

QUEENSLAND WINE CONFERENCE  
**BY PETER HOWARD**

REGIONAL FOOD AND WINE TOURISM

**BACKGROUND**

I first noticed the importance of wine tourism in France in the middle 80's...how long has been going on, I asked myself, when it booked into a cute little Hotel in Paulliac...great steak & pomme frits...just like in the movies. But it was more than that...you could sense the awareness of Madame as she carefully took the order and suggested a wine to go with the meal. From there on in all round Europe, no matter where I went, the same feeling was there...I now know it is so deeply rooted in the culture, that thing of food and wine, that they, the Europeans take no notice of it.

In the latter 80s I did a lot a work at Mudgee in one way or an other and I began to see that there were some specific produce that was done well there – asparagus, lamb, beef, trout and so on and the notion of regional foods and cooing began to move around my head.

I was then approached in 1988 by Bob Roberts of Huntington Estate Wines to do the food for the first of the large concert series which is the Huntington Music Festival now – it was 200 meals over 10 concerts. I said I would do it if I could do “regional” food...I can still see he falling off the chair with laughter...but there were a couple of dishes I created using local produce which lasted for the 10 years I serviced this outstanding cultural event. And by the way, besides the cultural advantages, the Festival left behind a financial legacy – over \$20,000.00 in wages and nearly, \$80,000.00 in food purchases...and every bed in Mudgee filled for a week.

So that was the beginning of my interest in regionalism, which led me to start the CTAC with Tourism NSW and go on to, be recognised for my work by being named a Living Legend of Tourism in 1999.

## **CLICK**

### **FOOD AND WINE – THE SENSUAL SYNERGY**

#### **CLICK**

- Food and Wine Culture

Australia's emerging food and wine industry is full of expectations and questions – it has been acknowledged that we do have a style of cooking which can be called Australian but does that make it Australian Cuisine? And can we have another word for Cuisine ...probably not. So some of the expectations have already been met in that we know our ability is there to produce the food and we certainly have the abundance of agricultural products to use. The questions really concern the multicultural approach to our food and how that affects it – we simply don't have a solid culture at this point to be able to say this is Australian because the ground rules keep on changing. The culture of food and wine is underpinned by the cuisine and those wines used with it – but as we keep looking at the different influences from our ethnic brothers, we move more and more away from having a solid, stationary cuisine.

For me that is not a worry as cuisines are meant to reflect the current influences of the society. Consequently, we as a consumer society, demand things new and so it's Thai one minute, Moroccan the next with a smattering of Spanish in between. And we love it, as it is truly multicultural and exciting.

The culture of food and wine is on its way and we have been working on it for years now and its reality will provide some security for we believers that food and wine in Australia can make a difference. Sadly, the respect for food and wine is held by a very small amount of the population and the major challenge we have is to spread the word to advance the plight of the culture of food and wine.

## CLICK

- Wine without food – what is it?

It is a miracle to me, anyway! In the middle of June there are acres of dried up stick clinging to trellises all over Australia and 6 months later grapes are producing the juice that turns into the magnificence of wine – when they say that winemakers are just farmers I disagree; to me they are miracle workers. However, wine is a beverage that is starting to get acknowledged – we drink at albeit that our consumption is static at the moment. But when I was born, in 1947 we drank around .2lt/head/per year and now we drink around 20lt/head/per annum...and for me the dilemma is that I drank that last night and so I'm stuffed for the rest of the year!

The true beauty of wine is magnified by food – just as the saying goes...wine and food or food and wine...for us that are the thing we must know about and press it forward as a lifestyle issue.

As the old saying goes..." a day without wine is like a day without sunshine...". Combine it with food we can experience the celebration of what we do so well from an agricultural base.

And I guess I am speaking to the converted here but we have an enormous amount of work to do to get the rest of the population to experience what we know already.

