

NZ award, RS acceptance speech

Thank you all for being here today. I am truly honored to share this moment with you.

I can honestly say, with no fear of contradiction, that the 1980s period, when I enjoyed the prestigious title of New Zealand Government Viticultural Scientist based at Ruakura Research Station was the **professional highlight** of my life! And this so on a multitude of accounts, not least of which was viticultural research accomplished and published from this period. This was because I was able to work with such an impressive team of co-workers spread throughout the country, many of whom may be involved in this little ceremony.

Even the timing of my period as Government Viticulturist can be seen as a little incongruous; the New Zealand Winegrowers who honour me with this award were not yet in existence! I worked in New Zealand at a time when the world was **just beginning to appreciate** New Zealand wine and the impact that it would have on the world, as was attested to by the Second International Cool Climate Viticulture and Oenology Symposium held in Auckland in January 1988.

I had the privilege of working at the internationally renowned Ruakura Research Station and Te Kauwhata Research Station, and alongside DSIR personnel. My work also took me to Auckland and involved supporting technical and extension teams in Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, Marlborough, and other regions. These experiences gave me a deep appreciation for the power and quality of emerging New Zealand wine, as well as the dedication and talent of the people driving its success.

An important part of my leaving Australia for New Zealand was a belief in **Cool Climate wine quality**, soon to be reinforced by many New Zealand experiences. However, my initial memories of New Zealand were very much involved with phylloxera as it was spreading rapidly throughout all New Zealand regions. I worked with Dr Doug then Petra King from Entomology at Ruakura, and Allan Clarke Extension Specialist to understand and control this pest. The solution to plant on rootstocks was well known. What was unknown then was the best rootstock to use and for which soil type, with further issues of possible incorrect naming and virus status in the mix! These were all issues addressed by our team. And by the way, the discovery was made by King and his team was a world first: that phylloxera could be spread by mechanical harvesting.

I had the opportunity to further develop expertise in canopy management and trellis design in New Zealand which led to the development of grapevine training systems with Maori names, the Te Kauwhata Two Tier (TK2T) and the Ruakura Twin Two Tier (RT2T)! Subsequently I have learned of New Zealand research into Future Vineyards in Marlborough at BRI and at Delegat Wine Company with which I have been involved. I am now working with apple research colleague Dr Stuart Tustin of Hawkes Bay and 4 others

to promote a new design for winegrape vineyards which promises to double yields and improve quality with mechanisable design!

Much of the 1980s research was quite elementary involving creating and cataloguing healthy germplasm collections, and conducting regional rootstock and variety trials. My one regret was not performing more clonal selection and rootstock trials, although I am presently sharing new methodologies with Delegat Wine Company. My other regret is that this work did not continue until the present.

The present New Zealand wine industry is a model for a sustainable future by anticipating future trends well in advance. Geographically it has been dealt a kind hand by the low latitude location and large coastline compared to other wine producing countries. The Government and industry have also invested well in new technology and should continue doing so. It was my pleasure to be part of the first NZ Delegation to OIV in Luxembourg in 1989, and to deliver a warning to that body of the projected impact of climate change on the global production of wine, a story now frequently repeated. Looking ahead, the southern hemisphere location of vineyards seems climatically favourable even though consumers reside in the north. This argument relies on the quality of location of the grapevine plant, rather than consumer proximity, as long as shipping costs remain low.

The 1980s period and preceding decades was special for developments in viticultural science. In this period Professor Nelson Shaulis of Cornell University published concepts of canopy management and early studies in vineyard mechanisation and harvesting. These developments were to subsequently influence viticulture worldwide including New Zealand. Further, since I had been a PhD student of Shaulis at Cornell in the 1970's, canopy management was a focus of my NZ research, emphasising impacts on yield and wine quality. Vertically divided training systems were first described in New Zealand in this period and introduced to local industry. The Scott Henry system was initially developed in Oregon; now, there is more in Marlborough than anywhere else in the world! Much of the material for the OIV prize winning *Sunlight into Wine* was sourced in New Zealand and from local research. This is not to suggest that all is well in New Zealand at present. Local growers will be surprised to hear that yields and wine quality could be improved for the majority of vineyards if they make the simple transition from VSP to Scott Henry; at present they appear not prepared to learn this simple change, concentrating more so on leaf removal.

One thing is for certain that the wine industry will continue to change. Presently global consumption is in decline, a trend driven in part by health concerns regarding alcohol. Acetaldehyde, a metabolite of alcohol in the human body, is also a carcinogen. Perhaps the future of the wine business may lie in a pill to be taken along with a glass of wine, so that enjoyment might still occur while also avoiding health concerns. There is high likelihood of research success in this area, as outlined in a recent January 2025 article

in Australian and New Zealand Grapegrower and Winemaker, see also recent articles on my website www.smartvit.com.au.

As I reflect on this journey, I feel immense gratitude for the opportunities I have had and the exceptional individuals I have worked with. To the New Zealand Winegrowers, thank you for this incredible honour. It is a privilege to be recognised by an industry I hold so dear.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported me along the way, from colleagues to friends and family. Your encouragement has been invaluable. Finally, thank you all for being here today to celebrate this milestone with me. It means more than I can express.

Dr Richard Smart