

KAESLER



A century of tradition

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The Kaesler Vineyards were established in 1893. The family, sprung from Silesian pioneers who came to the Barossa Valley in the 1840s, took up 96 acres in 1891. They cleared the scrub and in 1893 planted out the entire holding with Shiraz, Grenache, Mataro (Mourvedre) and White Hermitage vines.

Some of the gnarled dry-grown Shiraz still remains and provides the backbone of the intense wines produced from the sandy loam of this prime viticultural block.

Over nearly a century of hard and stoical work, the Kaeslers at times removed patches of vines to plant fruit trees – apricots, peaches and prunes – to keep the farm going. They had their own horses, stabled in the pug wall and brick building that is now the cellar door. They had some cows, too. The cow shed has become the present restaurant.

But there were always vines, most of them for red and fortified wine. More Grenache was planted in the 1930s. It grew well and had the high sugar content needed by the taste then for fortified wines. More Shiraz was planted in 1961, 1962 and in the 1970s. It could be used for fortified wine, but was also excellent for table wine as European migration helped turn Australia away from its ports and sheries. Now more than 70% of Kaesler's red wine vines are 40 or more years old – age that shows in the brilliance of the wines.

The Kaeslers had some white wine varieties, but they were not the sort of people to be taken in by the apparent fad for white wines that sadly affected so many other Barossa holdings. This fad led to the Government-sponsored "vine pulls" in the 1980s that destroyed much of the valley's stock of irreplaceable century-old Shiraz, Grenache and Mataro vines. Sadly, the struggle to survive forced three Kaesler brothers off this historic property.

The Kaeslers and later owners did not make their own wine. Traditionally, they sold their grapes to the Seppelts. The exceptional Kaesler wines now being produced had their beginning in 1997 when a young winemaker at Cellarmaster just a few hundred metres away at Dorrien noticed the power and intensity of the fruit.

Barossa Valley - the “cream of South Australia”

Adelaide’s founder, Colonel William Light, gave the Barossa its name. He journeyed into the area in 1837 and named the “Barossa Ranges” after the site in Spain of a British victory over the French earlier in the century. A clerical mistake quickly reduced this to “Barossa”.

German scientist Johannes Menge looked into the valley in 1839 and declared that this was the “cream of South Australia”. With astonishing foresight, he called it “New Silesia” and saw it as a place for “flourishing vineyards and orchards and fields of corn...”

[Menge, a dramatically eccentric man, was originally employed by the South Australian Company as a geologist. The ultra conservative General Manager of the company, David McLaren, could not cope with Menge and fired him. Interestingly, McLaren’s name is remembered in McLaren Vale, South Australia’s second major vine-growing area.]

Menge’s enthusiasm so inspired Charles Flaxman, the personal representative of George Fife Angas, the man behind the scheme that established South Australia, that he promptly bought 28,000 acres of the valley on Angas’s behalf – almost bankrupting the company.

Meanwhile, in the Silesian area of Prussia, members of the Old Lutheran Church, faced persecution from a directive of King Frederick William III that there should be only one Protestant church. Pastor August Kavel, one of their leaders, went to London to seek help from Angas. It was a shrewd move. Angas, as a noted dissenter, was genuinely moved. As an entrepreneur, he also knew the effect hundreds of dogged, hard working and peaceful German immigrants would have on the new colony. He lent them the money to make the voyage.

Some 200 arrived in 1838. Hundreds more followed. By 1842, some families had moved to the Barossa Valley, first to Bethany and then to Langmeil, later given the Aboriginal name for a waterhole, “Tanunda”.

Gottfried Kaesler, a shoemaker, was 36 years old when he, his second wife, daughter and son, arrived in South Australia aboard the *Patell* on September 18, 1845. He built a cottage at Bethany and when it burned down some months later, moved to Langmeil, where over years he and his sons made hay and planted fruit trees – and vines.

The German settlers were good farmers and had been growing vines for centuries. But this was a completely new country, with a different climate and different soils. They planted dozens of varieties to see what grew best. Shiraz and Grenache flourished. They had a high sugar content and, importantly, could be grown dry and still survive the blistering summers.