CLICK

- The Pleasure Aspect- physicality of eating and drinking

Just the sheer enjoyment of eating and drinking is as good as sex...well,...maybe not as good as....but certainly it as close as you can get in the full view of the public. However, it is the sensual pleasure that eating and drinking brings that can entice us all to get that pleasure from an action that some see as feeding the machine.

The total experience is when the right wine is served with the right food...the balance is there...the flavours are equal...and sometimes this takes a lot of doing and sometimes it happens just by chance. But when it happens in the regions it is magic! Eating a meal of local produce accompanied by the local wine...and in the region is often one of the ultimate experiences in life. Don't; truffles taste better in Perigord than in San Francisco...have you ever compare a cassoulet in Toulouse with one in Melbourne?

Don't forget the social aspect of eating...we in this industry do a lot of entertaining and eating...even drinking...but most of the population don't ....it is an experience for them ...a special occasion...wine can be the catalyst for this social event.

CLICK

## PRIMARY PRODUCE – THE REGION’S RICHES

### CLICK

- International perspective

Around the world we are seen as being green and green – an image I endorse we maintain – **CLICK** this logo is for the FARL campaign in the USA and we have been successful so far in our exporting of lamb to that country. And certainly we are known for our wines – **CLICK** again that has been a superb effort over the last decade or so. But more & more, the SEA on the label (Sth eastern Aust.) is being questioned and the region of origin is being requested.

### CLICK

- What is regional anyway?

We are hearing more about this every day and so what is regional? For the wines, it is easy as they have the GI (geographic indicators) but for food there is no such regulations and so, regionalism is very much in its infancy in Australia but it is beginning to make its mark. It certainly is used in a “Branding “ – but what are the elements of regionality?

1. The terroir – **CLICK** the smell, the earth, the sky, the ambiance...the rainfall...everything about the region must be known...the breakdown of the soil
2. The architecture **CLICK** of the region that is a major influence and the heritage that goes hand in hand.
3. The food – **CLICK** what the heritage has left us and how that is now used – here the German wurst house in the Barossa but is there German cuisine in the Barossa anymore...not much in restaurants but

certainly domestically yes. But it is the heritage and this shop does a very healthy tourism trade as well as the locals.

4. The people – everyday people that make up the society of the region and also the stars...**CLICK** here peter Lehmann...in his famous weighbridge

**CLICK**

- Using regional produce to attract tourists

Can regional produce and food attract tourists?

For me, food can be as big a draw card as the wine.

The raw produce can indeed be used but it is the finished product on the plate that is working better. The Orange region has worked with **CLICK** Michael Manners a chef of longstanding fame to produce regional dishes, which go on show in places like Wine Australia. Michael's restaurant is Selkirk's. The Riverina used their stickies in a package called "A Pack of Gold" which was available only in the region.

In Cowra, the Al Fresco company (makers of small goods) had a viewing room for tourists to view the workplace and then a café to buy the finished product. But it is the fact that tourists, let's say, the day trippers or city folk that believe the food is always cleaner and better in the country that supports this premise. Now that may not be true but smart operators are offering country food to appease that market.

The Yarra Valley Food Trails have produced their own guide to where you go as a tourist to see their regional food and wine in action.

**CLICK**

- What grows best? Eliminate the mediocre and develop regional pride with excellent produce

Find out what grows best in your region and focus on that to spread the good work....In the Lockyer, not so long ago, I found out the local farmers had worked with the DPI to develop a carrot, as I remember called the Kondor, that would give the best yield and flavour etc. Does this allow you to eliminate the mediocre and concentrate on the best? One would hope so but is that economically viable? That must be our ideal but is it practical? But wine wise it is what we must acknowledge.....certainly some grapes grow better than other...look at the Semillon of the Hunter and the Shiraz of the Barossa...while the pinot of Tassie are looking up...the problem is that we are such a young industry here in comparison with the old world who have had centuries to try and prove what grows best.

