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OH 692/135

Full transcript of an interview with

MICHAEL POTTS

on 23 July 2002

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

OH 692/135 **MICHAEL POTTS**

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OH 692/135 TAPE 1 - SIDE A

NATIONAL WINE CENTRE WOLF BLASS FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.
Interview with Michael Potts on 23rd July, 2002, at Langhorne Creek.
Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Michael, where and when were you born?

MP: At Strathalbyn, 24th September, 1959.

And who were your parents, Michael?

MP: Elva and John Potts. My father, John, who ran Bleasdale for many years until he passed away in 1987.

So what are your earliest memories, Michael, of the winery?

MP: One that stands out is being a kid coming into the winery when we shouldn't, and playing around, causing havoc, including little homes inside the carton stacks, and getting told off by Dad and others. That's when we were little kids. But as we got older we got put to work by putting cartons together—and getting paid a cent for each one—at Christmas time to put all the bubbly wines in. So that was a more useful activity that we became involved in as kids. That was very early days.

What did the winery actually look like in those days, physically?

MP: Oh, the memory was that it was fairly untidy, old fashioned, not much upkeep on it. Still sections of the winery today are fairly run down, you might say. That's the old fortified sections. Certainly it's been modernised a lot in the last ten years—cleaned up. Far more attractive. Still a lot of work to do but it's a lot better.

So did you go to school locally, Michael?

MP: Yes. Langhorne Creek Primary School, Strathalbyn High School, and then spent one year here at the winery just working as a cellar-hand in 1977. And then Dad pushed me towards Roseworthy College, and I fell for it, and went there for three and a bit years.

So you did the oenology degree?

MP: That's right. Finished that. Never actually completed it. I missed out by a fraction of a mark over three years. Had to go back and repeat some subjects, which I struggled at. And never actually got the certificate, which is no big deal to me. I was always going to end up back at Bleasdale. Went and worked at Mildara for a couple of years, over at Merbein.

Tell us a bit about that, Michael.

MP: Oh, Dad knew Richard Haselgrove, I think his name was, and asked if I could get a job there. And, yes, I just did a vintage there—laboratory, in the cellars.

Was that a fairly big set-up in those days at Merbein?

MP: Yes, it was. Quite sizeable. So you got stuck in certain areas of the winery, but it was an experience. They didn't want me back here at Bleasdale straight away. We already had another winemaker here. I wasn't too keen about going to Mildara but I did, and after two years they decided that I'd better come back home, and I worked with the existing winemaker for a year or two.

Just going back to Mildara. Tell me a bit about what you learnt there from their production and their wine people.

MP: Well, after coming straight out of college, it was all fairly theoretical up there, so I could see winemaking actually happening, and putting the things that I'd learnt at college into practice. Had some good teachers. Tony Murphy, Gavin Hogg—some good name winemakers. Jack Schulz was there at the time. He was a legend, apparently, in the industry. Yes, I

learnt quite a bit in the short space of time, as you do when you're on site and doing things. So it was a valuable exercise I think, to not come straight home where you do get into a comfort zone here, knowing that you've got a job, and perhaps be a little bit blasé about it at times. It's been shown by some family members over time. It was a good decision by Dad to send me up there.

So had Roseworthy been a bit theoretical as well?

MP: Oh, I found it very theoretical. There was too much emphasis on, to me, chemistry, micro, and not enough emphasis on the actual winemaking subjects in terms of what the subjects were worth from a marks point of view. So that was a frustration, but that's the way it is, so can't do much about it.

Did you have anything in mind about what you wanted to do when you came back here?

MP: From Mildara?

Yes.

MP: I was going to be the winemaker. As I say, I worked with a guy called Ian *(sounds like, Garn-am)* who was winemaker here at the time. But he always was planning to move on. And we worked together for a year or two, and he did decide to move on to his other fields. And then I became a winemaker. It was totally different back then. We were doing a lot of cheap carbonated bubblies and bulk wines, whereas twenty-one years later it's really mostly table wine—red wine. 85% now, and far more emphasis on quality.