The knowledge quickly spread back to Silesia where new migrants carefully selected cuttings which preceded the phylloxera pest that was to destroy the vineyards in Australia’s eastern States.

The settlers moved out wider in the valley, leasing back much of Angas’s 28,000 acres. One of them, Johann Carl Schultz took up a portion of Section 122, along the road to Angas Park, later to be known as Nuriootpa, another Aboriginal name. It comprised 60 acres and one rood or thereabouts and was the land “which lies to the south of a line drawn from a point on the Government Road forming the westerly boundary of the said Section distant from the northwesterly corner thereof seven chains and nine links or thereabouts to a point on the easterly boundary of the said Section distant seven chains and six links or thereabouts from the easterly corner thereof”

On June 2, 1882 Schultz transferred the land to Johann Ernst Schultz, a farmer from Siegersdorf. In turn, on October 27, 1882 this Schultz transferred the land to Friedrich August Domke. Apparently none of them cleared or worked the block.

Gottfried Kaesler had died in 1873. His son Daniel prospered from the sale of hay, and took up a number of properties. He sought land to provide farms for his six sons and at one time the Kaeslers owned land on the other side of Barossa Valley Way opposite the present holding and the areas now occupied by the Kaiser Stuhl (Southport) winery and the nearby Tarac plant. The Kaesler lands were noted as some of the “tidiest” in the district.

On April 23 1891 Daniel bought the Domke 60 acre-block for his fifth son, Paul Hermann Kaesler. He also acquired “40 acres or thereabouts”, part of Section 134, which almost joined Section 122 in the northeastern corner. Some four acres of this were surrendered to the South Australian Railways Commissioner in 1911. Daniel took out a mortgage with the Gramps to finance the purchases.

Paul Hermann Kaesler, born in 1880, was only 11 when his blocks were bought. So it appears the whole extended family moved in to clear away the light scrub and tussocks that covered his future inheritance.

In 1893 the total area was planted with vines. The Kaeslers now knew exactly what to grow. They planted Shiraz, Grenache, Mataro and, in case it should become important, a little “White Hermitage” – probably Semillon.

It was the beginning of a hard struggle. Most of the grapes went off to Seppelts for port or sherry, but even without fortifying it was noticed that in some dry summers the ripe fruit produced wine up to 19% alcohol.

Paul Hermann became the official owner on July 1 1907 and a year later paid off the mortgage held by the Gramps.

In 1917 with grape sales flagging, Paul Hermann pulled up three acres of Shiraz and planted apricots for drying. In the early 1940s he pulled out another three acres and put in peaches. Later he added a couple of acres of prunes. But some more Grenache was planted, apparently in the 1930s.

Three Kaesler sons, Ernst, Arthur and Peter began to take over the running of the property from their father. In November 1944 he transferred the land to them.

Arthur, the youngest, gained the 30-acre “home” block, where the winery, cellar door, restaurant and accommodation are now. Ernst, the eldest, took the “30 acres, 1 rod, 20 perches or thereabouts” immediately to the south along Barossa Valley Way. Peter took the 36 acres in Section 134 fronting the Angaston Road. It was separated from the “home” block by a right of way “about 40 rows of vines long” and three metres wide. He sold his holding in the 1960s.

Arthur saw no future in dried fruit, and in 1961 and 1962 pulled out the fruit trees and replaced them with vines, mostly Shiraz and Grenache, still mainly for port. He also planted Mataro “just to have something different”, Clare Riesling (Crouchen) and some Semillon.

“The demand for port dropped off by 1962 and the other wine styles hadn’t caught on,” Arthur recalled. “We couldn’t get rid of anything. It was hard.”

Even the magical 1893 Shiraz was ignored. “No one wanted it,” Arthur said. He recalled one year in the 1970s when the search for a buyer saw the fruit remain on the vine long after normal vintage. Finally, when he managed to get Thum’s at Lyndoch to take it “the juice looked like blood.” When its sugar content was measured, the Baume was 18%. Arthur also recalled that it took 2-1/2 years to be paid the \$125 a tonne.

It was difficult to survive, but Arthur's foresight in extending the acreage of Shiraz was a crucial investment in the future. This same foresight, and probably stubbornness, kept him from taking the ill-fated swing into white wine in the 1980s. He ignored the "vine pull" that hurt the future of the valley.

