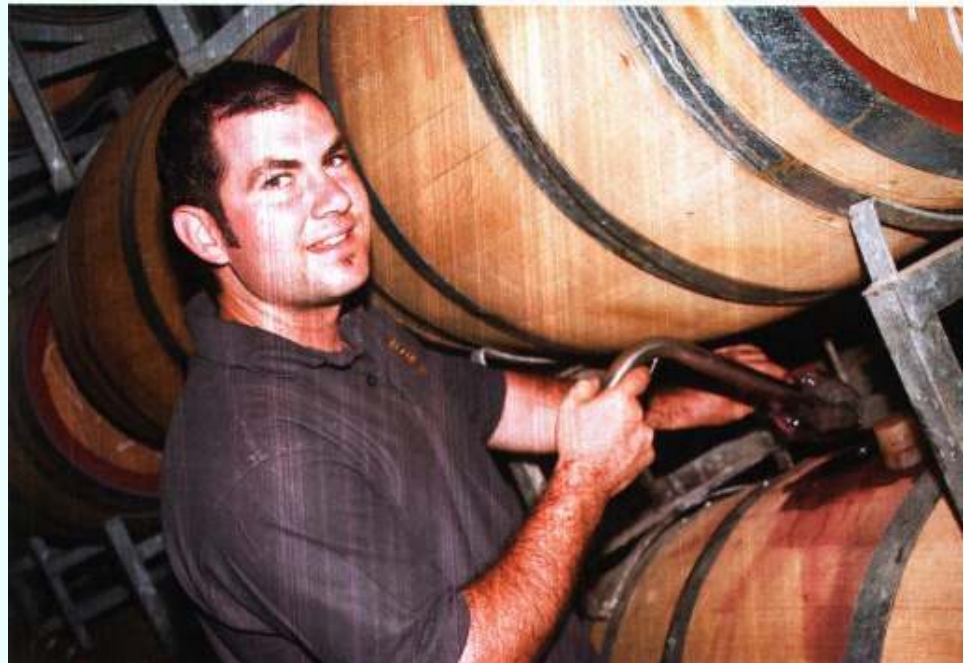
FOR WINEMAKER Jacob Stein there really is no place like home. In January last year, after spending several years overseas developing his craft, Jacob returned home to his birthplace of Mudgee to take over the mantle of winemaker at his family's business - Robert Stein Winery. Jacob is the grandson of the vineyard's founder and namesake, Robert 'Bob' Stein. Thirty four years ago, Bob purchased 75 acres at the vineyard's current location and started planting shiraz rootlings - later adding subsequent acreages of chardonnay, rhine riesling, traminer, semillon, cabernet sauvignon and black muscat. Bob's legacy continued with his son Andrew - who is now thrilled to have the third generation on-site to help steer the vineyard into the future and build on the region's winemaking reputation. While his travels took him to some exotic locales - including the Rheingau and Rheinhessen regions in Germany as well as Italy and Canada - right now, Mudgee is exactly where Jacob wants to be.

**What features do you feel most define Mudgee as a winemaking region?**

Mudgee has always had an image of making big-bodied reds. However, our ability to produce a wide range of varieties, and do them well, is I believe the way of the future. We are one of Australia's oldest wine towns with close to 100 per cent family owned and run wineries and a growing number of local small and specialised food producers (of which I am one). With an even balance of industry veterans, we also have a bunch of young bloods doing great things in Mudgee. I believe they will be seen as a regional force not too far down the track.

**What's the best part about working in a family business - and the hardest?**

The best is the honour of having a great addition in wine and having your family name on the label. Being the third generation is so a great achievement for a small family winery. The hardest part is the work is never ending, particularly during vintage when, as well as our own wine, we make wine for many Mudgee vineyards.



**What was the most useful lesson you learnt during your years as a travelling winemaker?**

The wineries and winemakers who were organised and pro-active in their winemaking always seemed to be a step ahead of the rest. I've learnt it's better to find any issues in wines before they become problems.

**What can young winemakers like you teach some of the more established veterans in the industry?**

Innovation and variation of styles is a starting point. Although we are quite lucky in Australia to have some veterans who are apt to change and innovate, try telling an old Italian winemaker in the hills they should be washing their barrels after every wine movement!

**What still makes the cellar door 'experience' memorable for you and where is your favourite cellar door in the world?**

I always prefer to visit small family-owned wineries because of the 'real' experience of speaking to someone in the family with dirty hands. My favourite cellar door was in Canada - at Thirty Bench Winery in Beamsville, Ontario. It was real,

educational, a great view, great people and the wines were excellent.

**What's the most memorable bottle of wine you've ever consumed?**

The most memorable bottle of wine I have shared was before harvest in Germany during the Australia vs Japan World Cup soccer match of 2006. An old Rheingau winemaker named Heinz Koch, who spoke no English, brought from his cellar a bottle of 1937 Erbacher Steinmorgen Riesling Spatlese from Pfarrgut Erbach Rheingau. He insisted I open it and pour it out to the other screaming Germans. The wine was past its best, but the Socceroos won 3-1, and I have the empty bottle in my cellar.

**Where's the most unusual place you've ever consumed wine?**

In the car park of the sunset viewing area of Ayers Rock with a bottle of Wovenfield Ferguson Valley Shiraz Viognier, sitting on the red dusty bonnet of my Land-Cruiser.

**What's your favourite wine accessory?**

It would have to be my Riedel magnum decanter and funnel strainer. They've been working overtime lately.



**What do you think are the biggest challenges facing Australian winemakers across the next ten years?**

The increased competition from lower-cost rivals such as Chile and Argentina. They are making considerably good wines for good prices. How we combat this is a big issue. The other challenge is to reverse Australia's slump in wine export quantity and price per litre. The rise of lower-cost wines within Australia is also an issue facing small to medium-sized wineries. The fluctuating and rising Australian dollar also has an effect on Australia's export sales.

**Do you have a soft spot for any particular variety?**

Riesling, of course, because of my family's important involvement in supervising the

early vineyard of Camden Park. In 1838, Johann Stein - my great-great-great-grandfather - brought out from Germany the first cuttings of Rhine riesling to survive in Australia. Riesling is the queen of grapes, is grown all over the world, and can be made in such a wide range of styles.

**How would you describe your own personal wine collection?**

Going through university I amassed a collection of big reds from down south - huge tannins and oak. Now I am more 'refined', and so are my wines. A big collection of riesling, mainly from Germany and Australia.

**Do you spend much time thinking about what food and wines make the**

**best combinations?**

The practice of matching wine and food presents great challenges and set rules for some. However, I like to keep it simple, and believe it is subject to individual taste, preference and whim, so it is only on rare occasions that the combination will 'ring everyone's bells' - although our 2009 riesling was a hit at Christmas with all the cooked seafood!

**What did you ring in the New Year with?**

We splurged this year and had a '96 Pol Roger Cuvee Winston Churchill, a 2006 Domaine Francois Bertheau 'Assemblage' Chambolle-Musigny and a few young bottles of Aussie riesling.