Going back twenty-five years, what was the winery set up for? Fortifieds, pretty much?

MP: Oh, yes. Of course, fortifieds were still a fairly important part of the business. Red wines was the biggest part of it, but carbonated bubblies—cheap wines—they were still in vogue then.

The pearl style?

MP: We had Spumante, a sweet Muscat type sparkling, and then Demi-Sec, and then Brut. Bit of Cold Duck I think was still being made then, a sparkling red. So we used to send truckload after truckload out around the country but there was very little money in it, and that slowly phased out over time and we eventually got out of that. And slowly, but surely, we became more involved in making high quality red table wines.

So was concentration always mainly on the reds?

MP: Yes, because our policy's always been just to use fruit from Langhorne Creek, so that's restricted us to really making mostly red wine. There's not too many whites that do brilliantly down here. So the emphasis has always been on red, and it's just growing more and more that way today.

So when you came back here, what did you have at your disposal—equipment and storage-wise? Can you remember, Michael?

MP: Oh, shocking! There were so many wooden vats for the fortifieds.

So this is waxed wooden vats, you mean? Storage vats?

MP: Yes. They were waxed at the time. Had been used for red wines. Concrete tanks, wax lined.

Hume pipe type tanks?

MP: Yes, pipes, as we call them. There's four here today, which are on their last legs. Underground tanks, which today are epoxy lined, so they're fine.

Concrete?

MP: Concrete, yes. But they used to be waxed years ago. They're just not very good vessels for storing good wine. So thinking back, it was really a horrible set up for making high quality wine. Sure, we had the odd

amount of new barrels, a little bit of stainless steel, a bit of refrigeration, but it was pretty basic, to say the least.

So there was some refrigeration?

MP: Oh, yes, because they needed that for the sparkling wine production.

Yes, of course.

MP: So that was still needed to control red ferments. The white production of course. So it was interesting times back then. And thinking back, also the quality control side of things was very ordinary.

Just tell me a bit about that then, if you can remember.

MP: Well, the bottling line, for example, was in the middle of one the big sheds in the middle of the winery, and the fork-lift would roar past and the fumes would just be up in the air, and there'd be dust and all that flying. It's amazing how we didn't have more problems I think with quality control back then.

(Tape restarted)

What I'm interested to know is when you came back here from Mildara, could you describe the annual winemaking process? How you were crushing at that time. What machinery you had.

MP: Well, the processing side of it wasn't too bad. We had reasonable mil of crusher. Open concrete fermenters, which are still being used today, although there's a lot more stainless steel fermenters. Air-bag presses. They're okay for reds. It's really the next phase in reds where we struggled a bit. We didn't have enough high quality oak. Perhaps the vineyards weren't performing as well as they needed to be. Not enough emphasis on paying growers more money for better quality fruit.

Were you involved with that side of it at that time?

MP: I worked into it. Being the winemaker, you had a bit of a say in that, but my father would be dealing with growers, for sure.

What were they looking for? Tonnage rather than quality?

MP: There was certainly no near as much emphasis back then on quality because that's been an evolutional thing. Some growers would be happy just to grow big yields and get good dollars. If they could sell the fruit, then why not? Bleasdale's wines were always in the middle price point. We never had expensive wines. We never had high aims to make the best wine in Australia. So the philosophy of the company was very conservative. The spending was low-key. The idea was to just put the money in the Bank and not spend much at all, and that made life a bit difficult to make better wine because we weren't spending. So you were chasing your tail a bit.

You told me earlier about the storage that was available, and once you went through it—you said your bottling lines were pretty exposed. But how did you go about implementing new equipment, Michael? Bit by bit.

MP: Well, you just had to keep putting pressure on management and say that we need this bit of equipment. I remember fighting for an earth filter that cost I think, back in the mid 80's, $8,000. Dad was reluctant to spend the money on it. And I worked out that you could save money by using it, and it was worthwhile buying, and eventually he agreed, but that was like extracting teeth. That's just one little item that's been a standard item for years now. So it was fairly difficult.

