



CELLAR CLUB INC.

"The First Fifteen Years"

1981 - 1996

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THE BEGINNING OF THE CELLAR CLUB INC

With the Club's 15th Anniversary rapidly approaching, I thought it would be appropriate, at this time, to briefly cover the history of the Club, and in particular, how we came to be in existence.

In late 1980, a small number of people with a keen interest in wine thought it would be a good idea to try and form a wine club in the Northern Suburbs. They had no idea how many other people would be interested, as at that time the making and drinking of wine was in its infancy and there were very few wine makers in New Zealand with the knowledge and skills to match the quality of wine we now take for granted.

The original people called an informal meeting on 18 November 1980, which was held at the Broderick Inn. Ian Yackley from the Waiwharangi Wine Club spoke on the establishment of their Club and provided a copy of the Club's written constitution. It was then decided that a steering committee would be appointed and the necessary steps taken to establish a club in the area. The original people involved were Graeme Fountain, John Hubbard, Heather Kermack, Ron and Cheryl Owen, Kathy Power and Adrienne von Tunzelmann.

A public meeting was then advertised and held at the Burma Lodge on Tuesday 10 February 1981 and over 100 interested people turned up. Michael Morris (now part owner of Te Mata Vineyard in Havelock North) spoke on the historical developments and current situation of the wine industry in New Zealand. Afterwards, an open discussion took place on the possibility of forming a wine club in the area.

Graeme Fountain, who incidentally, is the only one of the original people who is still a club member, was authorised to act as the prospective club's first Chairman and to prepare the rules for the operation of the club as an Incorporated Society.

On 10 March 1981, the first official meeting of the club took place at the Burma Lodge. John Morrison from Cooks Wines spoke of his Company's philosophies and the trend towards the production of better wines in New Zealand.

The next meeting was on 15 April 1981 and this was advertised in the Independent Herald and in the Newlands liquor shop. At the meeting, it was decided that any left over wine from each evening would be raffled; this would also raise funds for the Club. It was also decided that the current admission charge of \$2.00 would need to increase to \$2.50 for future tastings!

At the next meeting on 12 May 1981, a ballot was carried out to determine a suitable club name. Three names were suggested, being The Corkscrew Club, the Kau Kau Wine Club and the Cellar Club. By popular vote the latter name was chosen.

The following meeting on 9 June 1981 saw the introduction of the club's written constitution and after some discussion, everyone was asked to sign it. The document was then lodged with the Registrar of Incorporated Societies and within two months the club would be officially registered. It was also suggested at this meeting that members should bring their own tasting glasses rather than use the plastic throw-away glasses that were available.

The meeting on 7 July 1981 confirmed the registration of the club and advised that the first AGM would be held the following month. The first office bearers and committee members for the following year would be elected at this AGM.

The first AGM was then held on 11 August 1981 at the Burma Lodge. The steering committee plus 38 people attended. The office bearers elected were:

President	Graeme Fountain	
Vice President	Ron Owen	
Secretary	Glenys Owen	
Treasurer	Kathy Power	
Committee Members	Ann-Marie Lee	Jocelyn Fountain
	Heather McKerchair	Lois Robertson
	Ron Thomson	

Since then the club has gone from strength to strength and now has 60 financial members. Over the years, the club has become well known in wine circles and enjoys a high standing with wine makers and wine representatives.

With the interest and knowledge that members can gain from the club, I think we need to thank those people who had the foresight back in 1980 to recognise the need for a wine club in the area. Long may the Cellar Club continue.

THE CELLAR CLUB INC THE YEARS 1981 TO 1986

I arrived in Wellington in 1980 with an interest in wine that had been sparked by living in London with visits to France and Italy. I had never been to Wellington previously, let alone purchased a bottle of wine in the city. Jocelyn and I flatted in Old Coach Road in Johnsonville for 15 months. Our shopping used to be completed on Thursday evening after work, or on Saturday morning, in the Johnsonville Mall. It was during those shopping jaunts that we met Kathy Power in the Trust wine shop that fronted onto Johnsonville Road. Kathy was instrumental in getting the group of interested people together, and as Ron Thomson has described, the Cellar Club was born.

After starting with an international cricketer as our first guest speaker, we had the "Who's Who" of the Wellington wine scene as guest speakers over the next five years. Obtaining those speakers was always the most significant and challenging task of the committee members during those early years. However, on reflection, an excellent job was done. How is this for a list - Brett Newell, John Buck, Geoff Kelly, Michael Morris, Peter Rumble, Ken Kirkpatrick, Allen Hogan, Mike Bodnar and Peter Withington (John Bull in Bond Street).

