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## OH 692/142

Full transcript of an interview with

## PETER RUMBALL

on 20 December 2002

by Rob Linn

Recording available on CD

**OH 692/142** **PETER RUMBALL**

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**OH 692/142 TAPE 1 - SIDE A**

**AUSTRALIAN WINE HISTORY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.**
**Interview with Peter Rumball on 20th December, 2002, at Norwood, South Australia.**
**Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

**Well, Peter, first question, where and when were you born?**

**PR:** I was born in Adelaide. I was born in 1951, so I'm in my fifty-second year I suppose.

**And who were your parents, Peter?**

**PR:** My parents were Leith and Joan Rumball. I was the third child of four children. My father, I thought when I was growing up, led a particularly uninteresting life because he was in the insurance business, and he was in the insurance business all his life. In some ways I started at a very early time wanting to do something different. The other thing I realised was that none of our immediate family, like uncles and aunts, and things like that, appeared to be in any businesses by themselves. So long term, I knew at a very early age that I wanted to do something different.
And the other thing was that my father, because he was in the insurance business, never took any risks because the insurance business was always about taking risks and assessing risks, so he never took any risks himself. We led a very protected childhood.

**You were educated in Adelaide?**

**PR:** Yes. I had rather a different sort of education, too. I went to the Colonel Light Gardens Primary School. When we were being brought up in our very early teens, we used to go over to the West Coast of Australia, and my uncle was the Town Clerk of Streaky Bay. The Town Clerk, in those days, was really like the sheriff of a wild west town. *(Laughs)* He

knew exactly what was going on around the town. He used to even be the part-time Magistrate, so he was sort of the organiser, and the fix-it man. So we did lots of interesting things over there.
We'd go over there and go out kangaroo shooting and rabbit shooting, and the next day we'd be out on the high seas catching whiting, and catching schnapper. We'd come back and sell the whiting for crayfish bodies—you know, what they call the spiders—and so we had some great times. We used to walk down to the movies in the local institute and things like that. And back in those days my cousin had a ute. It was our first experience of all piling in a ute and going around. So we had great fun over there. Because I had so much fun over there, and because we had such a restricted upbringing over here about what we were and weren't allowed to do, my parents I guess misguidedly thought that I was interested in agriculture. *(Laughs)* Whilst my other three brothers and sisters got sent off to colleges, I got sent to Urrbrae High School, which is an agricultural high school.

**And not far from where you lived either.**

**PR:** Not far from where I lived.
The thing that most people didn't understand was that because it was an agricultural high school, it was a non zone school, so that any other students who got into a lot of trouble at another school and got expelled, the only school they could come to was Urrbrae. *(Laughs)* So it was full of ratbags, and it was very hard to—it wasn't full of ratbags but there were a lot there. And it was very destructive. And I wasn't particularly interested in agriculture, so I just sort of breezed through.
And also we were brought up as fairly strict Anglicans. I went through a period of carrying the cross in front of the choir, and being an altar server, and being in the Young Anglican Boys' Society, and all the stuff like that. I guess reasonably sort of religious but in itself that was very restrictive, too. I certainly rebelled against, I guess, all my childhood. I think my other

brothers and sisters have, too, in their own way. We're not a close family at all.

Anyway, at the end of Urrbrae—you wouldn't believe it—the logical thing was to go to Roseworthy College and do the agricultural course there. I'd finished my Intermediate exams, and got through those, and I was undecided. You could actually in those days just go to Roseworthy with Intermediate. So off I went to Roseworthy College.

And Roseworthy College was, I guess in some ways, the biggest shock of my life. In the first year I lived in a room above what they call the main offices out there—the main block—and I lived with three other students, two of them who didn't survive the first year, and one who went on to do the wine course and is still a very good friend of mine.

Anyway, I guess two things happened there. I can remember the very first Sunday. I dutifully went off to chapel at Roseworthy College, only to find that there weren't many students there. The second Sunday came along, and I thought, well, I'm going to run a little bit of an experiment here. I won't go. I used to live in a room that was upstairs overlooking the chapel, and so I remember sitting there almost shuddering in my pants thinking that I was going to be struck down for not attending Church. You know, also being those sort of times when everyone dutifully went off to Church. So I didn't go, and nothing happened to me, and I've never been in a Church since, except for weddings and funerals. I only said to someone the other day that basically I've had enough religion to last me the rest of my life. *(Laughs)* So, you know, I've been there and done it all.

I was always an average sort of student, not particularly liking schooling and things like that, and so I didn't particularly excel. And the other thing that my parents had always drummed into me was that if you didn't work hard at your studies, you wouldn't pass. So I naturally thought that if you did work hard, then you would pass. Of course, at the end of the first year at Roseworthy, there were these students that didn't go to Church, used to play footy, used to go out with the girls or whatever, and we used to have a bit of a pub in Gawler. It was illegal drinking then, but we'd go in.

They'd go out and do all the things that I was told that if you did all those you weren't going to pass, and yet they beat me in my exams. *(Laughs)* So there was this rude shock awakening that doing well at exams had no relationship whatsoever to the amount that you actually studied. It was the amount that was absorbed into your brain. And you had to be actually interested in what you're doing.

Anyway, as I said, during the first year—there was another student there called Malcolm Ray, and he was going on to do the wine course. I got bored one day, and he had a lot of books above his bed about making wine, so I started to actually read some of these books. I immediately got interested in winemaking.

**Peter, had you had a background of wine in your family? Did you drink it at home?**

**PR:** I would say, to all intents and purposes, no. My father was not a great drinker. Back in those days he used to get a lot of, say, spirits—you know, whiskies and things like that—given to him as presents, and they were always there. There was not much drinking but they were always there and we were always surrounded by it. My father occasionally had a fortified wine and occasionally had a bottle of Riesling. So we had a little bit, but there was always lots of wine around on the cupboards and things like that. So we were sort of surrounded by wine and spirits and things like that, and we were brought up to live just as part of life.

**So Peter, when you came to Roseworthy and you read your mate's wine books, you were immediately attracted to this like you hadn't been to other things at Roseworthy obviously.**

**PR:** That's right. That's very true. I was attracted from two points of view. The first one is that it was very creative. Obviously very creative. And so here was a thing that I could put my mark on for life.

And the other thing was that I can remember thinking, well, wine's been made since the Greek times, or before, and so I was only a little blip in the history of making wine, that people had been making wine for literally

thousands of years before, and they'll be making wine thousands of years after I'm gone. And so whilst I may make my style of wine, my personal style, it's not ending with me and it didn't start with me. So here was virtually a lifestyle that had an enormous amount of tradition to it and an enormous amount of future to it. And I thought that that is really a good thing to be in. I think the other thing is that you can put a lot of style into it.

Anyway, I became very interested in making wine. So I decided almost soon after that that I would go on and do the wine course at Roseworthy, but they had some very archaic rules back in those years, and you actually had to do two years of agriculture in order to get into the wine course, which was a good thing and a bad thing in some ways.

**There were also no females on campus at that stage.**

**PR:** At that stage there were no females, but subsequently when I did the wine course we had the first female. But I'll talk about that.

Anyway, so I scraped through at the end of the first year of Roseworthy, went on and did my second year of agriculture, but by that stage I'd lost interest in agriculture. So consequently at the end of my second year I had a couple of supplementary exams and they gave me 49% for both of them, so I failed. I failed at my second year at Roseworthy, and in those years you got kicked out. And you got kicked out for life. So I was out of Roseworthy knowing what I wanted to do, but I wasn't actually at the place where I wanted to do it.