But the management side of things was very conservative, as I said, and the family in charge at the time didn't like to—well, borrowings were non existent. You never borrowed money, so you just had to work off money that we had and could afford to spend. So that made it a bit tough. Looking back, the place has never had any debts, so that's made life for the current generation, I suppose, easier, but at the same time the winery wasn't being upgraded and wasn't moving with the times. It's easy to sit back in hindsight and say that we should have done things differently, but in hindsight we probably should have, to make the winery move ahead

quicker. But change is hard. It's hard for me today. I'm struggling with computers, but you know that they're the equipment of the future. You just have to have them. There'll be other equipment come in that I'll deem to be unusable, but the wine will have to have it.

You said that your Dad was very conservative. Did that come out of his upbringing—what he'd been through?

MP: I guess so. I suppose all conservative through the years. But it wasn't just my father. He was the manager but he was a director along with three of his sisters, and they all had a say. I'm sure he had some very interesting meetings back then with them, being the only male amongst them. But he was the face of Bleasdale I suppose. He got out and about and promoted the place and was the person known for Bleasdale.

Do you have early memories yourself of that promotion of your Dad?

MP: Not a great deal. I know that he went away interstate, doing promotions like the winemaker—like I would do now. I suppose Bleasdale's been known—been run by the Potts family. His sisters married. Even though they're Potts by maiden name, their name had changed, so I suppose the focus has been on the direct descendants of the Potts'. So Dad always used to be out there and just seemed to be the focus. It's probably understandable, but the winery was—I know when he passed away in '87 he was certainly really struggling to cope with the changes in the industry. There's no doubt about that. We were needing more expert help, you know, management-wise, and that came about three years after he died when we got an outsider in by the name of David Owen, who really shook the place up and, to my mind, really saved the company.

Had David been involved locally at all?

MP: He was known to us. He was friend of the family. He was involved in Adelaide at a company called Elders in another division there. He was involved in overseas work with Elders. Loved wine and all that. Good

friend of Dad's and other members of the family. He agreed to come on as a director, and it turned out that he was here two or three days a week as an acting manager—at times. He played an enormous role in getting Bleasdale going ahead again, and spending a bit more money, and just getting things done.

So he was very much behind, say, your push for new equipment?

MP: Oh, yes. He was about progression. He could see that we needed to spend money. We had to make better wine. We'd slipped a lot through the 80's. Our name wasn't as good as it used to be. Presentation of wines wasn't as good. We weren't spending money on upkeep of the winery, and we had to push very hard to get things to change. That meant a lot of family friction at the expense of that, but it had to be done. Unfortunately in 1997, David passed away, and that left a big hole obviously. But we have another fellow, a mate of David's, called Dennis Squire, who was just helping out at the time with the expansion side of things, and he took over as Chairman of the Board and sort of Acting General Manager. He kept the momentum going until, oh, '99/2000—about that time—when we had some serious Board elections and we got more independent people involved. And the management structure has changed again. A full time General Manager's come in and the place is really expanding and going ahead now. Borrowings are in place. So it's a real big change from 1990 onwards. That's been a totally new era for Bleasdale. Still 100% family owned. Reputation for value wines—all that. You've probably seen a lot more modernisation here that a lot of people perhaps wouldn't realise that we had. There's still the old cobwebbed, dirty sections of the winery where the fortifieds used to be made but they're slowly being used up by the need to make less fortifieds. Just put more emphasis on table wines.

Would that be one of the big changes in your era here, Michael?

MP: Certainly. The industry's changed, too. Exports have really caused the wine industry to rocket ahead, and we needed to move with the times. We had to make better wine. The number of wineries is about 1500 in Australia now. It was, oh, probably 500 twenty years ago, if not less.

How have you been involved in the export side? Has that taken off?

