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Full transcript of an interview with

HERMANN SCHNEIDER

on 28 November 2001

by Rob Linn

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OH 692/145

HERMANN SCHNEIDER

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OH 692/145 TAPE 1 - SIDE A

NATIONAL WINE CENTRE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

Interview with Hermann Schneider on 28th November, 2001.

Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Hermann, to begin with your background, where and when were you born?

HS: I was born on 29th October, 1936, in a town called Baden, Switzerland, which is halfway between Zurich and Bâle. It's in the German section of Switzerland.

And who were your parents?

HS: My father was a grocer. He ran a grocery business. Quite unusual in a way because not only did he have a shop, but he had a country clientele of restaurants and farms where he supplied, not only groceries, but particularly to the farms, he also supplied feed. Not so much feed but more pasture seed. He specialised in giving advice to farmers, or making grass mixtures up, which of course are very important in Switzerland because there were very small acreages and a lot of the pastures were utilised three or four times a year with grazing and haymaking etc.

So what was his name, Hermann?

HS: The same.

Hermann?

HS: He was the oldest son in the family of five, and I'm the oldest son in the family of three. I have two sisters.

And your mother?

HS: My mother also came from a country area, not far from [my father]. And actually her family have a history. They were chimney-sweepers in Switzerland, which is unusual, but it was quite an important profession there, particularly with the big farmhouses and so on, because they all had small houses. And, of course, there were many of the typical Swiss farmhouses, which was part domestic and part for animals. And so it was a very important job with a lot of responsibility because not only was he responsible for the feed but also he was responsible for insurances and so on for fire, particularly of course with the haymaking. And hay was stored in the upper section of the barns. I remember that every time there was a farmhouse burning somewhere [although I never knew my grandfather, the business passed on to my mother's oldest brother, to whom I was very close] and there was always great concern whenever a fire broke out anywhere in the country, because he was one of the first persons that had to be there and he was responsible for the upkeep [of the property]

Hermann, you grew up in Switzerland during the Second World War, and its aftermath, did you?

HS: Yes. Well, of course, I was very young. As I say, I really experienced it as a young child and my father was away a lot of the time because he was in the Army in Switzerland, which then meant he was on duty for most of the year. And we were very close to the German border. Very close. And there were a lot of Allied planes who, whenever they had mechanical problems, or were shot or whatever, always tried to land somewhere in Switzerland if they possibly could. So we had a lot of excitement with planes crash landing around us. So these things I remember, too. And I also remember that one of the things that stuck out as a child was that all the news was totally dominated by the War, and of course I had this idea that when the War finished there would be no news. I was very surprised that the news services still went on, except the format changed completely. It's a childhood imagination, maybe because it was such a dominant part of my early childhood.

And were you educated at Baden?

HS: Yes, basically.

Did you do any tertiary education at all?

HS: No. Like most of us I left school when I was just past my fourteenth year. And what was very common in Switzerland, because we're bilingual—the two dominant languages in Switzerland are French and German—was that at school we did have to learn a second language. So it was the usual thing that unless you went into tertiary education, or university, your parents, particularly with sons, but with daughters as well, used to send you after leaving school into another language speaking area so that you would become more familiar with the second language, and you got experience also. You usually used to go with a family, maybe in a business structure but it was a family business structure. So you were not left high and dry.

And I finished up after I left school, when I was just under fourteen and a half, going to a town called Bulle, which is in the heart of Gruyère—the Gruyère cheese. It was a farming community. And I worked in a bakers shop as a baker's hand, and delivered bread and cakes on Sunday. It was always a very important thing that the baker home-delivered birthday cakes, or just patisseries to the clients.

And what brought you to Australia then?

HS: Well, it was the Olympic Games, really. Firstly, I was always keen on inspiring young athletes. Mainly running. I loved middle distance and long distance running. And I always had, as a very young person, an ambition to become an athlete. Then when the opportunity came it was through an advertisement. I saw it in the paper. The Victorian Government of the time advertised for chefs to come and work.

So you had become a chef by this time?

HS: Yes, by that time. That was in 1955.

