

Winemaker Profile

NICHOLAS PATERSON – CHATEAU PATO – HUNTER VALLEY

The last few paragraphs on the inside cover sleeve to the book titled: 'Tyrrells 125 Years of Traditional Winemaking, A Family History', offer some thoughts long held by the Author, David Paterson. "At the end of the seventies the call of the Hunter was strong enough to make him move there permanently. Together with his family he has bought some acres in the heart of Pokolbin so as 'to be near his subject' (this was in 1979). He has planted some of the classic Hunter variety, Shiraz on part of an old vineyard that was abandoned in the depression years. From this he hopes to reproduce wine that was, in its heyday, highly regarded for its quality."

The initial planting in 1981 wasn't very successful, as a determined drought prevailed. The Patersons replanted, and the first dozen bottles of Chateau Pato Shiraz was produced in 1984. Fourteen years later, Helen recalled the first harvest warmly as a significant family event, with fermentation having been carried out in a bathtub on the verandah. Approximately '200kg of Shiraz grapes from the most western extremity of Brokenwood's vineyards' were also fermented out to produce a further 22 bottles of wine. It was a modest vintage of winemaking.

In 1984 David published another book, Hunter Wine Country, which he described as 'basically a transcript of taped interviews of people living and working in their vineyards,' he'd carried out in his role as a broadcaster for the local ABC Radio 2 NC / NA in Newcastle.

Sadly, David died in 1993. "The late and greatly lamented David Paterson was a tremendous bloke and one of the most cheerful characters around Pokolbin in the 1980s.but the vineyard he started with his wife Helen lives on." (Hunter Valley Wineguide: Nick Bullied).

Unconditional passion is an infectious human emotion and it leads the Chateau Pato journey onward, with David's son Nicholas, now responsible for the vines and their wine.

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After the passing of my father in 1993, it seemed a natural progression for me to continue the running of the vineyard and winery. It was March of that year that we lost this wonderful man, and the '93 Shiraz was just in its infancy. I had been working on the wine with my father and therefore had built up a relationship with it - every vintage produces a new chapter in your life. At this stage I felt that I needed reassurance on what exactly I was doing, so I turned to the assistance of Iain Riggs, winemaker at Brokenwood. My father and Iain were very good friends, so it seemed a logical thing to do. Iain was more than happy to offer his advice and expertise to the wines of Chateau Pato. Things began to come together for the wine and although the learning curve was extremely steep, satisfaction was always a reassurance. Along with running the vineyard and winery with my family, I decided to start working further within the industry. Again I turned to Brokenwood and was employed towards the end of November 1993. A massive window of opportunity was opened and I found myself exposed to all facets of wine production, alternating between the vineyard, winery and production. I continued along this path for the next three years, working with and meeting some of the industry's most respected people, learning an incredible amount and keeping the wheels of Chateau Pato turning through three contrasting vintages. Production through those years was a tiny fifty cases in 1994, twenty-five cases in 1995 and a modest one hundred cases in 1996. Things were finally beginning to happen again and in 1996 I decided to expand my knowledge further by going to the Yarra Valley to do a vintage at Domaine Chandon for a few of months. It was an amazing period in my life, experiencing a completely different region for viticulture and winemaking along with the different philosophies that accompanied it. At this stage my thirst for knowledge was greater than ever before and I was beginning to apply a much more open-minded approach to techniques used at Chateau Pato. Listening and talking to people about *their* experiences and sometimes-bizarre ideals to the big picture of winemaking was an exciting priority and I

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began to spend less time focusing on what was deemed as an almost blinkered 'way of making wine'. Basically limits didn't exist anymore and in September of 1997 Brokenwood granted me a few months off to explore the next frontier for me, Europe.

During the vintage of 1995 a winemaker from Tuscany in Italy, Saverio Petrilli, came to Brokenwood to do a vintage, as he had also acquired the same thirst that I had. We became good friends throughout that vintage and after my return from the Yarra in 1996 I faxed him, inquiring into the possibility of doing a vintage in Italy. With all of the openness and generosity that is the Italian way, he welcomed my interests with open arms.

I arrived in Tuscany in late September 1997 and was taken back by everything that I experienced. It was a completely different volume of knowledge that didn't just encompass the obvious things such as unusual grape varieties and winemaking techniques, but filled a void that was this fantastic understanding of the local environment accompanied by the local food consumption, the local agricultural methods, climate and social values. It answered a question that I had pondered on in Australia for so long – 'what is the difference between Shiraz from the Hunter to Shiraz from the Barossa or Clare or any region in Australia?' This is what Italy did for me, especially when I travelled further south later that vintage to work in Campania with a good friend of Saverio's, Bruno de Concillis an emerging great winemaker. After working with such a Tuscan variety such as Sangiovese to a grape called Aglianico which is one of the dominant varieties of Campania and Basilicata, it explained to me the basics of *terroir* a subject which is now more and more part of the Australian understanding of wine growing. I now know why Tuscan Sangiovese is the world's most famous along with Cabernet blends from Bordeaux and Semillon from the Hunter. To Europe's gain it has its 100's of years of trial and error, now it's the New World's turn and I can see Australia building its reputation in this understanding.

I returned to Italy during the following vintages of 1998 and 1999 and spent more time in the south with Bruno creating new blends and enhancing old techniques, both learning off each other, and giving me food for thought. It was at this stage that I could feel that my own methods were being applied to Chateau Pato in a constructive way and was moving away from the experimental unknown that was the few years following 1993.

1998 was a great vintage in the Hunter, especially for Shiraz. During this vintage I began to divide the vineyard up into separate blocks, some containing just a few rows. This has now become a continuing technique for the winemaking and I believe has given the wine more definition and complexity, accompanied by the fact the original plantings are now 20 years old.

1999 saw my last year at Brokenwood, after becoming in charge of the cellar and working along side the winemakers. It was a fantastic time and a chapter that is of incredible value to me. A job was offered to me late that year and in January 2000 I began working at Tyrrells as assistant red winemaker. Tyrrells had always been somewhere which I had considered a must to work, as they have some of the best vineyards of Shiraz, Semillon and Chardonnay in the Hunter, so to be able to work with such fantastic fruit was a dream come true. It was a sad day when Murray Tyrrell passed away, but I will always consider myself very fortunate to have had the time to learn from him and especially to have gone through the marvellous 2000 vintage with him, again another important chapter in my life.

We have just had the 17th vintage at Chateau Pato and again the vineyard has produced some delectable fruit to work with. I often think of the vision that my father had for this piece of the Hunter, and there has never appeared to be any alternative but to continue on with what he began. The soil on which the Shiraz is planted on is part of that magical volcanic base that some of the Hunter's best Shiraz is found. There are a few more pockets on the property which are suitable for Shiraz and I'm hoping to get these planted this year. It's nice to know that the work that every body has put into the place over the past 20 years has been worth it, as a strong following has now been established and a constant interest is being shown in the wines. I'm proud to continue the tradition that is Chateau Pato.

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