MP: It's probably 25% of our business today. It's certainly taken off for us but probably not as much as a lot of other companies would've taken off with exports. It's certainly growing. We're in with seven or eight different countries, and just our lack of stocks up until about two years ago has prevented us from really selling a lot more. But 2001 has seen us with a healthy quantity of wine, so we're just starting to move through that stock now, giving different countries pretty good volumes.

Is that because you've got increased crushing facilities here?

MP: Yes, that, and we made a decision in '97 or 8 to put a bit of a five year plan together to expand the processing and facilities to get us up from about 1200 tons to a bit over 3000. So we've got one year to go and we should be there. A lot of the vineyards with *(sounds like, contracts to)* Langhorne Creek have come on to full production. And currently the Board's putting another five year plan together to see what we do in the next five years. So I imagine we'd be stabilising to some degree and just trying to upgrade and do things as more efficiently as we can.

It's pretty obvious in looking around that you've certainly gone into the small oak a lot.

MP: Yes. Once again, emphasis on quality. We've got an excellent grape grower *(couldn't decipher word)* scheme now based on quality—bonuses. We keep all the batches seperate, and that involves needing smaller tanks, a lot of barrels, and just gives us so many more blending options to make grades of wine of reasonably consistent quality each year rather than just—I mean, you can't do anything about vintage variation and some poor

seasons where you won't get top wine, but having different batches gives you the scope to still have a set blend every year. Just mightn't be as much volume as you'd like.

Well, on the vintage side of it, just looking back over time, how have the seasons run here, Michael? Through your lifetime. What are the variables that actually affect the vineyards, and the grape quality?

MP: We're in an excellent region here because the conditions are very consistent. We're next to Lake Alexandrina so we're getting those cooling influences in the afternoon—the late breezes. It's low rainfall region here, but water's not a problem because we get the floods from the Bremer River. Underground water's been okay, and in recent times the Lake water has been superb. So we've had a lot of good seasons and the occasional outstanding season, and very, very rarely you get a poor season. 1999 and 2000 were fairly difficult seasons. Rain at the wrong time. Heat wave. There hasn't been a great *(sounds like, lot of)* consistency in the last five years, so that's sort of taking an exception to the rule I suppose. Over fifty years here you'd get a lot of very good seasons but not many bad ones.

So drought's not really a factor here for you at all?

MP: No, we're fortunate. There's no doubt about that. Water is the least of our worries.

What about in the mid 80's? Did you get affected by vine-pull here at all in terms of government interference in the industry?

MP: That was in the mid to late 80's, wasn't it?

'85.

MP: Well, what happened there? From memory, there was too much Grenache and Shiraz—those two varieties spring to mind—pulled out. And it wasn't long after that some of those varieties were thought of as being needed again. I don't think it was a huge thing down this way, from memory. There certainly wasn't masses of growers suddenly taking their

vines out. That would have been more so in the other over-supplied regions. So it was just a minor little hiccup down this way, bearing in mind that this wasn't a very big district anyway back then by national standards. It was barely—what?—1,000 acres.

Were most of those people who had the vineyards known to you—as families?

MP: Yes. Most of them back then—private growers.

Cleggetts. Folletts. Few of the names I can think of.

MP: Yes. Borretts. Giles. I don't know how many growers there were, but there wouldn't have been enormous amounts. But since 1990 it's a different story, when the exports really started taking off around the country. The region's gone from 1,000 acres about then to—oh, I think it's 14 or 15,000 acres now. So that's a dramatic increase. And a lot of that's been due to the big companies stepping in and snapping up land and using the Lake water. Taking advantage of the stable climate down here.

Are you surprised that they'd do that, or has it not been a surprise?

MP: No, no surprise at all. The land was fairly cheap. The farmers were happy to sell up. Plant their own vines. There's certainly been a lot of growers now that used to run lucerne or sheep or cattle—whatever. Certainly in the early days of the expansion, and still *(couldn't decipher word)* is very good for grapes. They're probably thinking, well, how long has this been going on? They're just lucky to be in this region I think. The water availability was there. But no surprise at all. The big companies have really put in, you know, 1,000 acres here, 500 acres there. And they're coming off a very small base, so Langhorne Creek didn't take an enormous amount. We're seen as one of the fastest expanding regions in Australia really, coming off the small base that it had.

