

Jenny Houghton

Former pilot and balloonist turned vineyard owner, Maygars Hill vineyard, Euroa

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Spring in the Strathbogies is such a glorious time of renewal, fresh growth and hopes for the coming vintage.

I love the way the vines use all their stored energy to burst onto the scene. Stark trellises are transformed with a tinge of green and then the whole vineyard erupts into green leaves.

I just love being in the vineyard – even when there's 11,999 vines left to prune!

I was brought up on a farm in the south west of WA, and I was involved from an early age with the hands on running of it. So maybe that explains my love of vineyards.

The aerial crop duster we had kindled an interest in flying that is alive and well in me today many years later. Perhaps it was from flying training that I learned the discipline needed to maintain an orderly vineyard.

I have six acres of vines - three and a bit of shiraz, and two and a bit of cabernet sauvignon.

Setting up from scratch, I took advice from Strathbogie wine masters such as Geoff Elford who had been here for 20 years.

All of them recommended shiraz for this area of the foothills. Cabernet also came up as another variety to try.

I thank heavens for that advice. They do exceptionally well here in the foothills of the Strathbogies. The cabernet has a true “Maygars” character according to the judges.

I added another acre of cabernet after we won a major medal in Sydney at our first attempt and the win went straight to my head.

Now, I'm constantly reminded of the extra work I created as I mumble and grumble my way through the last acre of pruning or slashing.

Both varieties have different characteristics not just in the nose and palate but in the vineyard.

Cabernet is dignified, calm and gracious. Shiraz can be wild and very difficult to tame. However, the rewards if you get it right are exceptional. Bit like an adolescent really.

This little patch of dirt around Longwood not only produces outstanding reds but is the only part of the world that has produced three Victoria Cross recipients.

Burton, Maygar and Tubb. Burton and Tubb were recipients in WW1 and Maygar during the Boer War in 1902.

Lesley Maygar farmed up the road towards Ruffy and returned to farming after his gallantry in South Africa. He re-enlisted in 1914 and subsequently led the last 40 men off Gallipoli and was then sent to Palestine.

He died during the Charge of the Light Horse at Beersheba. In memory of the 90th anniversary of Maygar's death, we named our flagship wine The Beersheba, made from our stunning 2006 cabernet vintage.

I'm very proud of our wine and our association with Lt Col Maygar and his living family. In fact, our Maygar cabernet was on the dining table last month when Victoria Cross recipient Keith Payne of Mackay in Qld took the Beersheba and the shiraz to the Victoria Cross, George Cross Association annual dinner in London.

Prince Charles and Camilla were the guests of honour. I'm still waiting to hear if Charles was impressed with the results of our endeavours to create an organic vineyard!

www.strathbogieboutiquewines.com.au

Next issue, we feature more on Maygars Hill.