

Agribusiness

Innovation Hotspot Profile



Brown Magpie Wines

Adapting knowledge to produce quality products

Talking to Loretta and Shane Breheny, the owners of Brown Magpie Wines, you come away with the impression that they have harnessed a passion for making quality wines with sound knowledge and business principles. The result is a successful local business with a clear focus, proven track record and a bright future.

After a long search for a suitable property Loretta and Shane purchased their block on Larcombes Road, Modewarre in 1999. Right from the start they demonstrated their approach of using the best available knowledge to inform their business decisions. In choosing their Modewarre property they were very careful in identifying good aspect, soils and suitability for irrigation. Proximity to Geelong and access to labour and expertise was also important. The result is a site that produces high quality, intensely flavoured wines.



Their success is demonstrated through a raft of wine show prizes over the years. Most recently these have included best wine in show at 2013 Geelong Wine Show for their Pinot Noir, Best Shiraz and Best Pinot



Noir in the 2013 Australian Cool Climate Wine Show, and a Silver Medal for the Pinot Gris at the 2013 Royal Melbourne Wine Show.

Throughout the development of Brown Magpie Wines, Loretta and Shane have actively built knowledge based on their strengths. Loretta studied for qualifications in viticulture and wine making and took the lead in managing the property. Shane's focus was ensuring a viable business model utilising his corporate and accounting background. They have also adapted



to changing circumstances and in recent times their roles have swapped with Loretta running the business and Shane taking over property management activities. Seeking assistance from knowledge experts to assist where appropriate has also characterised their approach e.g. local consultants assisted in advising on varieties, trellising system and the irrigation system.

A clear business model summed up as: *"premium grapes, estate produced wine and sale to local/premium markets"* underlies all of their activities and provides an alignment of approaches that is fundamental to success. For instance, producing quality wines translates to detailed attention to viticulture. This means things like regular leaf testing to monitor minerals in the soil as well as monitoring root depth and water level so that management practices can be adapted accordingly.

The major drought from 2005 presented a challenge and they had to buy water in 2009. As a result they

studied options for better use of water and in particular how to reduce evaporation. This led to a deepening of the main dam to increase capacity by 30% and the use of silicon treatment in the water.

Loretta and Shane see ongoing adaptation as important to maintaining and improving their operations. For instance, Shane is keen to do more composting using vine and winery waste to reduce weeds and improve soil structure as well as reduce spraying - all focused on making the best quality wine they can.

The business model is reflected in marketing practices, with the emphasis being on estate grown and

produced wine for high value markets. A mix of channels reflects this and includes cellar door, online, agents and direct distribution to local bottle shops and restaurants.

A local focus is also reflected in partnerships that have directly benefited the business. For instance, they actively participate in the Otway Harvest Trail and the Geelong Wine Association. The local community is very supportive and Loretta and Shane have benefitted from support and advice from a range of local farmers and other wineries in the region. They also provide access to their wine laboratory for other wineries in the region.

The history of development and investment in Brown Magpie Wines provides an outstanding example of how building and adapting knowledge combined with a clear business model directs consistency of effort to produce a successful business.

Brown Magpie Wines website:
www.brownmagpiewines.com

This innovation hotspot is an initiative of the G21 Agribusiness Forum - to illustrate the success of innovative agribusinesses active across the region. See:
www.g21agforum.com.au