So anyway, there was a technicality there that you could get back into Roseworthy as an industry student. So what I did was that the following year I came back and I went back to high school and did matriculation, and I did it at Norwood High School. That was a really tough year because I was back living at my parents' place, and although I refused to go back to the Church and things like that—I refused to go backwards. Basically I was at a high school with students who were one year out of primary school

and I'd spent two years at the equivalent of a tertiary institution like a university.

Anyway, I just was patient with my time and worked and—you wouldn't believe it—I came out **of** matriculation with a couple of credits, because then I had a vision of what I wanted to do. So I applied to go back into Roseworthy. In the meantime I went to work up in a winery in the Riverland, which was the Berri Coop. Back in those days the Berri Coop was the biggest winery in Australia. I worked under Brian Barry and 'Orgie' Williams.

**And Macca?**

**PR:** Yes. I had quite a good time up there.

**You couldn't help it with 'Orgie' and those blokes around, could you? *(Laughs)***

**PR:** It was a good time and they actually helped my general education. I worked up there as a general cellar-hand, and I lived up there.

**So they actually encouraged you, Peter?**

**PR:** I don't know that they encouraged me. *(Laughs)* The Riverland wineries were the Riverland wineries, and they were all about making big bulk wines. I was treated as a cellar-hand. Well, I was really just a cellar-hand with matric at that stage.

**Was that your first taste, though, of working in a winery?**

**PR:** Yes, it was. It was my first taste, and also I learnt a lot out of that. I learnt that I didn't particularly want to work in a huge winery. There was the attitude that, you know, if you wanted a piece of machinery—I could see what was happening. They would order a piece of machinery that was double the size of what they really needed because it was a coop winery and they had to get it past the Board, and they only had one crack at it every ten years. So they used to order a machine that was double **the** size, knowing they'd grow into it. We'll come back to that little story, and

that little idea, and I didn't agree with that. That doesn't rest properly with me, but they'd learnt that that was the way to conduct their winemaking over the years.

Anyway, I spent about eighteen months living in the Riverland, and driving up and down to Berri, and then I went back to Roseworthy. And you wouldn't believe it, but not only two years previously I'd been kicked out, and not only was I back in at Roseworthy but I was back in on a Commonwealth scholarship. *(Laughs)*

**This is '73?**

**PR:** No, that would have been early '70 because I graduated in '73.

So that was a strange thing. So anyway, here I am being kicked out, and I'm back again.

The first time I was at Roseworthy you had to have a thing called the college spirit, and there was a guy called Bob Herriot who used to run Roseworthy, and run it with an iron fist. You weren't allowed to drink there. You weren't allowed to have any women on the college. You were only allowed one weekend off a month. You had to do a certain amount of work, and you had to have **"**college spirit**".** So the second time I went back I thought, well, blow the **"**college spirit**"**. You know, that doesn't actually get you passing. So my attitude had completely changed, and I put an emphasis on actually studying what I wanted to study and passing. I learnt a lot at Roseworthy, and those winemakers that I went through with at Roseworthy are still my very good friends. We were fortunate that our group that went through Roseworthy, and the group beforehand who went through Roseworthy, are basically the movers and shakers in the wine industry today.

**Who were some of those, Peter?**

**PR:** Well, in the group before there were the two Glaetzer brothers—John and Colin—Doug Bowen from Coonawarra, and Mike Press. In our group there was John Duval, who now just recently left Penfolds**; he** took over

making the Grange. Chris **Proud** who worked up in some of the Riverland wineries. Bob Smith. Nick Holmes who runs Shottesbrooke. They're just a few. And Ian Wilson who made sparkling wine, and is now dead. And this friend, Malcolm Ray, who is now running the Waikerie winery. And Grant Burge was there in that time, and went on with Ian Wilson to be Burge and Wilson, and then Krondorf. There was a lot of motivation in that time, and a lot of movement, and a lot of excitement about going out and doing things for yourself, which really impressed me. There were a few people who were going on to other wineries.

I guess once you got into the wine course—and there were only twenty students, and so there were only twenty students allowed in every two years. And the course only started every two years. There were nineteen of us that came out who passed. And even the person that didn't pass, well, they've done well, anyway. So it was ten winemakers coming out every year, on average.

**Who were your teachers, Peter, at the time?**

**PR:** Our main one was Bob Baker. I mean, Bob was probably good for his time but he'd probably been there a bit too long by the time I arrived. He was ready to retire. There were a variety of other lecturers, none of whom particularly stood out I guess.

Unfortunately, with any education, and I really believe this, anything that is a bit like the wine industry, the movers and shakers are actually out in the industry. They don't have time to be lecturing people, and so there is a bit of an attitude that you can only learn the theory at Roseworthy and that you'll learn the ins and outs of the winemaking once you get out. And that was very true. That was very true.

For instance, I think that I know a lot about making sparkling red, and yet I wouldn't have time to actually go and lecture students about how they should make it, or even how they should make **M**éthode **C**hampenoise sparkling wine. The other thing is that now it's changed completely and

there's a marketing course and things like that, and lot more structured courses.

Halfway through my course I decided that, having worked at a big winery up in the Riverland, I would go and work in a small one, so I actually picked the old Stanley Wine Company up at Clare.

**Was this part of your course work at the time?**

**PR:** Yes. We had to do some course experience as well.

**So is this in the period that Heinz had just taken over that -**

**PR:** Unbeknown to me. I thought the day I was arriving that I was going to work there just for the vintage. I'd just talked to Tim Knappstein, and then Mick, so it was basically just Tim and Mick Knappstein there. And I worked there for vintage, not really knowing that Heinz had taken over roundabout that time that I first worked there. I had a good time. Tim Knappstein and I got on well. I was just doing a cellar-hand's job there. When I finished my course at Roseworthy—and, by the way, I passed, so it was good.

**So the Commonwealth scholarship proved something. *(Laughter)***

**PR:** Proves that once you find something that you're actually interested in, everything will normally flow after that, and there's no reason why you shouldn't pass.

I wrote to Tim Knappstein and they actually created an assistant winemaker's position for me at Stanley, so I went back there as Tim's assistant. The day I went back I actually found out that the place had been owned for a little while by HJ Heinz, and they had the fourth general manager in two years, or something, joining the day that I went there. Anyway, I only stayed at Stanley for a couple of years. I'd started back there in '73 so I suppose it would've been late '75 when I left Stanley. I had a really good time. We made a lot of good wine there. That's where I learnt to make Clare Valley Riesling. But let me say that I also attribute the way we used to make the Clare Valley Riesling really to John Vickery,

because Tim and I actually copied John Vickery's style of making Riesling. So I really think that style that was set then is really reflected in the styles that are made by Neil Paulett and Jeff Grosset. By the way, Neil Paulett was another Roseworthy person that did **the course** the year before I did.

**Just out of interest, who was the General Manager at Stanley that you struck?**

**PR:** A guy called **Stan Olschefski***,* and he was quite good, but the Stanley Wine Company was the only company that Heinz owned out of 450 companies worldwide. And they just didn't really understand the wine industry at all. They expected that you could take a commodity like grapes, turn it into wine, sell it, and turn it over and get the money.

**I heard one of the other former General Managers tell me that, too. That was their expectation.**

**PR:** The Stanley Wine Company in the Heinz hierarchy was used as a stepping stone up to the Board level. It was used as a place that the General Managers got sent to**;** to gain a bit of experience. It's almost like it's part of the Empire. You know, go out there and run the Stanley Wine Company for them. *(Laughs)* And of course, what used to happen is that every General Manager that came along would change all the labels, and say this and that, and all the rest of it.