So you'd been a baker's assistant, and then -

HS: Yes. And then I did my apprenticeship, which in Switzerland, in those days, was only two and a half years. But even then you were not classified as a chef; you were a young cook. Then you started basic training, and then you did your [various] stages. So in 1954 I finished my apprenticeship—early '54—and I did a couple of seasonal jobs, which are common in Switzerland. You know, with the ski resorts and the summer resorts.

And it was during that stage that I saw this advertisement, or actually a colleague of mine saw it. And he was always an enthusiastic adventurer, and he loved cars, and he came one day to me and he said, 'I saw this job and we could travel right through Europe and take the boat and go to Australia'. And I was young, so without any great convictions I applied for the job. To my surprise, all of a sudden, there was an invitation for me to come for an interview at the Australian Embassy in Geneva.

So it was actually the Victorian Government, not the Swiss, who invited you to come?

HS: Oh, no. It was the Victorian Government. They actually were looking for chefs to complement the staffing, not only in Switzerland but also, as far as I knew, in Germany and Austria and in several European countries.

So how did you get here in the end?

HS: As I say, firstly I didn't expect it to come at all. It was just really a rushed decision. I think the other influence that drove me to it was because in Switzerland we had to do national service. I was just ready to go into the national service, and in Switzerland we have two intakes of national service. One is a summer intake and one is a winter intake. And everybody tries to avoid the winter intake because it's not that pleasant to do army service in Switzerland in the wintertime. So I thought that it would be a good excuse if I would get permission to come to Australia so I could avoid the winter intake. I thought it was only going to be three

months or so and I would be ready then for the next year. And to my surprise, again, because it's very difficult to avoid national service, they thought it was important enough for me to get permission.

So I accepted the position and we were initially supposed to be flown out, and then in the last few months before departure there was some difficulty because there were not many flights. And we were told that we would have to come by boat, which was a little bit inconvenient because in the meantime I took on a position in Frankfurt to work for a brewing company. This company had after the War, tried to build up their restaurant and hotel chain again. So I had accepted that position.

I had to leave three months earlier to take the boat trip. I thought it was still worthwhile. So I'm still here.

What was Melbourne like when you first arrived?

HS: It was a huge change for me. It's hard sometimes to reflect on how big the changes were, but the whole vastness of the country was I think my first impression. We came by boat and we landed at the pier in Melbourne—Princes Pier—and I remember it was late morning when we arrived, and after disembarkation we were taken by bus to the only big village in Heidelberg.

I remember that trip. It was almost like travelling halfway to Switzerland. Just from one end of Melbourne to the other. And one of my impressions was also that all the buildings in Europe in those days were rendered buildings. They were brick buildings mostly, but they had a hard old rendering. They were usually old double brick with all the plumbing inside because in Switzerland all the pipes and things would freeze in the winter time. And travelling through Melbourne, and the suburbs of Melbourne, I could see all those naked brick buildings with all the plumbing outside. My impression was that none of those buildings were finished. It took me a long time to realise that that was the common building practice. So I mean that was an incredible impression.

Also the abundance of food. The abundance and variety of fruits that were available. The sizes of the meat that was served, which was more than double what we would be used to consuming. I was mainly brought up and people were still used to the fact that a serve of a 120/150 gram steak was a sizeable piece of meat. And of course that would've been less than half of, in those days, what would be expected on a plate in Australia, with those huge T-bone steaks and rump steaks that were served covering the plate.

Was it high quality?

HS: Well, I think the quality was good. Of course, the meat wasn't trimmed as we would have done it. The other thing was vegetables. Everything seemed to be two or three times the size of what we were used to.

I remember if you bought a kilo of carrots, there were one and a half or two carrots. And everything just felt larger than what I had been used to.

Was your time as a chef at the Games a challenging time?