## CLICK

- Regional cuisine

Several places in NSW have trailed this concept and it is a hard one. Because we haven't gone far enough down the road to say this is definitely regional. The concept of regional cuisine is being examined and the pilot course has been run in the Hunter Valley TAFE. This course is available on the national agenda...it is a 54 hour course that is available to all takers...professionals and domestic alike. Until regional foods are cooked in the home that cannot be said to be regional. We have a long way to go but we have started.

Where this course has had remarkable success is in the Hume/Murray region where it has been run four times – twice for professionals and twice for domestic. The course is also been

made mandatory for local apprentices at the local TAFE. This region has now got a full time food and wine co-ordinator who is paid a good salary and is provided with a car. This also happens in the Northern Rivers region and in the Cowra/Orange/Mudgee set up – called the C.O.M.E. Group.

For me, food can be as big a draw card as the wine.

CLICK The Rothbury Café tried in the Hunter and has told me it is all a little too hard in that continuity of produce is the bit that brings everyone undone. With out any defined regional borders they set up their own and did very well and used it s a marketing tool – this worked well for awhile.

More importantly, in this embryo stage, the region’s branded product can be used to bring notice to a region....the Tamworth Rabbits, The Illabo Lamb, the Gloucester beef, the Orange apples...produce that is branded as having come from a region...how can you ignore King Island cheeses?...or indigenous specialities like the Dhu fish found often in the Margaret River. These items go onto menus that proclaim their origin. Just look how important it is in the wine industry...especially if you look at the terra rosa strip of Coonawarra...and how that effects your bottom line.

The quality of the product that comes from your region shapes the image that consumers have of the region – simply but very very true.

Certainly there are any number of cynics who say we cannot have a regional cuisine because, as one put it, there is not “peasant cuisine “; in saying this we forget we are a very, very young country, speaking now of our current incumbency. Rob Robinson, the guru of regionalism in Australia who started the FOOD festival along with other enthusiasts, stated years ago, that just as language evolves so too can food. And evolution is

what we must concentrate on and know that our model of regionalism will be very different to the European version.

CLICK

- Australian Contemporary Cuisine

CLICK

Regional cuisine must be studied to aid and assist the Australian Contemporary Cuisine. This is a 682-hour course developed for chefs to study the emerging cuisine of Australia.

Any cuisine that is worth it's salt has to be studied...

CLICK

FOOD AND WINE FESTIVALS – ARE THEY THE ANSWER?

CLICK

- Do they work?

If nothing else they are a great day for the local population – for locals to get together to celebrate what their region is about but as we will see they can be used to attract thousands of people (tourists) into your region. And yes, the answer is they do work...and I want to spend some time on the ones I have been involved in...but firstly

CLICK

- What's involved in getting them together – hard work!

These things take an extraordinary amount of time to get organised. A shrivelled up sausage wrapped in cotton wool bread does not make a gourmet food and wine festival...yet some think it does...yes it is done by committee but they end up being driven by one over-the-top dedicated person.

You do have to have your outcomes organised...you must know what you want from the festival – so stated objectives are essential and a good treasurer is the only way to go. However, these events must be seen as a community based happening and they must involve the community where ever possible. Don't forget to take the community along with you for the journey...let them know at all times what you're doing and how it will benefit them and your region.

CLICK

- Taste of the Riverina

This festival started about 5 years ago as a promotion wing of the CLICK Riverina Food Group of which the Riverina Winegrowers group is a member. The components of it are

1. The Golden Plates Awards in which the members are peer judged to have done specific things that makes them worthy of the award...so it can be the one who

made the best contribution to the wine industry or food industry. This is done through a regional produce dinner to which 250-450 people pay to come.