Also, the week that I joined as an assistant to Tim, Tim said to me, 'Look, you've got to help me do all the winemaking and, in addition to that, go across the road there because across the road's the bottling line. I don't want anything to do with the bottling and you go over and run that'. So I went over there and had a look at the bottling line, and I knew a little bit about it to realise that there was a roaring yeast problem in the bottling line and the bottling line was contaminated with yeast. So I set on a programme of sterilising the bottling line, and in the time that I was at Stanley taught myself a lot about bottling. I taught it all myself, knowing what sort of parameters, how far you could stretch things, and how far you couldn't go, how to quickly sterilise machinery. You know, I started out

with swabbing things with alcohol and all the rest of it. It ended up with more like a sterility programme that would be more than adequate -

**Had you learnt about the yeast factor, say, from Roseworthy or just from the practics of winery work?**

**PR:** I probably learnt about the yeast contamination from Roseworthy, but that would be the end of it. The rest of it I really taught myself. I don't really know what they teach now—the details they teach them—but I think the same principles would occur now.

Anyway, about a year after I got there at Stanley they decided they were going to go into wine casks, and we were one of the first people to start commercially producing wine casks. So I was given the job of doing that. To start with I had 17% leakers, you know, because wine casks are difficult to handle.

**At the valve itself, was it leaking?**

**PR:** No. Mainly through flex cracking of the packaging and things like that. But we experimented on how to stack it on semi-trailers once it was filled and all the rest of it. By the time I left I think I was down to .03% leakers. So it worked pretty well.

I guess, as winemakers, we objected to putting premium into wine casks, and so Tim and I used to do some unusual things. We had a bit of weight as winemakers. But I remember blending 40,000 gallons of Rosé, and we put this Rosé into the Perth wine show and it won a trophy and a gold medal. So we put the gold medal sticker on the wine casks to build up the quality of the wine casks *(Laughter)* instead of putting it into the top bin range.

It became more apparent, the longer time I was there, that Tim Knappstein really was getting frustrated with Heinz and he really wanted to leave, and so just quietly he was starting up his own winery that he initially called Enterprise Wines. Then Heinz found out, and he hadn't registered the name of it, so they went and registered the name and then they sort of

hung it over his head like a carrot and things like that, which wasn't very good.

Anyway, there was a bit of animosity and things like that, and so rather than go into it all, all I can say is that I, as one of the winemakers, was getting tarred with the same brush and things became more and more difficult there. You know, we had a reconstruction programme. The vintage before I left there wasn't approved until, I think, mid November or early December, and so I actually had to try and knock down a whole block of tanks and get them all rebuilt by vintage. I couldn't get it done in time. And then the project got cut in half, so I'd knocked down these old concrete tanks, and then we didn't have enough storage and we virtually had to stop crushing halfway through vintage, and it was just a mess—an absolute mess.

The other thing is that Tim had decided that he was leaving, so he'd actually given about twelve months notice. They'd appointed a new senior winemaker there who, hey presto, was Brian Barry, who'd been one of the winemakers up at the Berri Coop where I'd worked.

**TAPE 1 - SIDE B**

**So Peter, Brian Barry comes on to the scene.**

**PR:** I knew Brian Barry was coming. I didn't sort of really agree with that because here was a small winery and Brian Barry, as I said, was used to running what was then the largest winery in Australia, with large equipment. We made wine almost the opposite way. We made it in very small batch lots and we blended up afterwards out of these small batch lots.

I guess in some ways I didn't really agree with Brian Barry's style of management. I always used to think that he ran a terror style of

management rather than a cooperative style. I don't know how many times I'd heard him say, 'If you don't do this, you're fired'. And so I knew that I wouldn't like that style of management. And Tim was just biding his time there. The winemakers were getting tarred with this awful brush that they're not interested in the place. So I decided to leave before everyone else left, and so I left purely out of principle.
I can remember coming back down to Adelaide to my parents' place and telling my parents, and my mother was absolutely aghast that I'd left.

**Why? Because she liked the product? *(Laughs)***

**PR:** No, no. She was aghast that I had this perfectly good job that I'd left. Because you just didn't do that in those days.

**Depression mentality?**

**PR:** And then she said something about going back and asking them if you could have your job back. And I said, 'No'. And she said, 'Well, what are you going to do?' I said, 'I don't know. I'm not going to do that'.
So anyway, I'd got to know a lot of the local people, and I loved living in Clare. I'd been looking at some land down at the southern part of the Clare Valley down near Watervale. I liked that area because it had really good red brown earth over some limestone. And I'd got to know the local land agent up there, and guess what? He was one of the Knappsteins. There's quite a few Knappsteins in Clare.
Anyway, I'd been to this auction and he'd knocked this small block of land down to me, which was good. He knew that I'd been looking for a while. It was twenty acres and had lots of noxious weeds, chicken sheds, an old dairy, an old house on it, and all the rest of it. Anyway, I bought this twenty acres. I didn't quite have enough for the deposit. I knew that, but I thought by the time I came to pay the deposit I'd scratch up enough. Anyway, the day that I bought this land, a guy I used to go snow skiing with in wintertime popped up at Clare because he was working for a bloke from Saddleworth, a guy called Lance Vater, and he used to build buildings,

and I had organised a new bottling hall to be built and he built this building. This guy called Stephen Elliott, who was my friend, rolled up, and I said, 'Come and have a look at this land I've just bought'. He had a look at the land and we were driving around, and he said, 'Do you want a partner?' I thought, well, gee, I hadn't thought of that. Why not? I was young and naive, and I said, 'Okay, as long as I get 51% and you have 49%'. 'Oh, okay'. So that way I could pay for the deposit on the land. *(Laughs)*

So I had this land there, and I could shift into the house, which I did. I didn't have a job. And then talking with Stephen Elliott we came up with the idea that in order to create some cash flow, to get some cash to build a winery, we would go into the contract wine bottling business. I certainly knew more than anyone else in the Clare Valley about bottling. I realised then that since none of the concepts about bottling wine had ever been taught at Roseworthy, there was probably only, say, a dozen people in Australia who knew anything about bottling.

So we set up this small contract wine bottling company. I bought some second-hand machinery and Stephen, because he was working for the building company, designed the building and then had all the steelwork—and Stephen and I and our parents erected this building over time, and other people helped us a lot. It's amazing in the country, if you start out to do something, people come along and they're prepared to help you, especially if you're struggling.

**I wanted to ask you about that, Peter. Was there a deal of camaraderie up there between different -**

**PR:** Certainly. I loved my time in Clare Valley, and it's a lovely area to live. There's lots of little nooks and crannies and things like that. And we had probably two people working in the laboratory. Darryl Woolley in the early days. He eventually went off to New Zealand. The other person that came along to replace him was Tim Adams, who now, of course, has his own winery in the Clare Valley. And it was also the times of Rick Robertson. He was a very wild sort of character. And a guy called Peter

**Nicols**. **Rick Robertson** had his own little winery of course, which is now the Tim Adams winery. It was also the time when 'Roly' Birks was just retiring, and Tony Brady came along. And the Mitchells were just starting up.

**Andrew and Jane would have been just starting.**

**PR:** Yes. We used to bottle their wine. And Jeff Grosset was just starting. This was down at Watervale, and we called the place Fareham Estate. We called it after a town in England called Fareham. I've never been to Fareham but it actually rolled off the tongue because -

**I have been to Fareham.**

**PR:** Have you?

**Yes.**

**PR:** The interesting thing is that the area in between Watervale and Auburn is the area of Leasingham. There was an old little township there. So we were Fareham Estate **of** Leasingham, albeit that the Stanley Wine Company then had a label called Leasingham. And of course, now, the winery's called Leasingham and the wine casks, which are now Stanley Wine casks, are made up in the Riverland. So it's all changed around.