When did you think the recognition of the region started, in your memory at least?

MP: Well, there's never been a massive recognition of the region. That's been the problem I think. Because nearly all the grapes have gone out of the region to the big companies and going into blends and wines without Langhorne Creek being on the label. Certainly Wolf Blass was pushing Langhorne Creek in the early days, and still today. He's been very happy with the fruit that he's got from down here. But without many wineries here—there's only been Bleasdale and the odd very small one over the time—there's been next to no recognition of the region. And that's something that we are trying to turn around these days with wine councils and winemakers' bodies, doing all the things that need to be done to promote the region. It's a never ending job. And there's more wineries here of course now, with their own labels, and that's certainly helped to push the image of the region. Because like all regions, there's some very high quality fruit here and there's some low quality fruit. But I think the fruit down here is pretty consistent, and we just need to make sure that the word spreads that we are making fairly good wine nearly every year. Regions like Coonawarra, perhaps recognised as the best region in Australia, certainly struggles more years than upper regions, where it's too cold. But they do have their fantastic seasons, too, where you just cannot beat them.

So it's been a regional growth really, in one sense? It's not just Bleasdale -

MP: Oh, no. Not just Bleasdale. We've been forced along a bit by the emergence of these other wineries that have come here that have been very successful—Lake Breeze, Bremertons. And in recent times there's other handful of people that don't necessarily have their own wineries but they have their labels now. Supply the fruit and sell wine in small parcels. That's forced us to lift our game because we don't want to be left behind. We can always fall back on the fact that we're the oldest winery here, and therefore we've got that respect I suppose, but if the wines aren't good enough you'll soon lose that respect. It's an ongoing battle to keep up with

everyone else and try and be better than them I suppose, in terms of value.

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

So Michael, you were saying that the growth's been very much regional and it's actually pushed Bleasdale and the Potts family along with it, forcing them to keep up in a way. I'd like to take you back again to your earlier memories. Who are some of the people—the characters—that came with the place down here that you can remember?

MP: *(Laughs)* Some characters?

Family as well.

MP: Family? Well, Uncle Geoff—Geoff Scutchings—was the winemaker, self-taught for many years, and he obviously did a very good job for Bleasdale. He was a very gruff, opinionated character who was here when I was here for that one year after finishing school. I remember he gave the current winemaker, Iain Riggs, a young fellow who's gone on to be very successful in industry today, a hell of a hard time at times there. Yes, a few episodes spring to mind. But he certainly did a good job for Bleasdale. He got the bubbly wines going and put some technology into the place. Another one was Uncle Diddy. That's Alan Potts, who was a blender/winemaker for nearly fifty years. Just one of nature's gentlemen. I can remember that he pottered around in his latter years here just filling a few kegs and talking to customers. I think that epitomised Bleasdale, a person like him, where a lot of people would have known him and the friendliness of the place—the warmth.
Aunty Micky, Mrs Clifford on cellar door, another one who could certainly have her opinion on things, like we all do, but she worked at cellar door for fifty years and a lot of people kept coming back to buy wine because she

was out there and looked after them. Offer them a free bottle of Port at Christmas time if they were a regular customer. She didn't know much about wine but I don't think she had to. She had the charm to deal with people and that's what is 99% of the job I think back then, to get people to come back. And as I've been around the country in the last twenty years doing promotions, so many people have asked if she's still there at cellar door. That's kept Bleasdale in their mind. All these little things add up I think.

There's been a lot of family members with their own particular traits. Good and bad, I suppose. *(Laughs)* Including myself, no doubt. I suppose none of us are really that ambitious. We're just happy to keep the family business going along—we have been—without wanting to turn it into a Las Vegas casino type set-up where we make $1,000 a bottle wines. We've just been happy to provide excellent value for money wines over the years. There has been times where we perhaps should have done things a bit better and quicker, but it's easy to go back and say that now.