2. CLICK Celebrity cooking demos at wineries or partnered with wine displays – depending on whether the Taste is in Wagga Wagga or Griffith. These attract huge crowds and are done on a staggered basis around the region.
3. Regional Cooking Competition – CLICK here the judges decide which is the best restaurant in the region by the food served in a two day cookoff at the Wagga Wagga TAFE – we started with 4 and ended up with 9 last year. The outcome is the collection of recipes and shots of winning regional dishes which one day we will turn into a regional cook book...here the CLICK Yabby Mousse and CLICK the Silver Perch wontons

Last year, over 300 people travelled directly to Griffith with the express purpose of going to the festival. There was a huge telemarketing campaign, regional advertising, and a post card drop, which rendered 61 active responses that came to the festival. This festival is in the process of change and we will see what happens this year but it is usually held on the long weekend in June

CLICK

- Regional Class

CLICK

Started as Tablescape – where everything on the table was created/made in the Mudgee region. Even the glasses were made in Lithgow – it consisted of seminars through the day and dinners/wine tasting through the evening. This gave birth CLICK to “ Regional Class “ started by Kim Currie and run by

her...the first year she lost just over \$20,000.00 but it has come good these days...it still consists of seminars through the day on diverse matter as aquaculture, wine styles and tasting, bush tucker excursions...participants pay to come to various events and enjoy a focus on regional foods...so prawns are light on the menus...but it does bring people into the valley and more to the point, it is given good space in editorials - the PR value must not be forgotten...CLICK and there is the enjoyment part...a huge regional dinner

The building of regional confidence and networks have been a very positive outcome of this festival – this year it will have a single focus and that is aquaculture – so it will be a day long session on this emerging and important industry. Guest speakers include Lyndey Milan from the Australian Womens' Weekly, John Newton, myself and industry speakers. Cooking demonstrations are very much a part of this expo...as we know so little about our native fish and how to cook them. The demos also feature the use of wine....both in drinking and as an accompaniment.

The next Regional Class is on May 19<sup>th</sup>. 2001...at Mudgee

CLICK

- F.O.O.D.

Now this is the 10<sup>th</sup> year of this wonderful and prophetic festival, which is the FOOD OF ORANGE DISTRICT – it is a talkfest, a produce fest, and a big day for tourists and locals. The focus of FOOD is starting to change in that the committee that runs it want to expand and use the FOOD logo to BRAND products to capitalise on the credibility of FOOD.

This festival was started by Robbie Robinson and the Doyles of Bloodwood Wines...it is a fantastic festival and one which I was involved with for 6 years but felt and still do that these festivals

are a way of promoting the local chefs and talent and that people like myself should be used to attract business...careful advertising is used but the celebrities do work. The public day attracts 7000 – 9000 people through the day and features local producers selling their produce, both raw and value added. The food and wine stalls sell very well; school bands play, the sun shines...the local TAFE gets involved, as do the local chefs.

Each year a serious celebrity chef is asked to do a dinner using local produce - this sells out very quickly.

There are so many of these events now held...generally around wine regions but the Northern Rivers have styled themselves the Hot Beverage capital of Australia and as such, they feature their teas and coffees. But by and large it is the wine regions that do so well. More recently, the Hunter had a month long festival which featured the works...food, wines, concerts, tastings. The Margaret River has had festivals for years now; the Barossa too has a number but only one gourmet festival...which again features local chefs and dishes only. The Grape Graising Festival of the Yarra is well known and fantastic and now runs for 1½ days... a dinner on the Saturday night and the tastings on the Sunday; a winery teas up with a well known restaurant...and away they go! Ulladulla has the Blessing of the Fleet and a seafood festival which last year attracted around 4000 people. This emerging region is starting to use the brand name of Shoalhaven – they are just starting out.

There are food and wine festivals all round Australia that bring focus to our producers etc and that then attracts tourists....and locals.

CLICK

- Produce register

This is one of the first things a region needs to do...to find out what is grown where and when...and how to get to it...sometimes easier said than done. It is a very useful document which benefits all concerned.

CLICK

SERVICE – THE KEY ELEMENT TO SUCCESS

CLICK

CLICK

- What does the tourist expect? How does food fit in?

