

# Meet Mary Retallack.

Retallack Viticulture managing director Mary Retallack was born in Berri in the Riverland and grew up in Renmark. She has a Bachelor of Applied Science in Conservation and Park Management and a Post Graduate Diploma in Natural Resource Management, as well as a Bachelor of Education and a Graduate Diploma in Viticulture. She is a certified practicing agriculturist, a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors Course and she recently completed the Australian Rural Leadership Program.

The past 15 years have seen her gain extensive viticultural practical experience both within Australia and abroad, which has included employment as a viticultural lecturer (TAFE SA and Okanagan University College in Canada), project leader on 'Research to Practice' for the Cooperative Research Centre for Viticulture, a winery hand in the Sonoma Valley (California), vineyard manager at Mountadam Vineyards (Eden Valley, South Australia), and a senior consultant/viticulturist at Scholefield Robinson Horticultural Services.

Retallack recently started her own viticultural consulting business, Retallack Viticulture, and is a non-executive director of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation.

## What inspired you to work in viticulture and how have you got to where you are?

I grew up on a fruit block in Renmark growing wine, table and dried grapes, apricots and pears, but after experiencing the downturn in the late 1980s (and the sale of the family property), I didn't have an immediate interest in viticulture. After qualifying to be a park ranger, I 'fell back' into the wine industry in 1995 as it was starting to prosper again. I met Kevin Fiddaman and Crockett Tonkin and with them helped to start the Viticulture and Wine Studies Program at Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE working in the Fleurieu Peninsula, Adelaide Hills and Limestone Coast wine regions. An early influence was watching Jancis Robinson's Wine Course on the telly. This opened my mind to the world of wine and showed me that it had the capacity to be diverse and fun, and that there were so many aspects of the industry to explore.

## What aspect of your work do you enjoy the most or get the most satisfaction from?

I enjoy working alongside grapegrowers to find solutions to problems, watching people grow as they develop new skills and confidence, and contributing to the strategic direction of our industry through my position on the GWRDC Board. I get a lot of satisfaction out of knowing that it is the progression of the viticulturist's work that crafts the potential of wine from the beginning.

## Who do you think is the most influential person in the Australian wine industry today?

I am inspired by the behind-the-scenes contributions of humble people who are passionate about what they do and the industry they are in, and people who go beyond their comfort zone to try new things. One piece of advice I was given by a well-known viticulturist early in my career was "never stop reading".

## What keeps you awake at night?

Apart from noisy koalas and occasional rain on my tin roof, I think about all the third and fourth generation grapegrowers living on small acreages where I grew up in the Riverland and the challenges they are now facing to adapt and remain viable in the current climate. I think about the need for capacity building in people and the courage required by those who need to exit the industry (from both warm and cooler climates) to forge a new future. I am surprised by the number of growers who need to be growing A- and B-grade quality fruit in cooler and temperate regions who continue to grow lower quality fruit. Ultimately this is unsustainable in the long term.



*The Australian & New Zealand Grapegrower & Winemaker keeps me up to date with industry affairs and research outcomes. It showcases grower innovation and topical solutions to seasonal challenges.*

– Mary Retallack

## What was the last big-ticket equipment purchase you made for your business? Would you recommend the equipment to colleagues?

Having recently started my own business, there have been many big-ticket purchases. For me, the best investments have been in a good bookkeeper, not taking any short-cuts in advertising (branding and setting up a website) and purchasing reliable business equipment.

The piece of equipment I would purchase if I was running my own vineyard would be an undervine slasher. The Pellenc hand-held Spectron and Selectiv' on-board sorting system are of particular interest and have a capacity to revolutionise the way we sample fruit in the vineyard and pick grapes in the future.

## What do you think is the Australian wine industry's biggest challenge and what is your solution to the problem?

Apart from the obvious problems of oversupply and restructuring, I think the wine industry's biggest challenge is sound leadership and the need to invest in the capacity building of individuals to adapt to new challenges. An understanding of good governance at regional, state and national levels is a must for constructive discussions and unity at all levels in the wine industry.

## From a research and development perspective, is there one single piece of research in the wine industry that has really influenced you or your directions in viticulture?

I think a combination of continual learning, the breadth of topics researched and the application of R&D outcomes are all important foundations for being adaptive and being able to demonstrate best practice. I am particularly interested in 'blue sky' experimental research – investment which leads to resilience and adaptive technologies, gaining a better understanding of how we can best utilise the balance of natural systems and the practical application of knowledge in the vineyard.

## The Ark question: The world is flooding ... which two wines (white and red) would you take onto the Ark?

I don't think two bottles would be enough! I would be happy as long as the wines were interesting, well made and expressive of varietal and regional character. Assuming it was a big flood to make up for the big dry we are experiencing, I would require multiple bottles for the duration. My wish list would include early picked Viognier, modestly oaked Chardonnay, Tempranillo, Montepulciano, Saperavi, chocolaty Shiraz and rich Cabernet Sauvignon. ■