There were some wonderful highlights from those evenings. There is one in particular that is worth a mention here. Geoff Kelly presented a champagne tasting in June 1982. I repeat these comments from the July 1982 newsletter. "Geoff's choice of the night was the NV Pol Roger. He gave it a strong recommendation. For those who want to put some Pol Roger in their cellars, Liquorland had a large supply on their shelves in mid-June at \$14.79 per bottle. Remember Geoff's words that this is excellent champagne, at a very cheap price, the likes of which we shall never see again. So don't wait!" Don't wait indeed! The 1976 Deutz also featured in the tasting. It was for sale at the time for \$25.80. Wouldn't it be lovely to be able to buy this Christmas' champagne at those prices.

Many other evenings can be recalled without reference to the history book. Mike Bodnar, known for journalism exploits at the time, spoke to us on glassware. This evening was particularly successful and entertaining and I seem to recall we had a record attendance. Record attendances placed strain on our organisational resource, especially when the evenings were held in the "dungeon" of the Burma

Lodge. Premises were always topical, but the Trust was invariably able to accommodate us.

Ken Kirkpatrick presented a great evening with some doctoring of wines - salt, sugar, the same wine served at room temperature and cold - the taste buds were put to the test. Rumble, different as always, introduced us to the "atom-smasher" to warm the reds in winter.

The wine companies also featured on our guest list during those years. I guess it is not surprising to see Montana on the list on a couple of occasions, as well as Corbans. They were joined by Mission, St Helena, Matawhero, and Cooks among others. The 1982 opinion of the Mission wines was not favourable. There were best summed up by that man who always called a spade a spade - Charlie Ell - "the best wine of the night was the quaffing wine." (It was not a Mission label!)

The mid-year and Christmas dinners became a feature of the club's calendar from the beginning. The venues will bring back memories for some of the members - Christmas buffet at the Burma Lodge, Ma Maison, Frasers, Roxburgh, Oriels, Earl of Pembroke - the names have changed, the BYO status may have changed, but mostly, the restaurants have remained.

One of my favourite exercises as Club President was to calculate the cost of tasting the wines at the Club each year. I note that for two consecutive years the cost per taste was 67 cents for members. I thought then that was a very effective and cheap method to find out if a wine was to your style and taste. I guess that figure is rather more now, but I am sure the conclusion will be the same.

Our club may be less pretentious than some others in the city, but it has served a wonderful purpose for its many members over the past 15 years. I am convinced it will continue to do so.

Graeme Fountain.

FROM MEDIOCRE HYBRID TO OUTSTANDING VARIETAL
THE NEW ZEALAND WINE SCENE 1980-1995

This Cellar Club was established in 1980 and incorporated in 1981 for the purpose of appreciating New Zealand wine. The 15 year period of the Club's life has seen a remarkable improvement in the quality New Zealand wine.

In 1978 the Chief Judge at our national wine competition, an American, Dr Maynard Amerine tactfully told interviewers what he thought of our wine "New Zealand makes the best New Zealand wine in the world". Then a lot of New Zealand wine was made from hybrids which are a cross of European and American grapes bred to produce hardier vines with larger yield. The disadvantage is a coarse wine, especially in the aftertaste, which lacks in body and flavour. The reader may recall the Cold Duck or the Bakano hybrid dry red.

The 1980s saw a consistent drive by entrepreneurs in the industry towards producing quality varietal wines. As Raymond Chan explained in his September presentation to the Club, varietal grapes are those used to make the quality wines of France. New regions were tried like Marlborough, Otago, and Martinborough with a success that refuted the original sceptics.

This drive included improvements with vine canopy management to optimize grape ripening, experiments with different methods of fermentation, and the acknowledgment that even excellent wine like any other product has to be marketed.

The figures and praises speak for themselves. There were 78 medals including 7 golds awarded to New Zealand wines at the 1994 International Wine Challenge in London which is the world's largest wine competition. The prestigious American wine magazine, The Wine Spectator, featured 10 pages on New Zealand wines concluding that "New Zealand is on the way to becoming one of the world's great white wine making areas". Bill Gunn the British Master of Wine is also impressed with New Zealand reds having "perhaps the biggest transformation with Cabernets having mellow plummy flavours and Pinots continuing to startle with their vivid black cherry aromas". In dollar terms the annual export of wines is approaching the \$100 million mark.

The future looks promising as well as challenging. Bob Campbell sees the danger of another "wine lake" and "vine pull" like 1985 if the present rate of plantings continues without the sales. For the consumer there is the promise of greater variety at improved quality. The Club has not been disappointed with the results of the last 15 years and looks forward with high expectation to an exciting future for New Zealand wines during the next 15 years.