**So you did get support?**

**PR:** Yes. We were Fareham Estate of Leasingham. Anyway, so off we went and we started trading and things like that, and doing some bottling. I remember the first bottling we did was for Brother May at Sevenhill Cellars. I think that was 1400 litres. We filled it in a little six in line filling machine. You put the bottle on the filling machine—my father did most of the filling—and when it was full you took it off and put it on a table, and from the table you put it into a corking machine and put your foot on the corking machine and it was corked. Then take it out of there and put it on a table, and from the table it would go into—oh, you'd put a capsule on it. You'd heat all the capsules and then you'd put it into a labelling machine.

From the labelling machine you'd take it out the other end and put it into a carton. We used to have wet glue, like PVA glue, that you'd put on the carton. Stephen's father made some little weights, so we put a weight on each carton so that it stuck for a while, and then on to the pallet. So the first 1400 litres I think took us about fourteen hours.
I remember that both the mothers cooked a roast during the day. 'Yes, we'd be finished by six, or something like that'. I think it was one o'clock in the morning when we sat down to have this roast.

**Were you pretty pleased that your parents supported you at this point?**

**PR:** Yes, I was actually. I was very surprised that they were keen to support. I was also very pleased for them, that they could actually see that there was another life beyond being safely ensconced in the insurance business. You know, things like that. That there was another sort of commercial life out there and you could take risks.
We made a bit of wine for ourselves and then we opened cellar door sales. In the early days everyone wanted to do cellar door sales, so we had to make a roster for people to come up from Adelaide and do cellar door sales. Of course, that only lasted about twelve months and then you get sick of doing that, and so we used to have to roster people on to do cellar door sales and make sure that they came up.
We shifted that business down to Adelaide in 1985. So let's say that there was ten years up there. I think we started that in '76, so nine years. During that time I decided that I wanted to build my own house up there, which you could do. There's lot of things you do in the country, so I decided to build a house. Actually it all started one winter when I got bored.
What used to happen in the country, especially in Clare, is that the middle of winter the mist would come rolling in about six o'clock in the evening, so if you didn't actually have some activity, everyone would just go in **their** house and watch TV and wait until the next morning. You'd get up and it'd be misty and cold and things like that.

There was a couple of things that I did. First of all, a little group of people—we used to go to each other's place for dinner. So if you could cook, then you could have people around for dinner on Saturday night. So I started to cook and learn how to cook, and experiment, and it wasn't hard. Generally I didn't have too many girlfriends then, so what would happen is that the other women would come and say, 'Can I bring something?' 'Yes, you can bring something'. And when they get there, 'Can I help you make the salad?' 'Yes'. 'Can I help you wash up?' 'Yes, that would be a good idea'. So someone always would come to help you. And generally there were other winemakers. Basically it was the winemakers and teachers that would get together I suppose. And so that was a good time. And I still do a lot of cooking now. I really learnt that in the country, that you've got to make your own fun.

Anyway, one winter I decided that I would have a project and I'd build myself a spa pool. *(Laughs)* I knew nothing about spa pools so I started to ring around. I couldn't find, in Adelaide, anyone who knew how to design spa pools, except I came across one guy who knew a lot about the pump sizes and, you know, the jet sizes and things like that. So I built this spa pool modelled out of scraps of timber, basically **from** ACI pallets, which **are glass pallets.** I built the **male mold** for it, and I knew someone in ski boats and building ski boats in Adelaide so I brought it down to Adelaide and they laid the fibreglass over the top of that. I took it back to Clare, built a timber frame for it in an old chicken shed that we had there, which was open one side, and then put all the jets in, and it was a fantastic spa pool.

**This isn't the beginning of your fixation with sparkling wine, is it, Peter?**

**PR:** No, I really haven't come to that yet. *(Laughter)* I'm just getting sidetracked.

**This is very similar to -**

**PR:** This is when I build my own house because the spa pool eventually went to the house.

**I was being facetious.** ***(Laughs)***

**PR:** The spa pool was like a whirlpool in the end. It had two air injection pumps in it and a big circulating pump. And it was huge. It was so much fun. We used to get this spa pool full of people, and it was optional whether you wore clothes. So we'd sit in there and one by one, male or female, you'd have to—to get out of the spa pool you had to get out on to a 44 gallon drum, on to a chair and get down on the ground, run across the gravel driveway into the old cellar door sales area and get one of the bottles that had been opened, and run across and bring it back, and then we'd all have a drink. And then the next person would do it. So we had so much fun in it.

And subsequently I started building a pole house, and I put the spa pool on the top floor of the pole house, and the pole house was actually in a—I bought another block of land overlooking the contract bottling plant. Anyway, turning back to the wine business, what happened after a few years is that both Stephen and I weren't particularly good managers of a business. Full stop. And we ran into cash flow problems—dire cash flow problems—because we'd expanded so quickly. And so I got a friend of a friend involved and eventually we got five multimillionaires as a group to all put some money in. When you can only put $3,000 each in, which is not much these days, so it was $15,000 but that was enough to get us going again. And subsequently, of those five, one guy eventually for one reason or another bought out the other four, and he was the main person in it. The contract bottling grew and grew, and so by about 1983 I started to experiment making sparkling red. Just little quantities for myself. About that same time we had been asked as part of the contract bottling to go into contract champagne making—like, méthode champenoise production.

**Did you have any background at all in sparkling wine making?**

**PR:** No. Nothing.

**So Berri wouldn't have been doing it when you were there?**

**PR:** No.

**Roseworthy probably wouldn't have taught it.**

**PR:** Well, -

**A little.**

**PR:** A little. I remember doing a tirage at Roseworthy but no disgorging or anything like that. And that was a brut style, like a white style. I virtually had no experience whatsoever.

**So was your interest triggered by what you'd drunk, or by what you'd read, or just inquisitiveness?**

**PR:** Well, I think it's just inquisitiveness. All winemakers when they're young are inquisitive about all styles of wine. I was also inquisitive about making, say, Vintage Port, which we'd tried to do up at Stanley with Tim. Making botrytis wines was very in vogue, although I didn't actually follow down that path. I was interested in making sparkling red because—the méthode champenoise is a way to make very small quantities, so you can make five or ten dozen and **bottle** ferment it, and then disgorge it by hand and drink it. So it is a way to actually start off very small.

**Does that mean you don't need as much of the base wine as you do if you're bottling larger quantities? It's something you can control more yourself?**

**PR: Yes.** The alternative methods of making sparkling wine—I guess the other is basically it can be straight carbonated, or it can go through a Charmat process, or it can go through a transfer process. And if you did it transfer, then you need a lot of wine and a lot of expensive machinery just to do a batch. So if you don't have expensive machinery—I mean, you can virtually just do a small amount in méthode champenoise and tirage it and

go on from there. Anyway, so that's why I started my very small experiments.

And then in 1985 the contract bottling business was finally making a profit and it was going quite well. So we decided to shift that down to Adelaide because we were paying so much in freight. It was shifted down to Mooringe Avenue at Camden Park. Then the building up at Clare was empty and so we decided to buy some—we had bought some méthode champenoise equipment, and some of that equipment I've still got today, and we went into doing small quantities of méthode champenoise.

**So did Stephen have an interest in it as well?**

**PR:** Stephen Elliott?

**Yes.**

**PR:** He had a financial interest in it, Rob.

**But did he have interest in the méthode champenoise, or was it really just -**

**PR:** Oh, yes. It was part of the Fareham Estate, so it was all inside this company.

So we shifted the business down to Adelaide, and the business in Adelaide then became known as Southern Beverage Corporation, and went into the contract bottling business, and the méthode champenoise we left up at Clare for a while. Darryl Woolley ran that for a little while up there. Then subsequently the méthode champenoise business shifted down to Normans in a building they had down at Clarendon that we rented.