HS: Not really. It depended on the nationalities of the chefs that were here. They were mostly allocated to certain groups of teams. The set-up was that there were so many kitchens—I can't recall exactly the number—. The [design was built around] central kitchens with dining rooms on both sides, and then again they were divided between the sizes of the team. Now, the huge teams like Russia and America, they all had their own dining rooms etc. In the kitchen I was allocated, the kitchen was even divided into two sections. And the kitchen I was working in was allocated for the French, Belgian, Swiss and Luxembourg teams. The Swiss, of course, in the end didn't come to the Olympic Games. It was similar to Australia's boycott of the Russian Olympics. Switzerland boycotted the Melbourne Olympics because of the Hungarian revolution. And it was surprising because on the other part of the kitchen, the other side of the same area, were the Hungarian/Bulgarian team and I can't remember the second

team. And yet the Hungarian team were participating [and the Swiss were not].

So the Swiss did not participate?

HS: None of the Swiss. There was a great controversy. Even while we were here their flags went up, and we came up three weeks before the Games. And when we arrived, even at that stage it wasn't final if they were coming. A certain part of the sporting bodies wanted to come, and some didn't want to come, and then of course they left it so late there would have been huge transport problems. In the end the Americans, President Eisenhower I think was the President then at the time, offered to provide some flights for them but no athletes came at all. There were just a few officials here, and the press were here, but no athlete participated.

Now, what was the aftermath of the Games for you?

HS: Well, as I say, my plan was really to come to the Games, and perhaps to take a month's holiday, with no real commitment to stay here at all. But during the Games, through some Swiss sporting press people that I started to know, I was introduced to a Melbourne family. [This came about] because a lot of the press stayed in private homes. And this couple—Swiss press people—were living in Melbourne in a house that was owned by a man who was a very sporting enthusiastic person and, actually at the time, was the mentor of Peter Thomson, the golfer. But also he happened to own a hotel. I mean a pub, in Melbourne, but he was very food conscious and he was a very interesting man. And he encouraged me to stay around a bit, and he told me that I would be able to stay with them for a while. He introduced me to some people in the industry so that I might get a job. I decided that it was worthwhile to have a look around. I then decided to make a part of the career of it.

What was the food and wine culture at the time—in the mid 50's? Was there a wine culture?

HS: What stood out to me was—and of course it happened even in Europe in those days—if you went into certain restaurants there was always a very similar type of food served. And even in your training you learned that you had your range of dishes and almost every hotel or restaurant would serve those basic type of dishes and the same type of garnishes. And it was really only the finesse or the quality that made the difference. It's not like today where you have such a huge range of food and where the chefs have the freedom to do what they want. It's quite different.

It was very confined, was it?

HS: It was very confined. In every hotel you had their carpetbag steak. It was very, very restricted. Wherever you walked there were the same dishes served. That was very, very limiting in a certain way. And even the vegetables—there were firstly very few vegetables served. If you went to a pub you got peas and carrots, or those shredded beans. They used to have the bean shredder. If you went to a finer restaurant you may've got spinach. But that's all you ever got—spinach, because that was the fashionable restaurant vegetable.

One of the first things that I did in the restaurant during my career [was to provide] dishes with vegetables that were complementary, on one side, and also which would be seasonal. And that was a mixed success. A lot of people would return the dishes and say, 'Look, take the garbage off and give me my steak, and my chips'.

But, slowly, people started to appreciate it more and more and more. And a lot of people became interested. We would serve fennel and witloof—all vegetables that you just wouldn't expect in those days in our restaurant food. And that was very rewarding in many ways.

TAPE 1 - SIDE B

So, Hermann, what was your first appointment then as a chef?

HS: Right after the Games I went to work for a group called the Federal Hotel—run by Oliver Shaul—which had a Swiss background. Oliver was a colleague of the same people—Harry and Lorraine Young—who were really my mentors and enabled me to stay here. Actually it wasn't my first job. I went for an interview at the Menzies Hotel and I was amazed on the drop of salary I was offered after the Games—because we had been on a very substantial salary. I was taken aback . And so I decided that I would try another position with another hotel.

And so I had my first job at the Chevron Hotel in St Kilda Road, which in those days was a very popular hotel. I was only working there for about three, maybe four, months, where I met another Swiss chef who was working at Maxims restaurant in Toorak Road, which was then one of the first really exclusive, European-style restaurants with the French influence. And I was offered a job there, mainly at that stage as a holiday replacement.