But by 1986, he could no longer hold on and he sold the property to local landscape gardener, Toby Heuppauff. Toby continued to sell off the grapes and converted existing buildings to create a restaurant and accommodation units set in distinctive gardens with a long wisteria-covered walkway. He also had some wine made for him under the Kaesler label and sold it through the cellar door. Keeping up his own landscape business, it was an enormous task.

On the southern block, Ernst also got rid of his fruit trees. The last to go was the strip between Ernst and Arthur's houses along Barossa Valley Way. This strip was noticeable for the vines being planted north-south rather than the east-west of the rest of the vineyards.

There were some oddities in some of the other plantings on Ernst's holding. A row of Grenache, for example, might have two or three Rhine Riesling. A later owner of this southern block, Barry Matthew, noted one patch with four different varieties. Arthur Kaesler, on the adjoining block, said nursery cuttings were not always true to type and it was "impossible to tell the difference".

Barry Matthew also found uneven lines of vines that were certainly "not planted by a German". There was a clear reason for this. In about 1968 Ernst sold his holding to the popular and hard-working Hungarian immigrant, Milos Obradovich and his German wife Irmgard.

Milos worked enthusiastically and when he sold the block to Adelaide business identity Barry Matthew in 1975, it had some 13 different varieties including, presumably for nostalgia, one row of 80 Tokay vines.

Barry, who said the Obradovichs "virtually gave me the block" when ill health caused them to retire in 1975, immediately went about taking out the Tokay and varieties such as Pedro Ximinez and Doradillo and replacing them with Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. "The overall ratio was about 60% white and 40% red," he said. "I changed it to 76% red and 24% white."

He also changed Milos's policy to sell to the five big wineries in the valley and sold exclusively to Seppelts.

By 2001 Barry Matthew decided it was time to get out. He had deliberately allowed his children to make their own decisions on their future. "I didn't want any of them to have the obligation that someone had to take over the vineyard," he said.

He still loves the Barossa, however. He hived off about an acre and three-quarters to continue to live in Ernst Kaesler's old house – and turned it into a bed and breakfast set in a Barossa Valley vineyard.

Searching the world for excellence

The present range of Kaesler Wines springs from a worldwide search for a property to produce the best possible grapes for red wine.

Winemaker Reid Bosward and his co-owners, a group of international wine lovers, searched areas such as America's Napa Valley, the south of France, Marlborough in New Zealand and other parts of Australia before deciding to buy into the Barossa.

"No other area can produce the intensity of flavor that we have in the Barossa," says Reid.

The search began through a chance meeting – and the love of great wine.

Reid Bosward comes from Dural in New South Wales. As a boy he earned his pocket money packing shelves in the local bottle shop. He dusted a bottle of Grange. "I couldn't believe it. It was \$7. Who would pay \$7 for a bottle of wine?" he recalled thinking.

In 1987 he came to Roseworthy to do the winemaking course. It was a bumper three years. The 11 who finished that course now shape much of the Australian wine industry.

Reid went back to NSW to work for Murray Tyrrell in the Hunter Valley. Mr Tyrrell – "always Mr Tyrrell" – taught him neatness, order, cleanliness, balance and introduced him to working with Shiraz. He also learned that the real secret of great wine was always in the vineyard. It was knowledge he confirmed making wine in many places.

He took his technical knowledge to France to work with Jacques Lurton, near Narbonne, adding to the "Flying Winemakers" bringing new Australian skill to the less well-known areas of France. At Domain DuVasiere, he brought new techniques to a winery that was 600 years old.

In South Africa, he was instructed by the English owners to ignore local traditions to ape the French and produce wine that better reflected the fruit it was made from. In Moldavia, on the Black Sea, the wine froze – and he returned to the Hunter Valley.

Then chance entered. In 1994, Reid and his now wife Bindy were at Chateau La Louviere at Pessac in the Graves district. They were joined for a weekend by one of Bindy's friends, Julie Fraser, and her husband, Edourd Peter, a Swiss banker.