When the business got to Adelaide, basically I clashed with Stephen Elliott, the person that I'd started the business with. He wanted to be the high-flying General Manager, and I realised that I didn't think that that was the direction the company—I'd built up the contract bottling, and I'd learnt a lot about running the business and I realised that it was still in the early stages and it needed a lot of proper management to keep it going. I won't dwell on that, but rather to say that from then on, from when I got to

Adelaide and Stephen and I clashed, I basically realised that I wanted to get out. And subsequently the business lasted, I think, for another eleven years in Adelaide, and eventually the original investor, who was one of the multimillionaire investors, who was then the Chairman of the Board, pulled the plug and put it into receivership, which was the correct thing to do. It should've gone into receivership years before that.

In the meantime, I had this sad realisation that—I didn't want to stay in the business, and also that my shares in the business had dropped down in value to an enormously low level, and basically my shares were worthless. After all this work, for fifteen years, starting up this business, basically it was worthless, and I was very depressed to think that basically I'd wasted fifteen years of my life.

I tried to sell the shares in this business and no-one was interested in shares in a company that was losing money. By the way, I sold the shares and a few shares that my parents had in there for $1. That's not $1 a share, that's $1. I've still got the cheque around here, and I'm determined to keep the cheque as a little lesson to myself, and to remind myself. I recommend to other people not to go into business with any other people, that if they want to start a business up, unless you really need a partnership, trust in your own confidence and start it up and just do it yourself. It might take you just a little bit longer but you'll get there, and you don't need a partnership and things like that. You can just do it yourself.

So I decided one day that since these share were worthless I would have to start from ground zero again. This first company up at Clare that I'd started with not quite two and a half thousand dollars, I had no money this time around until I realised that even though this old company was going out the back door, it was probably going to last for another twelve months. I'd technically been employed by this company, and so this company owed me long service leave. So I resigned from that company, took the long service leave, which was $6,000, and was determined to start up again. I

was trying to work out how to make—I decided that I would go into making -

**Is this the mid 80's we're talking?**

**PR:** Yes. By this stage it was about 1986 I suppose.
So I'd had a little bit of experience in making sparkling wine and, by this stage, by méthode champenoise. I'd done some little experiments in that time. Southern Beverage employed a guy called Tony Jacobs, who I don't think is in the industry now, but he was quite a far thinker. Of course, Southern Beverage had this brand name, Fareham Estate Brut, which is somewhere around here. I think it's one of these bottles here. It was actually in one of those paintings over there.
And Tony Jacobs and I worked on this thing that we would get this label up and get it running and, you know, get some sales behind it, and then we would sell it as a label, maybe **to Liquorland** or something like that, because they were interested in having house brands like that. He taught me how to do a thing called **a S**ituation **A**nalysis. Actually there was quite a demand for sparkling wine, and there was a hole in the market.
Anyway, Tony and I took this to the Southern Beverage Board, and of course, because there was no money there, they decided not to go on with it. And I thought, well, here's an enormous opportunity. I could see that I lacked marketing in the past, but I could see an opportunity here—and someone who actually taught me a little bit about the market and marketing and the analysis, and the **SWOT** analysis and things like that.
So I went home that night and everywhere where it said 1,000 dozen, or thousands of dozens, I tried to put in one dozen. And I thought, this will work, and if it will work, it'll work for one dozen. So I was trying to work out how to make one dozen and start with that.
In the end I made ten dozen Brut, and we made $6,000. I bought this ten dozen Brut back off the Southern Beverage Corporation in a disgorged fashion, and I bought a computer so I could do my own accounting work, and the rest of it I spent on labels and label design. I used to pick up the

bottles that had been disgorged and take them home and wash them in my shed, and then label them at home. I started off with ten dozen.
I remember the first liquor store that I ever called on. I think it was Baily & Baily at St Georges in Adelaide, and the person there said, 'Peter Rumball? Who are you? Never heard of you'. And I said, 'That's fine. I'll be back next week, and the week after, and the week after that until I get to know you'. I decided then and there that I needed to teach myself some marketing, so from then on I did all my own calls and all my own deliveries in Adelaide for many years. I started virtually with ten dozen of the Brut. I thought that I would make some sparkling wine, and there was a little hole in the market so there was a demand for it.

**Can I just take you back a step, Peter?**

**PR:** Yes.

**How did you teach yourself about all the facets of méthode champenoise? There's quite a mystique about it. Did you speak to others here who'd been in it for a long time, or did you just teach yourself as you went?**

**PR:** At that stage I really just taught myself as I went. I mean, I subsequently went up and had a long chat to Norm Walker, but that really about sparkling red. Up until this stage I'm just making Brut. No, I taught myself.

**So this is every facet, right through?**

**PR:** Yes.

**For those people who don't know, sparkling wine or méthode champenoise is actually a lengthy process and involves a lot of stages.**

**PR:** Yes.

**I just bring that in because it's not just a thing of saying, oh, I'm going to bottle some wine, is it?**

**PR:** No. I made a lot of mistakes over the years. But the thing you've got to do to make sparkling wine is just to have a vision. You've really got to have a vision about what you want the wine to look like at the end and work towards that. It's not as though you can, say, take the best grapes—this concept that other winemakers have, which is correct, that their Cabernet is made in the vineyard, it probably is, but with sparkling wine it's totally different. The sparkling wine that comes out at the end is not a true reflection of a single vineyard, because there are so many processes that go through and things that can influence it. Anyway, I started making ten dozen Brut, and that sold, and so with that I made twenty dozen.
I was very fortunate that I knew, about this stage, Roger McMahon from JB McMahon who used to sell corks and things like that around here in Norwood. He lent me a little corner of a warehouse that he had. He rented a warehouse and he didn't charge me. I always remember that time. It was probably only about ten feet long and four feet wide, but it was actually enough for me to do my labelling in there in my own little bit. And Peter May gave me some corks.

**OH 692/142 TAPE 2 - SIDE A**

**AUSTRALIAN WINE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.**
**Interview with Peter Rumball on 20th December, 2002.**
**Interviewer: Rob Linn.**

**Peter, we were talking about Roger McMahon and this ten by four piece you had in his warehouse.**

**PR:** Yes. Roger was very good to me. He never asked me for any payment for this little piece of the warehouse. I was in a very vulnerable stage where every little bit that someone offered really helped me. Also Peter May from the old industrial supplies then gave me one bag of corks. That bag of corks actually lasted me for quite a while.

**Where's Peter now, do you know?**

**PR:** He's with a company called Lallemand, and he's just about to start retiring soon. In the yeast business. I still buy my yeast off him after all these years.

Yes, it was very interesting because I started off at ten dozen, and then my second year I think I sold about fifty dozen, and I think in the third year I sold about three hundred dozen. So it was very small.

Roundabout that time though I'd recently become married and decided the marriage wasn't working, so I actually opted out of the marriage, and in the process I had to give away half the value of the fledging business. The property settlement took another couple of years and I didn't really expand the business in that time. It was really not until about 1995 that I started to then develop the business that is now.

If I go back a little bit and say that I started making Brut. Soon after I started making Brut I started to make a pink wine because I could make a pink wine by changing the expedition liqueur to turn a Brut into a pink.

**What is an expedition liqueur?, Peter?**

**PR:** The expedition liqueur is the liqueur that's added after the wine is disgorged, so that when the sediment is taken out of the wine, then the expedition liqueur is added there. So it can play a pretty important part of the wine.