Then through my sporting friends I was offered the position at one of the golf clubs in Melbourne. And from there I was offered another position in what was at that stage a very fashionable French/Italian style restaurant called Antonios that was run by one of the first women operators.

What was her name, Hermann?

HS: Ella Paul. She was an English woman who married a young Italian man, and she was probably a forerunner of Gloria Staley—a good front person. She had a lot of taste. She brought a bit of elegance—dining. She had velvet banquettes and a lot of gilt and so on. And she really appealed to a very good clientele of experienced diners.

And then in 1960—that's four years later—I started to get itchy feet and I had ambition, probably like most other Europeans, because America was the country with the greatest expectations. So I thought that I may go to America, and was offered the possibility of taking a position in Hawaii. And

during my decision making, my friends offered me [the chance] to start on my own, in partnership with them, in a business. I decided to take on the challenge, and in 1960 we started my first, and basically only, restaurant—Two Faces in South Yarra. And I was there for twenty-seven years.

And whereabouts in South Yarra?

HS: That was in a basement of the corner of Darling Street and Toorak Road. It was very fashionable in those days for the restaurant to be a bit hidden away. Antonios, for example, when I started there, was in a little side street.

It certainly was hidden.

HS: It really was. I think it had an advantage in those early days at Two Faces, but I think at the end of it I regretted that I hadn't moved. I was contemplating a move on several occasions but it's certainly not, these days, the fashionable thing to be. I think people want to be seen these days.

So, Hermann, when Two Faces were set up, were you to be the chef?

HS: Yes, I was very much the chef.

Not the front man, as such?

HS: No, I've never been the front man. And I've never been ambitious to be the front man. I've never been totally in the kitchen all the time but I'm really much more comfortable to be in the background. I've always been really a chef operator than a host operator.

In the four years that you'd been here, after 1960, was there beginning to be a change in the eating habits of people, do you think, towards trying more things than they had in the past?

HS: Well, it's quite obvious. I think the post War European immigration brought a fairly substantial change—you didn't see it so much in the restaurant but you saw it in the delicatessens. You could buy different

bread. In the butcher shops, you could buy continental smallgoods. So that's where the big change started to happen. And then it slowly moved also in the other ingredients. Slowly you got more and more vegetable varieties available. And more fish was used, and different [types of] fish. We would probably have been one of the first restaurants in Melbourne at the time, together probably with Gloria Staley, who would use lamb extensively in a restaurant. In the hotels you hardly saw lamb, because it was beef. Lamb was perceived to be eaten at home. And I slowly saw the change. And within five/six years we started to sell more lamb than beef in the restaurant. With my Swiss background I always tried to have a veal dish, or a couple of veal dishes, on the menu, which was always hard because you either had weaner veal or you had, what they call young, yearling beef. You know, it was always very hard to get proper veal. And it's still hard. It's still hard. And it's surprising. It's still hard.

And, Hermann, at the time, had you grown up in a culture with wine?

HS: No, not really. I mean, my father always had wine for his meals, and Switzerland had a fairly extensive local wine production. In Switzerland unless you really are in the upper market it's very dominant and the Swiss and Swiss government have been very supportive to Swiss wines—maybe to their detriment. It's only really the last few years—maybe the last ten years—where a better variety of grapes have been planted. In Switzerland you drank one white wine, and it all used to be made out of Chasselas. But we certainly were used to wine consumption with meals.