What about some of the cellar-hands and that type of thing around the place? Have there been some characters there?

MP: Yes. I can remember just coming into the place, through the early 70's when I was a school kid, coming into the winery and just play around. You'd see some of the old cellar-hands, and there used to be lots of them back then because wages weren't very high, I don't suppose. There was plenty of people going around waxing tanks, cleaning tanks out, doing their jobs, and it just seemed such a slow pace of life back then. I can certainly remember some characters, but they were all great people, from what I could see. Loved their jobs. Had been here a long time. It seems the management of Bleasdale over the years had been conducive to people wanting to stay, so it became one big happy family it seemed. There's probably a few stories you could tell about cellar-hands that probably perhaps shouldn't be told *(Laughs)* that may be the management didn't know about at the time.

Hoses in tanks?

MP: Yes. Drinking on the job.

Was grog part of the smoko set-up here?

MP: Yes. I can remember the cellar-hands would quite often be drinking these Vegemite glasses of Port at smoko time and lunch time. Just looking back, I can't see how they could do a solid day's work because they wouldn't just knock one off, they seemed to be knocking them off pretty regularly. I would have thought that Port would affect people a bit more than what it seemed to.

The management at the time just felt that, well, that's just part of where we've been and -

MP: It certainly looked that way, yes. The jobs were still getting done. I guess there was not so much oc health and safety around back then. But there seemed to be very little in the way of accidents happening. Whether that's good fortune or good management, I'm not sure.

It did seem to be industry-wide though, Michael, in those years. Very few wineries didn't have that. Most did.

MP: Yes, it was just the way that it seemed to be, just talking to people and seeing pictures of other places.

Was there a regularity in your customers, too, in those years? Did you have a very strong clientele that kept coming back?

MP: Apparently, yes. A lot of Port was sold in bulk—flagons—and people would come from all over the State it seemed. Down from the South East and the West Coast. Even today, I think Mr Siviour is a customer who's our longest living customer. I might be wrong here but he's been buying wine for a good sixty years. A man in his 90's, I'm pretty sure. Still gets the odd bit of Port from us. So we certainly had a very regular clientele base because I suppose the wine was quite good—good value—and once again I presume the congeniality of the place, the friendliness, would get

people to keep coming back. That's something we still try to keep going today, even at cellar door with our unique set-up there. You can come in and pour your own wine out without any pressure to buy all the time. Not standing there, pouring your five mils of wine, and then holding your hand up for an order.

Has that always been the way in cellar door here?

MP: As far as I know. You'd come in and Mrs Clifford, or Aunty Micky, would say hullo to you and have a bit of a chat, and then say, 'There's the reds, there's the whites, there's the bubblies, there's the Ports, help yourself. Come over to me if you want a chat'. I don't(?) think it's a bad way to go. Sure, some people these days are far more educated about wine and more inquisitive and need questions answered, and we probably need to educate our staff out there a little bit more. It's in the process of happening. But I still believe the system we've got is good and it encourages people just to be relaxed, and being relaxed I think they're more likely to buy if they don't feel pressured.

Even though you're growing up with it all around you, Michael, did you feel the sense of history here in a fairly strong way?

MP: Well, I think so because you could always see the photos everywhere.

(Tape restarted)

We were talking about the people around the place here and some of the characters that you'd met and the influence of members of family. I was wondering, Michael, just in hindsight, what would be the largest changes you've seen here in your lifetime? Probably technical, to begin with.

MP: Yes, that's pretty obvious, the technical changes. They came into the industry at a time when things were really starting to take off. More educated winemakers around. Computers. Things like that. And we should have taken advantage I think more of that change but we slipped behind. But we've caught up a bit now. It's a mix of having the right staff, technology. We can't really go wrong here if we've got all those things—

spend a bit of money—because the area's just so good. And we've got a very, very good base of the winery here with borrowings nowadays. If we can't make a go of it then there's not much hope for many people in the industry, I don't think. So technology's been the big change.
I think just the people here. Sure, there's still a lot of family members here and there's a lot of improvement that can be made from all of us, but we've got much better qualified quality staff here now in positions from the Board right down to cellar-hands that are properly trained now. And that counts for a lot. Quality control areas. Other winemaker, Renee(?), just extremely talented.

