



GOING THE DISTANCE

Deciding to stay rather than sell the family farm has paid off for a winemaking mother and daughter.

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ANYONE who could buy 60ha of prime grazing country in the midst of productive apple growing land for \$30,000 would reckon they had a bargain. OK, so it was 1976 and land prices were a lot different in those days. As well, the property's location - in the heart of Western Australia's Great Southern at Mt Barker - was a long way from the much more fancied Margaret River region, for fine wine production. But the new owners of the land which had been on the market for eight years - (the late) Ian Tyrer and his wife Linda - were excited young pioneers of the region, happy to take up the grape and wine challenge. This was despite the daunting prospect of what lay ahead, travelling thousands of kilometres from Perth at every opportunity to establish a vineyard which they firmly

believed would produce the fine grapes they needed for premium winemaking. And so it proved to be - bearing the label Galafrey, taken from "gala," French for festivities, while "frey" derives from a Nordic god of happiness - even though the agony of effort and increasing costs were constant companions. After Ian's death, wife and daughter Kim battled with the decision of what they should do - sell up and move on or stay - a difficult choice given the times of tough industry competition and indifferent returns. But the ghost of bearded, belly bubbling Ian Tyrer hung everywhere in the property - too powerful for wife and daughter to ignore. Besides Kim, from a very early age, had followed her father throughout the vineyard and winery, intrigued by so many aspects of winemaking while girls of

a similar age in the area were more likely to be dressing dolls. The first vines were planted in 1977 and today - 40 years on - Galafrey boasts a sound line-up of styles to please most palates. Over its four decades, the philosophy has not changed. Ian Tyrer once told me: "We have the flavour so you can build everything else around it. It is our foundation." Even with her grounding in the business, Kim admits it was a huge learning curve taking over as winemaker in 2011, aged 25. "I did not want to be the one to lose the family farm," she said. Now 39 and mother of two, Kim helps her mother run the wine business whenever there is time from winemaking, while husband Nigel Rowe manages the unirrigated vineyard beginning the journey towards traditional wine styles that can live long

periods, while producing reserve wines as the opportunity arises. For good measure Kim is actively involved in industry affairs, becoming president of the Mt Barker Wine Producers' Association at a time of serious district decline with cellar door numbers having dropped in the last 15 years from 28 to 6. Only four of the six have full time cellar door facilities but there are still many grape growers in the region whose fruit is valued by winemakers in other parts of WA. She also enjoys respect in her role as an industry judge. Somewhat surprisingly, the most popular Galafrey wine at cellar door is the delicate tropically flavoursome muller thurgau - a cross of riesling and sylvaner made at Geisenheim, Germany, in 1882 by Dr Muller, a Swiss from Thurgau. While the variety's use in Australia has been limited

over the years, the Tyrers have persisted because "it is a serious really nice drink for the right occasion and it goes well with food". Riesling is the label's leading wine but cabernet could be the tortoise in the contest. Today, plantings have extended to 13ha but the once hoped for annual vintage of some 200 tonnes has come down significantly. Ian died in 2003, aged 56. It resulted in Kim having to give up a promising seven-year career in visual arts though the family, including Ian, were able to celebrate her skills with labels she produced for a number of wines. At the age of 17 and still at high school one of her paintings - a portrait of a winemaker, in this case her father - was hung in the WA Art Gallery. Such were her achievements that she was chosen on a regional panel for Arts

Australia. "There is a strong link between art and winemaking," she said. "There are so many important decisions to be made whether you start with a blank canvas or a tonne of grapes fresh from the vine." Among Galafrey's eight wines is a bubbly from riesling - a first for the region according to the ladies. "Galafrey has ended up as part of the family but that's what family wineries are all about really," said Linda, "a bit like an old faithful dog." Third-generation, seven-year-old Jack also gets into grape picking as well as helping at crushing time and even tasting before alcohol becomes part of the wine's progress. Once a cellar door visitor asked him: "What you got there Jack?" as the youngster was about to take a sample sip. "Grape juice?" Came the reply from Jack: "cabernet sauvignon".



Above photo: Viticulturist at work with Nigel Rowe.



Above photo: Kim and Linda Tyrer of Galafrey Wines.



Above photo: Ian and Linda Tyrer.



Above photo: Ian Tyrer.

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