Frank McCarthy

MEMORABLE TASTINGS

The Years 1990 to 1995

From the beginning in 1981, one of the basic aims of the Cellar Club Inc. was the appreciation of New Zealand wines in convivial surroundings. In the latter years, this emphasis has continued with many great tasting experiences with the epitome of New Zealand wines, but balanced occasionally with some imported wines, just to keep the assessment of our wines in perspective.

The Club has continued the themes of previous years with visits from winemakers, wine company representatives and experts in many different aspects of the wine world.

In fact, the list of speakers in recent years reads like a "Who's Who". Wine makers and Wine Managers such as Allan Johnson (Palliser Estate) and Andrew Shackelton (Te Kairanga) from Martinborough; Allan Hogan (Te Whare Ra) Almut Lorenz (Merlin) Warwick Stinchbury (Jackson Estate) from Marlborough; and, from further afield, Hermann Seifried (Seifried Estate), Tom van Damm (Rongapai), Warwick Orchiston (Mission), - yes they had improved!, Elise Montgomery (Vidals), Alwyn Corban (Ngatarawa), Denis Irwin (Matawhero) ...the list goes on.

Then, there were the specialist tastings - still fresh in our minds the visit by Grant Jones of Regional Wines and Spirits. His presentation on "Food and Wine Compatibility" drew record crowds, so much so that we had to transfer the venue to larger premises! Did we all agree that Villa Maria Shiraz was the ideal accompaniment to chocolate dessert?

Bill Barnes, Consular General from the American Embassy gave us an excellent insight to Californian wines - especially remembered is the range of Zinandels! His talk was full of anecdotes and historical references to famous American people and their appreciation of wine. His presentation was voted "Tasting of the year in 1993.

My own talk on "Pinot Noir from around the World" in 1990 sparked an interest in Red Burgundy for many people and introduced us to choice of which "clones" of Pinot Noir should be grown in Martinborough?

As mentioned above it is important to keep the standard of New Zealand wines in perspective and we have been treated to some great tastings of imported wines. Malcolm MacIntyre (Kitchener Wines) introduced the wines of the Rhone, (and several Champenoise tastings).

Brett Newell (Eurowine) showed us superb Italian wines and at really competitive prices. These were the wines of Terre del Tempo and Boscaini. Italian wines have certainly improved!

One of the real highlights was the recent "Tour of France" - sub titled "Back to Basics" with Raymond Chan. A visit to all of the main regions in France was included via some great wines.

Over recent years, a tasting of Gold Medal wines from either the Air New Zealand Wine Awards or the Royal Easter Show has been a standard part of the annual programme. These have been hosted by Wine Judges and experts such as John Comerford and David Weatherburn - and others! These do illustrate the epitome of New Zealand wine.

A mention must be made of regular speakers such as Baxter Fagan in Back-to basics tastings, John Forgie from Babich and John Follas from Rumbles Wine Cellar and the representatives from Companies such as Selaks, Montana, Corbans (including Alex Campbell and the Wine Game!), N.Z. Wines and Spirits, Moray Estate and Negotiants.

A trip to Martinborough to "Meet the Wine-makers" has become a biennial event. The wineries "over the hill" have certainly turned it on for us during both of the recent successful visits.

The traditional mid-year and Christmas dinners have, of course, continued. These continue to grow in popularity - so much so it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a BYO restaurant that can accommodate 50 plus members !

The decision to start a formal cellar for the Cellar Club Inc in 1991 seemed a logical step so that wines could be aged to show their true potential. These are now served at specialist tastings or at the AGM each year.

The Club year now starts with an informal Bar-b-que in January where members can meet and discuss the wines they have discovered over the holidays with a liberal sampling of BYO wines of course !

This theme is continued throughout the year with the emphasis on the appreciation of wine in convivial company and surroundings. The Cellar Club Inc may not be the most exclusive wine club in Wellington (and it certainly not the most expensive!) but there is a certain pride in tasting excellent wines, at minimal cost (still less than \$1.40 per taste !) - with no pretensions.

As Myra Waldo (an American Wine Writer) once said:-

"Wine should be a part of every day life, completely free of fuss and feathers and entirely without pretension".

We could not have put it in a better way and we are sure the next 15 years will be even more exciting and rewarding for the Cellar Club Inc. with many more "Memorable Tastings".

Yes !

I would like to learn more about the activities of the Cellar Club Inc.

Please contact me.

Name.....

Address.....

Phone : Business..... Home.....

OR

Telephone one of the following:-

Alan Evans

*479-7210 Home
388-8355 Business*

Derek Thompson

*478-7208 Home
566-3058 Business*

Francesca Menzies

389-2052 Home