At dinner in a Bordeaux restaurant (helped by three bottles of 1985 Chateau Mouton Rothchild), Edourd asked Reid how much it would cost to set up a winery in Australia. Reid said a million dollars, which to him then sounded a lot of money. "Ed just raised an eyebrow and said: 'If you see anything in Australia you think would be a good buy, give me a call'."

That thought stayed with Reid as he returned to Australia to make wine for Brian McGuigan in the Hunter.

In 1997, Reid came to the Barossa Valley to make wine for Cellarmaster. This was an enormous experience. "At Cellarmaster, with all its demands for varieties and levels of quality, you had to make 20 times as many decisions as you would have to in other places," he said.

This added to Reid's confidence – and confirmed the knowledge that the real secret of great wine is always in the vineyard.

In 1998, Edourd and Julie Peter came to Adelaide to visit Julie's parents and the four got together again. At dinner in the Aldgate Pump Hotel, Edourd asked Reid if he had thought any more about a vineyard and winery. "Actually, I think about it all the time," Reid replied. How much? This time Reid had a more realistic figure. "Ed said: 'I think we can come to that'."

"A few weeks later we had lunch at Vintners up here. He outlined his proposal and how much he was prepared to put on the table and off we went.

"There were not too many restrictions on what he expected He wanted excellent wine and ultimately I think he wanted it in Australia, but I had to go through the process of checking everywhere just to make sure we were doing the right thing.

"We looked everywhere. We looked at the Napa Valley. We looked in the south of France. We looked in Marlborough in New Zealand and we looked at the best regions in Australia."

Then chance entered again. Reid first saw fruit from Kaesler's in 1997 when Toby Heuppauff sent it to Cellarmaster under an arrangement for some to go back to be sold under a Kaesler label. The fruit impressed him.

In 1998, he was so overwhelmed by the intensity of the old vine Shiraz that he made a special batch he called "Old Bastard". It was up there in the Grange and Hill of Grace class, but with its own distinctions, its own secrets.

Clearly, here was his vineyard, but was it for sale? By sheer chance again, it was. Edourd Peter and his colleagues – an American, a Swiss and a German – with Reid made the purchase from Toby Heuppauff in November 1999.

But, with less than 30 acres, it was not big enough to justify building a winery. They not only needed more land, to meet their ambitions, they needed top grape-growing land. This in the tightly and mainly family held Barossa Valley was a formidable task.

Chance came again. Barry Matthew, the man who owned the property next door, decided to sell out and retire. Not only was this some of the best land in the valley and producing sumptuous wine grapes, it brought together 60 of the original Kaesler acres from 1893.

Kaesler now and the future

The first vineyard the winelovers bought comprised the buildings and 26.3 acres of vines – eight acres of Shiraz, 5-1/2 acres of Grenache, 2-1/2 acres of Mataro, eight acres of Semillon and just over two acres of Cabernet Sauvignon.

The 2000 vintage was difficult throughout the valley. Kaesler's got only 19.6 tonnes off the 26.3 acres – “but it was good stuff.”

In 2001, they added the vintage from the neighbouring 28.5 acres they bought later in the year. This new area had six acres of Shiraz, eight acres of Grenache, six of Semillon, some Riesling – “and we planted some Voignier.” This was a variety Reid had noted in France as a straight white wine and as a fascinating blend with Shiraz.

The old vine material was there. Led by 3.7 acres of 1893 Shiraz, more than 70% of the red wine vines on the combined vineyard were 40 or more years old. The Shiraz thrived on the sandy loam over clay. The Grenache was on the rockier patches, restricting the crop from this prolific producer.

The first major decision was to intensify the fruit even further. Growers who send their fruit to outside wineries may tend to keep their tonnages up. Growers who make their own wine can opt to restrict the output to increase the quality.

By pruning responsibly and reducing water, Reid has already cut the yield on red wine grapes by nearly 40%. The result is density and exquisite flavour. Baume, the measure of sugar content, is high – allowing wine to be made with up to 15% alcohol.

Why make such powerful wines? “Because we can,” Reid explains. “Lean wines are for a lean area. The Barossa allows us to have a high intensity of flavour. Most other places can't do this.”

It is part of the partners' determination to make great wine and to develop a style that offers a choice.

