

Taylors

Taylors Wines, which is now in its 42nd year as a family-owned wine company, continues to prioritise innovation, reports Katrina Holden.

As far as family-owned wine businesses go, Taylors are rather unique. Bill Taylor Snr and his sons Bill and John were firstly wine merchants in Sydney, all incredibly passionate about wines, particularly French clarets from Bordeaux such as Château Mouton Rothschild. The family were inspired to produce their own wines and began their search for the perfect piece of land to establish a vineyard. They established in 1969 a 178 hectare vineyard by the Wakefield River in Clare Valley, convinced of the promise from its terra rossa soil.

Coming to the land from a hospitality background, says current managing director Mitchell Taylor, gives Taylors a different perspective.

"It's made us a very sales and marketing oriented style of company," said Mitchell. "We've really got in and understood our customers and understood where the opportunities lie and then go back and make wines of quality in the areas where we can see success. I think that's been very helpful for us as we've grown, rather than to be isolated and being a production based sort of company and then come with products to the market and present them that way, we tend to work backwards the other way through which makes us fairly unique and helps us to be in tune with the latest trends."

The family are all heavily involved in the business. Bill Taylor is current chairman of Taylors Wines, while his son Mitchell, who was winemaker of the business from 1989 to 1997, now runs every facet of the company and is active in a number of industry associations including the Liquor Merchants Association of Australia and Winemakers' Federation of Australia. Mitchell's brother and company director Justin is based in the US, overseeing the important US and Canadian markets, while youngest brother Clinton and fellow company director is the project manager responsible for sales and production.

The spirit of innovation is strong at Taylors. They were the first Australian winery in August 2004 to convert 100 per cent over to screw cap, having been big pioneers in the screw cap initiative which started in the Clare Valley, and were embraced with their 2000 rieslings. More recently, Taylors introduced a fully carbon-neutral range of wines under the Eighty Acres label. "We've had a good response to the Eighty Acres range and we're looking at investigating

whether to extend that to other parts of the Taylors range going forward but we're pretty positive on that front," said Mitchell.

"We've won two major environmental awards with Eighty Acres so that's been pleasing and we've got WFA Accreditation and are part of the EntWine program. We're re-establishing the Wakefield River and getting the vineyard up to scratch there. We've probably held back a bit because we're waiting for leads with government and where they're heading with the program. We're certainly keen to look at more ways to reduce our carbon footprint."

At the winery, the new Jarraman cellar has been set up to be a state of the art winery facility with the ability to do whole bunch pressing on quite a large scale – "which is great for us as a business," said Mitchell.

September saw the launch of a new range of wines called Taylors Winemaking Project, giving Taylors the opportunity to experiment with new parcels and new varieties.

"Naturally we've created a botrytis riesling that we'll be releasing later in the year, following the advent of all the rain that came through in 2011 vintage. We're also releasing a GSM and a vermentino. The range has great new packaging and it's an exciting project for us to experiment and start to get a feel for what are the areas to explore within the marketplace. Rather than create a whole new range and start to sell it, we just really wanted to test the market and test our ability to make certain batches of wine. The name is really what it's all about, it's just trying and pushing new things and testing our skills and looking at what are some quality varieties coming through that may have potential moving forward," said Mitchell. Given the small batches, the range will mainly be focused at independents and on-premise.

The entire Taylors sales team were recently all provided with ipads as a working tool, launched in conjunction with their provider, which Mitchell says has enabled Taylors to get really close to their customers and understand their needs. "It's enabled us to provide exactly what they need instantly, for instance tasting notes or brochures as they're presenting, rather than having all our area managers loaded up with lots of paper material. It's really going

L-R: Justin, Clinton, Bill and Mitchell Taylor



through the specific needs and tailoring the business planning we're doing with all our customers. It also helps us analyse what's in the market and identify where are some distribution gaps – it helps us get that data through to head office instantly and we can be fairly proactive in making the right choices and making sure the stock is turned into the market fairly quickly," said Mitchell.

The Taylors business is currently 80 per cent domestic, with exports representing 20 per cent of the business. Prior to the GFC, exports had been 25 per cent of the sales. "We're looking at making some changes and getting a bit of momentum back in our export sales and we're up on last year which is good so we're starting to realign and refocus on them, working with better partners in some of the new markets we're going into. We're looking at Asia as well as North America," said Mitchell.

As one of the 12 companies involved in the collaborative Australia's First Families of Wine, Taylors has seen positive responses in key export markets where they have been working as a group with AFFW.

"It's really great to be a part of it because they're seeing an excitement and leadership back in the Australian category. The UK group is going very well, all the key customers look forward to our visits when we visit as a group and the media are very much on side with the concept and we've had a great trip through Canada which was very successful also," said Mitchell.

On the domestic front, Mitchell says AFFW are keen to do some more events with key customers and partnering with the right people.

"We've got such a divergent group with a lot of quality from all aspects of Australia but it's got some very positive implications when we start to position it with the right people that can sell quality wine and hand-sell the concept about what we're about," said Mitchell.



AFFW group at the Taylors Vineyards

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