Statistics show people moving out of cities as much as possible...the holiday pattern has changed and smaller breaks are taken. The expectations that tourists now have of wine regions is that they be able to taste the wines, meet the winemakers...and have a decent meal. This then means the tourist gets the total experience..., which was, really started me off years ago and resulted in the Food and Wine Strategy for TNSW.

It is critical that we remember that tourist travel miles to get to us sometimes and so it is essential they have the availability of good food, quality food.

Local cooked specialities featuring local produce...and keep in mind that no region can be self sufficient...there will always be a need to bring produce in from other areas...the regions wines and the regions personalities really makes the difference. There will always be the discerning consumer who wants more than

the average and we have to be able to meet their needs; but we must not ever forget the traveller who wants to be well fed and watered...and treated well. Service...when the winemakers is speaking, keep the language simple...not technical...ph values really go over the average punters heads and that techi-talk can be a real turnoff.

- Providing the complete tourist experience it's essential!

Tourist now want the complete experience; the spin off naturally being the benefit to the region of the increase in traffic and consequently the more money spent. Places like Brown Bros Epicurean Centre excite the visitor not only to taste the wines but also to experience the food of their restaurant.

If you're looking for regions that have concentrated a lot on their food outlets, go no further than the Margaret River where wineries are frequently joined with an eatery...thus offering the total tourism experience. You will remember that the first Wine Tourism Conference was convened in WA...and rightly so.

Everyone serving the visitor must know their region...not only the geographical attractions, but also what other wineries are in the area...the restaurants/eateries and what is served in them.

Simply, the modern tourist wants service, service and a bit more service.

Combine service with good food and local wines – and acceptable combination and you will have culinary tourism all sown up.

CLICK

CONCLUSIONS

CLICK

- Work with accommodation houses

As I have mentioned for the tourist to have the complete experience, good accommodation is expected and it is that the wine industry has to encourage people to provide this.

Some accommodation houses also couple up to do cooking classes with specific wineries. However, accommodation houses have to note that tourist come to regions for the wines, the foods...rarely do they come just to stay in an accommodation house. The message here is that accommodation houses are just as much a part of the tourist experience as is the food and wine aspects.

Encourage local tradespersons to acknowledge how much work they get out of the tourist industry...tourism is everyone's business.

CLICK

- Establish working partners

Work in partnership with government bodies to make this work. DO NOT HAND IT ALL OVER TO THEM..That is a relapse to the 80ies. We in this industry of food and wine have to be inn own our own business. When we own something we take responsibility for it and that is what we have to do in this case too.

Find a hero journalist who wants to follow what you're about; keep them up to speed with everything you are doing.

Get the tourist guide magazines to have more featured food...and of course that has to be there before it can be noted.

Have partners with money who can seed and support your events; make them as local as you can. Remember the community aspect of what we do.

Also, in wine regions, food can be made to feel like the “ poor relation “and this may be a reputation that has been earned but it should be stopped.

- Work with committees with commitment

The key word in this equitation is ALTRUISM...doing something for the good of everyone but not expecting reward...very difficult people to find

For the wine tourism industry to grow, it is crucial that good food be provided with good service and reasonable accommodation...that regionalists work together to provide the food that suits all purposes...be it lunch, dinners, casual and formal picnics...catering for functions...say a meal attached to a conference...have picnic hampers..BBQ packs

Ultimately, it is the people of the region who drive their own destiny and for those regions that have accepted this and got on with it...there has been success. We have looked at some of those regions today...we have now to get on with and take this great State of ours down the culinary tourism path...so our foods, our wines and our great personalities can be shown off!

Whilst we may be a way off having our own “food and wine culture “, when you compare with the Old World...it is fair to say we have done a lot of strong developmental work...and while we struggle with this notion of ‘regional’ food...we must be proud of what we have done and that we are setting up an Australian version...and for my, that’s fabulous!