Where I think my interest started was again a bit like the selection of vegetables with dishes. I used to be astounded that people started to get very interested in new food and new dishes and a widening of range, but the menus were always commercial and ordinary. Every restaurant had certain wine styles and certain brand names on the wine list. It would've been very hard to serve even people like Henschkes, or Burkes or Chambers. Rutherglen was close to the Melbourne market, but you would never have a Rutherglen wine on the fashionable wine list in Melbourne. It

was always Lindemans or Quelltaler or Hamiltons Ewell or Penfolds. So it was very restricted. It was very much brand oriented, and style oriented. Chablis and Moselle. Hamiltons Ewell was a typical benign Moselle and I remember in the early stage, I was very impressed. We'd serve the wines that came, for example, in the early 60's, out of Orlando/Yalumba—you know, the new Rieslings made by Gramp, Kronberger or Guenter Prass, with whom I became very friendly. And to try to tell people that you should try a Riesling, and they'd say, 'No, no. We want a Moselle'. So there I really started to say, 'Well, I really want to build a wine list with some depth'.

And I started to get more small individual winemakers on the list and also extended it into the imported list. From the early 70's onwards, I used to have at least three or four first growers Bordeaux. In those days we would have about twenty Bordeaux on our list, and probably less in Burgundies but still comprehensive.

I had a lot of German wines on the wine list, and these were very popular in those days. I thought this was very fortunate. These days the only German wines that get any recognition are Ausleses and the dessert wines. So I think that was my main thrust because whereas I saw an enthusiasm and an interest in people in new food and new dishes, there was very little interest in those early days on having a creative wine list.

Well, there probably wasn't the knowledge of wine to have it.

HS: The wines were here. There were a lot of wines imported. Because every rural company, like Elders, all had import people. So the wines were there but they mostly, I think, went into private houses. But they certainly weren't distributed in the trade.

So you began Two Faces at a time when people like Len Evans and Dr Benwell and others were writing about Australian wine for the first time.

HS: For the first time. A person that I think has been forgotten in lots of things and out of whom I got a lot of joy—I knew him personally and he

was a bit of an eccentric man—was Walter James. I think his writing was very much in the English style, but it was witty, it was charming, it had depths of knowledge and it wasn't commercial. I really must say that I'm sure he gave a lot of the people enjoyment. I get disappointed sometimes when I look up wine critics and even wine books and it's too analytical and too technical. Walter James had an understanding.

I took over Seabrooks in 1976—I bought out Doug Seabrook and he was a very strong influence on me, particularly in the imported wine sector. I spent a lot of time with him because he, in those days was the most selective wine importer. Not in the commercial sense, but he always had some very interesting wines, and he had very good agencies. I think he just had a very deep understanding of wine. So I spent a lot of time in his cellars, and with him, and we became very good friends. Then I realised that he really had to sell—or wanted to sell—the business. He wasn't so old. He was born in 1923. He died very young. I think it's a great tragedy. I think that having to sell the business came about because he realised he wasn't a businessman in a sense. Also his wife was never very supportive to him as a wine person. She had a very Methodist outlook on that. So I think he made a decision that he had to relinquish the business. He only died about five/six years after he retired.

But he taught you a lot.

HS: He taught me an enormous amount, yes.

So he was one of those who helped bring in a new appreciation of wine.

HS: Very much so, yes.

Along with the likes of Walter.

HS: Yes. And he really made you look at wines. Another [who influenced me was] Doug Crittenden. Now, he is another person who has been in the industry a long time. It always worried me when I saw that wines were so purely and quickly dismissed, whereas I found a lot of charm in some of

the wines which didn't jump out of the glass, or overpower you with richness and obvious flavours. And I think that's what people, like Doug, have been able to make me look for.

OH 692/145 TAPE 2 - SIDE A

NATIONAL WINE CENTRE ORAL HISTORY.

Interview with Hermann Schneider on 28th November, 2001.

Interviewer: Rob Linn.

Hermann, you had these men who helped you with getting and obtaining the wine that you were interested in, but who also played a big part in Melbourne, particularly in helping people appreciate wine.

HS: Yes. Melbourne was, in those days, probably the strongest wine centre. The wine and food societies were very strong. There were so many individuals: Simon Warden for example; and as you mentioned before, Sam Benwell. There were so many of those people who were really very serious wine lovers, and with extensive cellars.