So I started making Brut, then I started making a pink wine. The early sparkling reds I made were really just experimental wines. So the first sparkling red I ever brought out was a non vintage wine—as still they all are on the market at the moment—which was SB4, and I decided to have this blend number on there even though it was a non vintage wine.

So I remember bringing out SB4, and I guess the first break I got was that a wine writer from Melbourne rang me up. That was a wine writer called Mark Shield, who's now departed this earth. Mark was very good. I always got on extremely well with Mark. And one Christmas—it would've been about November—he rang me up and he asked me lots and lots of

questions about sparkling red. I think he was really asking me about my commitment to the style. Because he asked me what happens if you make this wine and it doesn't sell. I realised then that if it had to be a sparkling wine, there had to be some demand for it. Previous to that there was a lot attitude of winemakers that we'll make the wine, and then someone else will sell it, but of course it will sell. I realised then that in order for it to be successful I had to actually make the wine for the market place, and so I'd learnt the link between working out what the market place wanted to have and then to supply that product for it. And not to supply other products. And by the way, subsequently with the pink wine, there wasn't enough demand for it and I dropped making the wine completely. Albeit that as soon as I stopped making it, everyone wanted to buy it, but that's another story.

So, anyway, I really decided that I liked making sparkling red in that early stage and that I would stay with that style—stay with the sparkling red and the Brut. Anyway, Mark Shield started to write about it in the Melbourne Age, and he wrote about it for three Christmases in a row. A simple story about what I'm having with my Christmas lunch. What I'm having with my turkey is Rumball's Sparkling Shiraz.

**Were you the only person at the time doing it in that form?**

**PR:** No. There was Seppelts. They didn't really stop making it, although there might have been a slight hiccup there for a number of years. And also the Orlando Shiraz Durif had only recently come out, so that one was out there. And in my early days at Southern Beverage when I was experimenting as well, I was starting to make sparkling reds for a few other people as well. In actual fact, I made all the early Rockford Black Shiraz for Robert O'Callaghan. And so in my time at Southern Beverage I actually made a lot of different sparkling reds and sparkling wines for other people, and that gave me a lot of experience as well. I learnt from there some things about what to do, what not to do.

*(Interruption)*

**PR:** Where were we?

**You'd been making wine for other people—Rockfords—and -**

**PR:** That's right. I've just lost my train of thought there.

**You were moving towards the fact that before you actually set up your own -**

**PR:** That's right. I was making the SB4 sparkling red, and I brought that out on the market, and then Mark Shield started to write up about it in the Melbourne Age.

**That's right.**

**PR:** Well, what happened was that for the next three years the sales in Melbourne gradually grew and grew. And I remember the first time I ever went over to Melbourne, I went over on the train because I could arrive in **Melbourne** the next morning and the train was the cheapest way to get there. So I used to try and have a sleep on the train, and I would go around and do calls with an agent I had over there.
I remember being so thrilled one trip. Finally, after roundabout eighteen months of going to Melbourne, I actually was sitting on the train realising that I had come home with an order that was worth more than the train fare. *(Laughs)* And this would've been in the years when I was just selling about three or four hundred dozen of sparkling wine.
Anyway, that really helped put my wine on the market in Melbourne, and then the distributor over there gradually grew and grew. The sales in Adelaide sort of took off, and sparkling red became rather trendy in Adelaide. So it took off in Adelaide first, then Melbourne, and then just in the last few years it's become rather trendy in Perth. The sales have gradually grown and grown to the point where they are now. About three or four years ago I decided to have national distribution, and so I went looking for the best distributor I could, which was Tucker Seabrook. They have Bowen Estate, and Henschke, and Cape Mentelle and things like that in their portfolio. So there's a lot of really good people in Tuckers.

But I'd taught myself enough about marketing that I knew that I wanted to go and get the best distributors. It took me four years to get into Tuckers. I was just determined. But you see, with all this experience with marketing my own wine in South Australia, I knew exactly who was buying my wine, what they liked about it. In the years leading up to that**;** when I did do my own calls and my own deliveries, I've always done all the major tastings myself. So, you know, if I knew that there were 1,000 people coming to a wine tasting, I used to rub my hands with glee because here was my market research. I could get 1,000 responses, theoretically. So I used to take all sorts of things. You know, packaging, mock up things, different shades of the label, and all the rest of it. I used to ask people continually, 'Do you like this wine?' This was the sparkling red. They said, 'Too sweet', and 'Too dry'. 'Do you like the packaging?' Do you like this? Do you like that? And I just kept on changing it so that now when people say, 'I love this wine', I already know that because if they didn't, I'd change it again. And I'd change it again so that they did like it.

And also concurrently to that, through my good friend, Doug Bowen, down at Coonawarra, I found a couple of people who were growing grapes who wanted to grow a few more grapes so they've planted individual vineyards for me down there. I have a long term relationship with them—a long term **grower** relationship. So they supply the grapes, and they **deliver** them to Bowen Estate, and I go down and help them and crush grapes **at** Bowen Estate and turn them into the base wine, and then the base wine comes up to Adelaide. So over the years there's been a little bit of Barossa in there, and a little bit of McLaren Vale Shiraz in there, but mainly it's been Coonawarra Shiraz.

**Peter, would you say that you're very much product oriented as against grape variety, or even style or anything—you're after a product for a certain consumer palate. Would that be true to say?**

**PR:** That's very true. And I think that that's really the way to go in the future, to find out what the public wants and to head for that.

I realised after a while that in the méthode champenoise business, it's like being out on a limb and away from the rest of the crowd, and so sometimes you feel a bit lonely out there. And then sparkling red wine, that's even further out on the limb. You really realise that when you start going away from the mainstream states. Sparkling really is still not all that understood, say, in Sydney from a mainstream point of view. It's good to see now in Adelaide that if you go to a function or something and the waiter's walking around with a tray of pre function drinks, on the tray is light beer, heavy beer, orange juice, water, sparkling white wine and sparkling red wine. And that's the normal thing. And yet if I go up to Queensland and talk in front of a group of people, I actually have to remind them that this is a wine to put in your fridge and you drink it cold. I mean, just that basic sort of thing. If it's a sparkling red, you can put it in your fridge and drink it cold.

I go overseas to America and in America sparkling red is considered worse than a novelty**;** almost a bizarre wine. And so I'm really marketing Australia and sparkling red as a unique Australian wine and really initially selling it on an Australiana theme, rather than a wine that is the natural thing to have with turkey.

So it is very interesting, and I've realised out of all that that it's very important to supply the market and to—for instance, I've had virtually the same retail price from when I started. When I started I decided to sell it for $18.50 a bottle and, you know, this is thirteen years later and I'm selling it for $20 a bottle retail. So I've tried to stay in that price range because they're the sort of people I want the wine to go to. Whereas most of my original competitors are now up around $35 a botte. So I'm really conscious of that market place. But then I'm the major player in that $20 a bottle price bracket.

**But in those years you would've also got the advantage of cost effectiveness and higher sales, if that's the way -**

**PR:** Oh, sure. I get some benefits from higher sales. Also I'm getting very close this year to selling 10,000 cases, and through 10,000 cases you

get a lot of—you know, I've just recently bought a new neck freezing machine out from France, and that's taken me a long while to settle it in, and I've had to change a lot of those parameters for sparkling red, funnily enough. But there's an indication that I'm gradually getting more and more automatic equipment and I can keep the price down to a certain extent.