“Three companies set the style for 80% of Australian wine,” Reid says. “It is a danger for the industry to have so few careful styles. Australia needs the variety that there is in France. We need the individuality in smaller wineries. We need to offer something different.”

Kaesler is built on providing a difference. The partners do not plan to take Kaesler up to 300,000 cases. The business plan is not to make money in a hurry. It will take five, seven or 10 years to make a profit. In the meantime, the international partners take their share in wine, not money. The determination is to concentrate on producing excellent wine.

Kaesler would consider buying further property in the valley but only if the potential is exceptional. In keeping with the philosophy to be excellent, any expansion is as likely to be anywhere else in the world.

“The thread that holds Kaesler together is the production of excellent wine,” Reid says.

The new winery

The new winery built behind the cellar door facility has a capacity of 25,000 cases. It is unlikely that the Kaesler Vineyard will provide for more than 16,000 cases in any year. If it does buy in any grapes, they must match the standard of this vineyard.

The equipment is practical and designed for making high quality wine, both red and white.

The building, with its stone and beams from an old house and outbuildings in the Eden Valley, is designed to blend in with the simple style of the present buildings. Kaesler operates the cellar door and sub-leases out the restaurant and accommodation. Plans are in hand to create a new restaurant for fine dining from the old family house on the Barossa Valley Way frontage.

The wines – a point of difference

The beauty of making your own wines is that you can use your instincts to produce the best wines in any circumstances. It means, for example, that you can switch from French oak to American oak if you think it better suits a particular batch. It means you can use new oak, old oak or no oak to match the fruit.

Kaesler's 1893 Shiraz, in fact, is picked three times for different purposes and may receive different treatment.

The aim, however, is to develop a consistent Kaesler style for every type of wine that is made. But the consistency is based on excellence, not on a fixed formula. The objective is to give the buyer the best possible wine from any vintage – and a point of difference from the typical commercial product, even when that product is excellent.

Shiraz is the Kaesler flagship. These are intense wines that demonstrate the power of the Barossa Valley. In a good year, Kaesler produces it in three styles to suit different palates:

Old Bastard Shiraz – This is the essence of the Barossa Valley. It is made entirely from fruit of the 1893 vines – “the best piece of old Shiraz you would ever see” - and will be produced only when the conditions are perfect. It is a rich and powerful wine, as concentrated as possible from grapes of maximum ripeness. It will take 100% new French oak, but will never taste oaky. This is not a food wine. It is a sip or glass to enjoy on its own. American critic Robert J Parker Jr. rated the first 1998 version at 95. So, too, did Australian judge James Halliday. It had 14.5% alcohol.

Old Vine Shiraz – This is a blend of fruit from the vines of 1893 and the 1960s. It is a big wine and can handle some new oak. But it is based on the exceptional fruit, complimented not dominated by the oak. Oak will be either French or American depending on the vintage. As it ages over 10 or more years, the wine will become more delicate. It may have 14% to 15% alcohol. The 1999 vintage won a Gold Medal at the Brisbane Wine Show

Stonehorse Shiraz – This is a fruit-driven wine from vines that are from 15 to 40 years old. The only oak used is old, so it has only a savoury effect on the wine. This wine will age for 10 years and develop its own style of bottle age based on fruit. It, too, may have 14% to 15% alcohol. *Winestate* magazine rated the 1998 vintage at its maximum five stars. The Melbourne Wine Show gave it a gold medal.

The same philosophy for both excellence and to provide a point of difference applies to all the other wines that Kaesler produces. These wines are in two ranges – “Old Vine” to demonstrate the power and flavour of the older vines on the property and “Stonehorse” to illustrate the range of flavours that good fruit and careful handling can produce.

We will produce a “Rhône” style wine based on our Shiraz, Mataro, Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache. Fortified wines are also available.

Other specialty wines are made from time to time

(This brief history is based on interviews with Arthur Kaesler, Barry Matthew and Reid Bosward; research in the Lands Titles Office; the Kaesler Chronicles 1845-1988 written by Rhoda Heinrich and published by the Kaesler Reunion Committee 1988; the Barossa Valley Region Australian Geographic Indication Application; and information from the excellent Barossa Journeys Into a Valley of Tradition, by Noris Ioannou, a book all lovers of the Barossa should read).