And in later days, people like Derek Seegan, who had very, very strong connections with some of the best Bordeaux and Burgundy houses. He was the first person to my knowledge—I'm almost certain—who brought wines in the country, like Richbourg and Domane and Conti—all the DRC wines. Then Simon Seawood, who took over Taylor Ferguson—it was part of the family business—became a very serious wine importer. So we were very lucky. And I was lucky in a way that I had the opportunity to attend a lot of those special dinners and tastings, and no doubt I was helped to form a wider knowledge, a more comprehensive knowledge, about wine style.

Did you notice, in the 60's and 70's, a change in the Australian winemakers as well?

HS: Oh, yes. There was no doubt that in general, particularly the white wines—with the exception maybe of a few wines from Lindemans, or even

Penfolds from the Hunter region—before the late 50's/early 60's were very ordinary wines. I remember if two or three white wines were served, people would say, 'Oh, when are we going to taste real wines?' I think that showed a typical combination. People were interested in wines but the white wines were generally of a very inferior quality to the red wines. And so I think people like Rudi Kronberger, Guenter Prass and Colin Gramp brought a new way of thinking in white winemaking.

Then it changed again, I felt, really towards the mid 70's. I became very critical of the Australian white wines, because in those days there were hardly any Chardonnays on the market. It was dominated, without taking all the Hunter wine styles away which were not much understood anywhere other than in New South Wales, in the general market by Riesling. I felt the wines from the mid 70's onwards up to the 90's, where it started to change again, became very manufactured. They became grape juice rather than intriguing, quality wines

A bit too much of the laboratory?

HS: Laboratory wines, yes. And I was always critical of that. I still think the classic Leo Buring wines of that era, and the classic Orlando wines of that era, weren't successful in the wine shows. I always said those wines needed bottle age to lock in the quality, and you just couldn't have it both ways. If you produce a wine which you want really to be drunk within six months of production, it is not going to be a wine that is going to be attractive in five or ten years time.

This has been industry driven, but then I think it's also market driven and becomes a commercial thing. There's a certain criticism that I only felt came to light again in the last six months, where some European countries are saying, 'Well, Australian wines should be labelled manufactured'.

There is a valid argument about that. I don't say all the wine, because there's a lot of very serious wine made in Australia, but there is also a tendency to be monotonous. The difference between wine and, say, a beverage like beer, is that it is so much more individual. I know there are

different beer styles and so on, but when you look, particularly at commercial beer, they all try and eliminate each other, and if one person does something new, the other person wants to follow it. And I hope that doesn't happen with wine. The biggest risk is that we've got our wines to be high in quality, but they [may] just become single phase.

When you were creating the food at Two Faces, Hermann, did you always have in your mind to match it to wine as well? To have the two as one?

HS: In a restaurant, when you have an à la carte menu, you have so many different flavours etc. And I am always very conscious of my basic standard of food and of my flavours. I always feel that, firstly, cooking in my dishes has one underlying flavour or texture, and the rest should be complementary and not one dominating the other. And I feel that's very important. I always find it very uncomfortable when I go out and read menus, and you see five or six different dominant produce or spices in one dish. My philosophy and my background, being probably mostly from a more traditional French or European background is that there is a main flavour and that should be enhanced, or tamed, or whatever. There shouldn't be strong competing flavours. And I think that's also particularly important when you have wines. I always feel that not only should the dish be complementary to wine, it should also not override a wine. And yet on the other hand, I find some of our wines are just over-flavoured. They look very impressive and they can be very nice, but they're not necessarily good food wines.

And there is a difference, Hermann?

HS: Oh, tremendous difference. Tremendous difference. And it's surprising sometimes when you take a wine, say you look at a Muscadet from France, and if you drink it yourself, it probably doesn't excite you terribly much. I quite enjoy it if it's cold, and because it's light and in a way a bit aggressive. But then if you have it with a plate of cold oysters, or another cold shellfish, it's just delicious. If you would drink a barrel

fermented Chardonnay, I couldn't think of anything more contrasting, that would compete against it, because you lose all the delicacy of the saltiness and subtleties of the shellfish. And that's the reason even some of those simple Italian white wines, like a nice fresh Trebbiano, are delicious with certain dishes—and they're so much more comfortable to drink.

