

» By Madeline Cooper

In a glass of their own

Organic wine a marketer's dream?

When it comes to chemical intervention, conventionally produced grapes top the list as one of the most heavily sprayed crops. So in light of current trends in sustainable, healthy and 'clean green' living it is little wonder organic vignerons are capitalising on this forever sought after 'point of difference' to break into the saturated wine market. But with preconceived misconceptions about the quality of organic wine still lingering – is the organic label the key to market success? Madeline Cooper interviews Troy Kalleske of Kalleske Wines Pty Ltd about how the industry and consumer market has evolved, and Troy shares some tips for successfully marketing organic wine in an industry overflowing with 'big players' with big market power.

As a seventh generation organic grape grower, and now winemaker, Troy Kalleske knows his fair share about what it takes to produce and market a quality award winning Shiraz. The 2008 Barossa Winemaker of the year, who established the Kalleske winery with his brother Tony in 2002, followed the family's tradition of organic practices - but not to gain an advantage from a marketing point of view – quite the opposite in fact – as Troy reveals they actually held

back from marketing their wine as organic until it had achieved support on the merits of its quality first and foremost.

"We certainly believed that organic wine was of at least equal or superior quality compared to conventionally produced wine but we had to be very wary of launching a new product as 'organic' into a very conservative market that at the time still required a lot of convincing," Troy says.

When selling their first bottle of wine back in 2004, Troy says both the industry and consumer market were vastly different to what they are today, and organic certification was not something the Kalleskes marketed upfront.

"Given the superciliousness within the wine industry, we decided to approach the market with the attitude that quality alone would win us praise – not simply a brand or label."

"There was still this misconception by some that organic wine was brown, oxidised and poor in quality – an attitude we certainly wanted to change but we also didn't want to be pigeonholed or prevented from entering the mainstream market because of it," Troy says.

Steady sales growth and increasing interest in organic wine over the past five years appears to be reflecting a shift in consumer purchasing behaviour and taste preferences. The broader environmental and health considerations, and the superior quality that comes with a glass of organically produced wine has seen the uptake and interest increase considerably.

Delivering on quality and educating consumers has been a paramount feature of the attitude shift towards organic wine Troy says, as both consumers and conventional growers realise that the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in conventional wine production can result in homogenisation of flavour.

"From my experience, organic wine is, above all things, more genuine and reflective of the region, and this is what gives it that fantastic quality and flavour. Essentially, the vines are growing in soil that is unaffected by chemicals and other conventional practices which take away from the terroir that gives wine its distinct flavour.

"When producing organically, the grape's flavour and texture becomes a perfect reflection of the particular soil and climate. However, when you add synthetic chemicals such as nitrogen fertiliser to the soil, you bypass that all important stage when the vine finds its own nutrients in the soil," Troy says.

By not 'force feeding' or spraying the vine with pesticides, Troy says the vine seeks out its own minerals and develops its own mechanisms for fighting bugs and disease, all of which strengthen the vine, giving the grape its robust flavour and the wine its superior quality. Bio sprays are also used to help build up cell wall strength and biodynamic prep naturally restores optimum vitality into the soil.

While the future looks promising for small organic growers entering new niche markets, Troy warns the market is still a difficult one to navigate, with the power to push and test new markets a challenge given the lack of volume of smaller players in comparison to the 'big boys' who dominate the market.

"Being a small producer – whether you're organic or not – you really need to differentiate your marketing campaign as much as possible in order to generate that niche market appeal," he says. "In the current social climate, organic certification certainly gives you the

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Clockwise from top left: Troy Kalleske of Kalleske Wines Pty Ltd, 2008 Barossa Winemaker of the year; the vineyard; harvested grapes being prepared.

marketing edge – but in the end the key to success is delivering on quality with the correct price to go along with this,” Troy says.

While organic certification is only a minor aspect of the Kalleske’s marketing efforts, Troy agrees that, everything else being equal, “it is good to have that point of difference.”

Using minimal advertising, the Kalleskes have always promoted their product by relying on third party endorsement and actively getting the wine out there and sampled in both consumer and trade environments.

“Sponsoring environmental events, trade shows and dinners has been an effective way for us to put our wine in front of people who we know will be encouraged to try it because of the health and environmental benefits that go along with it,” he says.



However, in a conventional environment Troy says tastings and competitions are often more effective and successful in engaging consumers and building support when the ‘organic’ branding is concealed. “This way, people have had a chance to taste the wine and develop independent, unbiased opinions, at which stage we announce it is organic and use this as a way to educate and engage them in the world of organic wine.”

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