This is the young woman here?

MP: Yes, Renee. Straight out of college, and had her here for about three years, and she's doing most of the winemaking now. You certainly need younger ideas, and people with a bit of drive. Some of the family members have been here a long time and have had it fairly—well, not easy, we've worked hard, but there's not that pressure on to perform, otherwise you're out, sort of thing. You know, you can't be sacked. There's been a few problems in that area and it's rubbed off on some of the staff, which hasn't made things easy at times. There's still issues there today but they're better than they used to be.

It's part of a family company in the modern age really, wouldn't it?

MP: Certainly. I'd expect that that would be the case at other places. In fact, I've spoken to some other family wineries and they've got disagreements, as we have had here. We've had some fairly major disagreements amongst ourselves. Still have. But you've got to work together and you have to find a way to do your job, and try and be as professional as you can. So, yes, big changes. There'll probably be more to come, I'd say.

Have there been large changes in consumer tastes as well over the last twenty years?

MP: Well, obviously fortifieds have taken a huge dip. Quality wines in general, red and white, seem to be the go these days. People are more educated. You know, everyone has to do masses of tastings and educational type activities like that to promote your wines.

So for you as a winemaker and as a Potts, that's meant that you've got to be on the road.

MP: Yes. I've done a lot of tastings over the years, and wine dinners, and all those sorts of things. But a lot of winemakers in other wineries will be doing the same thing. And a lot of them are fun in the end, but it can be a bit tiring I suppose. That's something that Renee will have to look forward to in years to come. *(Laughs)*

Would that have been a change though—the winemaker coming into the limelight to a large degree? I know you said that your father did promoting, but you would have been pushed a lot further forward, wouldn't you?

MP: Yes, certainly that's true. Winemakers seem to have this demigod type status, and I think it's a bit over-rated. Really vineyards have probably as much to do, if not more to do, with it. It's not as glamorous I suppose to see a grape grower—a winemaker is seen to be there mixing up wines and blending and all that, and coming up with a concoction that tastes fantastic, and you think that they're a magician, but it's not really that difficult making wine. It's a matter of having the right tools and just being a little bit careful. And then you've got to sell the wine. The market is extremely important, as we can see from just our little operation. Some of the wines just weren't presented well enough. We knew the wines were quite good in the early 90's, but nowadays with the label changes and all that, the wines look a lot better and they are a lot better. So marketing, grape growing, winemaking, I don't know what the most important factor is. They're all very important, but winemakers seem to be wanted when it comes to promotions and speaking to people.

And Michael, on a personal level, do you have any sort of future hopes for Bleasdale?

MP: I suppose that you'd have to say that we're the second oldest family winery in Australia and we would like that to continue, or see Yalumba bought out and we become the oldest. *(Laughter)* It counts for a bit to say that we're the second oldest family winery, although that doesn't make the wine any better. But I guess we would like that to continue. I presume that's what most family members would like. But at the same time, it has to be as a winery that performs and doesn't slip backwards or operate in a manner that we don't want to see it be operated as. I think the winery's on the right track at the moment, pretty well. So it's steady as she goes, I suppose, is the cry. Just keep pottering along and trying to keep as many good people here as we can. Eventually we might conk out. There's no real next generation of Potts' coming through, which has always been hammered into us long and hard by various people. So I guess one day we'll run out of Potts'. Well, who knows? It might end up in different people's hands. Things just change so quickly in this world. At the moment it's good to be able to be part of a fifth generation winery that seems to have a fairly good name in Australia.

Well, thank you very much for talking with me, Michael.

MP: Thanks, Rob. Pleasure.