Hermann, what was the fortunes of the Two Faces then over the next twenty-plus years?

HS: Melbourne had a very traditional restaurant industry. Firstly, of course, it was always a fairly strong dominance of Italian style restaurants, like Marios, Florentinos, The Society. They had a very strong following. Then there were some of the newer restaurants—I mentioned Maxims. It was frequented by the society in Melbourne.

So we probably were one of the first restaurants who—maybe because of our location, in the basement in South Yarra—were always classified as being austere or simple. But we just became recognised by the serious 'foodies', and later by the people who were seriously interested in wine—a restaurant to go for good food and an excellent selection of wine.

And our reputation grew, probably more because we always had a very strong national following. People like Len Evans, Max Lake, Neville Baker and people from all over Australia, but particularly in Sydney, they started to recognise our standard of quality. We were fortunate that we were never recognised as a highly social restaurant but we got a very, very strong national following, acceptance and exposure.

And that stimulated us to extend the wine list, and we became fairly seriously involved in wine. And in 1974, the French Trade Commission approached me. At that stage two of the most popular and dominant French chefs came into Australia, Paul (*couldn't decipher name*) and (*couldn't decipher name*) Gerhard, who was the instigator of the French cuisine. They came and did a couple of dinners in Melbourne and Sydney, and I was asked to host them in Melbourne. In the end of it I declined because I felt that our restaurant wasn't to the level. And so I introduced them to Gloria Staley, who at that stage ran Fannys and Glo-glos, and Glo-

glos was just opened that year and was a much more up-to-date restaurant. But I supported them. I took them to the markets, and they came and ate with us and so on.

And at their instigation, they actually organised it, we got an invitation to become a member of the (*couldn't decipher name*) group, and we were the first Australian restaurant, or hotel, who was invited to become a member. And that gave us an international exposure. We didn't have a great international trade but it gave us introduction to a lot of the French restaurants, and we visited many of the members on our trips to Europe. And got to know them. That helped us. We got quite a lot of young staff from Europe who wanted to come to Australia. So it was very helpful in that respect. But those were really the two main vehicles I think which gave us the depth of recognition in Australia. It really started from the 70's onwards—from the early 70's onwards.

And that went right through until the end of the 80's. Is that right?

HS: Yes. But I was always very ambitious. I wanted to have a (*couldn't decipher name*), which means a really exclusive country hotel/restaurant operation. And so in 1987 I was invited by a syndicate of investors who bought this very old property that had been the holiday residence of a member of the Armitage family and then a school for deaf children in the Catholic Church, to become part of a syndicate to rebuild it as a country house, and so we became involved in '87.

We actually closed Two Faces completely. Because we took the name Two Faces and, with that we also became an instant member of the (*couldn't decipher name*), and so we transferred the restaurant to the country house property. We operated that from 1987 until '92. Unfortunately we got caught up in the recession. So we had a very difficult period during that time because the property was very highly overcapitalised. It started to enjoy a great reputation as one of the finest country house properties in Australia.

And in '92, did you come here?

HS: And during that period of time, I started to know the area, and I always looked at this as an outstanding site as a restaurant operation because of its position. It's a real tourist location, but I felt that with the budding growth of the wine area, and the location, it would be an ideal site for a restaurant operation.

And has that been success, do you think?

HS: Well, it's been a success in a way. It's been far more difficult than I would have expected it to be. The industry, in itself, is still very much in its infancy here. So you rely much more on day trippers. It's not recognised as a weekend destination, so we have many more day tourists than overnight stayers. We have to run a much more low key operation than our other restaurant used to be. We realised that we have to tame the market. The market is in a lower section. But we've certainly been very successful in promoting the local industry. We've been trying desperately to turn around people and promote the local wines rather than just serve wines on a commercial basis. The problem is that in this area our wines are perceived generally by the public as being expensive, which in a certain way is true because they're mostly boutique wine makers. So they are aiming it basically all for the upper market.

That can be dangerous because the competition there is fairly fierce. And also there is a limit to what people are prepared to pay.

Thank you so much for contributing your own story, Hermann.