**Peter, another thing I'm hearing from your life story is that through your upbringing, Urrbrae, Roseworthy, Berri and then back to the Clare region and setting up Fareham up there, you had a highly individualistic approach. You actually enjoy doing it as an individual and not in a corporate body, and that the smallness, if you like, is very important to you as well as the unusual product, if you like, as the Yanks might see it. The smallness of what you're doing is also very important to you. Would that be true?**

**PR:** Yes. Well, I think it's more of a challenge. I've set some goals, and I guess the initial goal was to see if I could be successful in the sparkling wine business by myself. And then the next goal was to see if I could make sparkling red in a truly Australian fashion, and I'll come back and talk about that in a minute. The current goal is for me to see if I can take sparkling red reasonably successfully outside of Australia, because I've got to market Australia in order to market the wine, and that in itself is pretty unusual. I mean, if you make a Cabernet **or a** Shiraz, you can take it over to the USA and say that I make a Cabernet **or a** Shiraz and they understand what you're talking about. Take **S**parkling **R**ed over there and you have to actually explain the basics, and where you're from, and what you do, and all the rest of it. So, you know, it's really starting at ground—the challenge is huge. So therefore that's one of the goals to see if I can do that.

As far as sparkling red goes, if I just talk about the style now—and we talked about Norm Walker previously. When I decided to set the style of the wine I wanted a style that was very traditional because sparkling red's been made in Australia since the 1860's, so it is <u>the</u> wine that Australians can really hang their hat on as saying it is a truly Australian wine. Almost uniquely Australian. So I wanted to make a blend of the old style with

some modernity into it. To that extent I went and saw Norm Walker and I had a talk to him about it, and he said that he didn't make much sparkling red, that his father did. And I said, 'Well, tell me how your father made it'. And he couldn't really remember. He didn't know. So I said to him, 'Well, tell me what sort of character was your father because the wine will always reflect the character. And also where did you get the grapes from?' They used a bit of Wendouree pressings—Shiraz pressings, for instance—from the Clare Valley. I already knew what that wine was like. And they used some wine from over Victoria. Bits and pieces and things like that. Out of that I could imagine what the style was like.

So I set out to make a style based on that style, and I also decided that I wanted a lovely, long, elegant palate. That's really why I went to Coonawarra Shiraz because the palate is long and it actually ages without any hollow in it. If you take, for instance, Barossa Shiraz, it's more rounded in the middle, but remembering that from the flavour profile you're adding on to the effect of the expedition liqueur. In some ways you don't want to end up with a hollow palate. That's why I started to lean towards Coonawarra Shiraz.

The other thing is that if we then talk about the expedition liqueur, then the expedition liqueur plays a significant role in modifying the palate of the wine. I describe it like this in some ways, that the end effect of the wine is really like a pyramid. The bubbles, which have an acidic effect, sweetness, the tannin, and the fruit, and it goes together like a pyramid at the top; and if you get it right it tastes really good right at the top. But the point is very pointy obviously and not much room to move there. The expedition liqueur will add to the sweetness, but it can also add to some of the other aspects of the wine—a lot of the aspects of the wine.

So I actually sat down and was my own think-tank for a while. What I was going to say is that a lot of the concepts that I've come up with I've really had to come up with by myself because there's been no-one else to talk to. I only just recently—last year—returned to Epernay **in** the Champagne area, but only because I thought that, well, what am I going to learn over

there? What can they teach me about sparkling red? Nothing. Who else can I talk to in Australia about sparkling red? There's probably only half a dozen people who make any sort of quantities of it. And not too many people in South Australia. I've really had to develop my own think-tank about it, and to that end I tried to think with a blank sheet of paper about the expedition liqueur. I will say now that what I came up with was a formulation, or like a concoction, and I decided to make it secret, only because the French have their own secret expedition liqueurs; and only because it took me so much time to develop it; and it is not based on anything the French have.

To give you an idea, if I talk about the French expedition liqueurs—if you read enough books about French champagne, and there has been many books written over the years, you can get an idea. And I can read between the lines a bit more than, say, the average person. So I can tell you that the simple formulation for a expedition liqueur from France is some old base wine, a little bit of acid, a bit of sweetening sugar, and some Cognac. Now, they use Cognac because it's an area near them, but let's say it's the equivalent to us adding Brandy. You'd have to say, well, why would they add Brandy? Well, I think the answer is that what they're trying to do is to increase the mouth feel of their wine by increasing the alcohol content. Why would they want to increase the alcohol content? Because of their grape struggle to get ripe. And they might only get 8% **alcohol.** In other words, the grapes are really green because they don't ripen. The weather in some years is pretty tough. So they're after every little bit of alcohol they can get, and they're trying to get up to maybe 11.5**%** or 12%, and you pick up an extra percent during the tirage fermentation. So they might start at 8**%**, pick up another, which is 9% or 10% or whatever; and they're still too low; so they add a little bit of Brandy in their liqueur to try and build up the alcoholic content and make the wine balance. In Australia, do we need to do that? Do we have trouble ripening our grapes? No, not at all. So do we need Brandy in the expedition liqueur? No.

So that's just an example of where my expedition liqueur is totally unrelated to, say, what the French would use. I just started out and started experimenting and worked out what sort of flavour profile I wanted and all the rest of it, and worked up from that. Then I'd go to all these tastings, and for a while everyone who walked in the door, I'd say, 'Here, try this wine. What do you think of that?' It took me about twelve months to refine it down.

**So the expedition liqueur, in effect, is giving your wine its Peter Rumball character?**

**PR:** That's right.

**It's not just the base.**

**PR:** It's not just the base.

**This is the finishing touch.**

**PR:** Yes.

**The *creme de la creme*.**

**PR:** Yes. And so it does give a totally different character to it, and it does put my individual Rumball character into the wine. And even when I was doing all this advice on how others should prepare their wine, I've never discussed it with anyone. I've encouraged all the other winemakers to start to make their own expedition liqueur, and they have. For instance, I used to do the Primo Estate one, and I got Joe Grilli—he now goes to wine auctions and buys old aged Vintage Ports and makes his out of that. So that's his own individualistic style, which is good.

Anyway, out of that became my house style of making sparkling red. Also in 1997 I started making **V**intage **S**parkling **R**ed, which is 100% Coonawarra, the best out of each one, just making about, you know, 500 dozen to put in wine shows.

The interesting thing is that I've never done particularly well in wine shows because I think, once again, not only am I out on a limb but also I'm out on a bit of—I think my wine, albeit that was based on a sparkling red that

may have been made back in the 50's, is still a fairly modern style. My wine traditionally hasn't done well in wine shows because the wine shows have been based on the old Seppelts sparkling reds.

**Well, while I understand the advantages of wine shows, and I'm not diminishing their importance, there's also the case that they follow the pattern set up by the panels of judges, and each panel in fact influences others.**

**PR:** Sure.

**So you have an industry that's based on, say, a Croser view of the world, or a Len Evans view in the past, or a Halliday view -**

**PR:** Sure.

**- and that's not necessarily the best.**

**PR:** That's right.

**It's just a palate, and a way of viewing it. I'm not disabusing it at all.**

**PR:** Yes. You're right. You're exactly right. In fact every time I look at a show schedule I have to remind myself that I have done all my research. I know that the public like my wine, and the fact that I might not win anything for a vintage wine that I'm putting in there, I know that when I finally release the wine the public will love it, because I've done all my research. And so what comes out of the show is really only, as you said, a reflection of what the judges think.
Interestingly enough, last time I went to a wine show, the chief judge there started to ask me if I'd be interested to judging the class. And I said, 'No I don't really want to do that because I want to put my wine in there'. *(Laughs)* You know, if I was judging the class—and let's face it, in some of these classes there's only ten wines in there. I don't want to not put my wine in there. I'd much rather get someone else to pick mine out as the -

**Yes.**

**PR:** But also the oldest finished wine I've got is 1997, and I had set up those wines to make them a bit like I imagine the old wines were made back in the 50's or 40's, which would've been absolutely undrinkable when they're young but took a long time to mature. And '97, this first wine's still maybe got another three or four years to peak, so it's really a long term experiment. I mean, it might be a ten year experiment and then have to modify it a bit. *(Laughs)* Certainly take the rest of my life.

**TAPE 2 - SIDE B**

**Peter, so where do you see your product going within the world of wine?**

**PR:** I guess I'll also add that I've started making sparkling Merlot. One of the goals I've got is to take the sparkling red to a couple of countries. Those countries I think will be Japan, USA and the UK. And I'll talk about them in a sec. And as part of that, I'm willing to go and find out what those markets require, to try and make a wine for those markets. To that end I started making a sparkling Merlot as well.
But I'll just come back and say that I started selling wine to Japan, only because I managed to have a sort of falling in with the Japanese market. I was doing a **consumer** tasting in Sydney called the Boutique Winemakers, and three gentlemen, obviously Japanese, in dark suits came along, and they were going, 'Oh, do you have a distributor in Japan?' And I said, 'No'. I was trying to infer that I didn't want one either, so I had to keep moving along. 'Next person, please'. You know, do the tasting. There were a lot of people there. And they said, 'No worry, this can be good if you don't have a distributor'. You know, move along. And they said, 'Oh, we'll send you a fax about our business'. So I said, 'Oh, okay'.

Eventually they did, and I finally understood that what it is is a business whereby the wine is sold to the Japanese tourists who come to Australia. There are about 400,000 Japanese tourists that come to Australia and they want to take home the flavour of Australia. They want the Australian experience, and they're prepared to buy Australian gifts while they're here. It's a very unusual system, but what happens is that when the Japanese tourist gets off the plane here, they get on to a bus, and that's owned by a Japanese bus company, or JLW or something. They have a tour guide supplied by a tour guide company. They go on a tour, and that's supplied by the tour company. They're offered gifts and merchandise by the merchandising company. And it's the merchandising company that I deal with.

The Australian products that they can buy are various sorts of things like fresh meat, prawns, crayfish; different sort of wines obviously. And **the** sparkling red, I mean I think I was fortunate originally because it's got a bright red and gold label on it and that just happens to be the Asian lucky colours. But leaving that aside, they deem it as a truly Australian gift, and that in itself is a bit unusual because that's really where I'd like to pitch the whole style of the wine so it is truly Australian.

And then what happens is that the tourist doesn't take their presents home. When they go home all their package of presents gets delivered to their door, and then they pay for it after that. So they're paying it in their own currency, they don't have to track it around, and they can get it delivered to their door because it's already sitting in a warehouse in Japan. So I actually export my wine to Japan. It goes over to this warehouse and then it gets delivered when they get home.

So twice a year I go up to the Gold Coast and to Cairns to what they call these Japanese **E**xhibition **D**ays; where there's all these Australian products. And the tour guides are the people who come. So it's sort of like having a wine day. They have all the different products that the Japanese can buy.

Now, that business, in a matter of four years, has turned into 30% of my business. It is getting bigger all the time. Now they've started to say there are Japanese businessmen working in Asian countries and they might want some Japanese items sent over to, say, Hong Kong from Japan, so this company will arrange the transport and things like that, and send it off, and send the parcel of Japanese things and my wines over to this businessman in Hong Kong. And in China, and Singapore and other things like that.

I have learnt that the Japanese are very good to do business with. The very fact of this old concept of honour and things like that. They're very good to do business with. Just recently they've asked me to do some other products specific for the Japanese market, and so rather than go into them—one of them I'm experimenting with now, based on sparkling wine. So the Japanese market has turned into 30% of my business, and I'm interested in the USA market. From then on it starts to get difficult. I keep saying that once you get outside of Australia, this wine is so unique that you actually have to sell concept for Australia.

I next went to the USA thinking that the US people would have quite an open mind when it comes to wine, but they don't. They have sort of a naive idea about wine and because it's a bit naive then it's not open at all. It's really set on what sort of wines have been promoted to them. So I've been disappointed to find that sparkling red is really worse than a curio wine, almost something so bizarre that when you want to try something else, then give this wine a hit, so to speak. And so I've got to change that concept if I can.

I'm only fairly small in the whole industry but the good thing is that there's an office of the Australian Wine Export Council over there called the Australian Wine Bureau in New York, and one thing that always cheers me up is that the Australians who work in the Australian Wine Bureau in New York are just so enthusiastic to have a sparkling red. They just absolutely loved it when I started exporting over there. I go there again next

February, and they always trot me out to do seminars on sparkling red because it is so uniquely Australian.
Next year I'm about to start the UK as well, which should be interesting because I have to go over there, and although other people have been selling sparkling red, it still will be difficult to try and get any continuity over there.

**Looking back over your lifetime in wine, Peter, what would be the most significant changes in your experience that have really impacted on you, to take you to where you are?**

**PR:** The changes in wine or -?

**It could be technical changes that have influenced you. It could be sociological. Or it could be manufacturing stuff. Things that have actually made a big impact on you.**
**Or has it just been that you've taken a bent that's a niche and it's been just something that's almost made itself grow?**

**PR:** I think the major influences on my life would've been the realisation that sort of stemmed from the early days of going to Roseworthy and all the rest of it, that Australia is still a country where anyone can go and do what they want.
I remember, probably ten years ago, driving around Europe with an Italian guy, and he was taking us around in the company car—a bottling manufacturer—and I said, 'Are you involved in this company that you work for—financially?' And he said, 'No. In Italy, if your relatives, or your parents, your uncle or aunt, or something like that, don't own the company, it is just not possible to start one up'. Then you realise that, well, we still have the possibility in Australia, and it is possible to do anything, and you can start small. I say to other people now that I've started two businesses up virtually from nothing, and although the first one wasn't a success for a variety of reasons beyond my control, if you take control and you ask questions and things like that, and you have collect the right sort of people around you—they are there. You've just got to go and look for them. You know, I found myself, even now, a retired guy. He's my financial mentor. A guy who used to run the brewery here. I insist on

certain banking standards and things like that, so I insist on being in the business bank, only because I realise that my original bank manager was what I'd call an absolute turkey, to use Wolf Blass' words. He was a turkey. So the more you understand about your own business, the more you identify people who can actually help you and give you good advice and things like that. Stick with them.
Does that answer the question?

**Yes, it does, thanks, Peter.**

**PR:** I guess the main thing is determination. I try not to think that I'm out on a limb. It doesn't actually occupy my thoughts normally, except when I sit down and think about it—the fact that I am so far out on a limb. But when I think about it I realise how vulnerable I am. If everyone stopped liking sparkling red, I'd be in dire straits. On the other hand, I think the main thing is the challenge to go out and to take on something and then to make it work, and to realise that it is not only the things you've been taught but the things you can teach yourself. So I've taught myself, not only marketing and things like that, but now it's getting to the stage where the business is getting really busy. If I grow another 25 or 30% that will be enough for me.
I guess the unfortunate thing personally—I have started to think about it—is that I don't have any children now. I realise now that I've collected an immense amount of knowledge about sparkling wine. I think Norm Walker would be in the same sort of thing. He would've retired with an immense amount of knowledge that he could actually pass on to someone. I guess the difference with me is, because it's my own business, I don't intend retiring. So at least it will go on for quite a number of years. *(Laughs)*

**Well, thank you very much for talking to me, Peter.**

**PR:** It's my pleasure.