

## **At Loggerheads with Len Evans.**

As I entered through 'Loggerheads' solid oak castle doors, Leonard Paul Evans OBE was on the phone despatching visionary statements "...plan that, build this, get young people involved in wine....". Small dogs barked at my heels, creating a scene reminiscent of an English Hogarth painting. Showing immediate hospitality, he beckoned me to sit, oblivious to who I actually was or why I was invading his home. (It turns out his secretary had not briefed him on the morning's appointments).

This opening scene set the stage for a morning of energy and enterprise, Evans style. He'd just returned from a South Australian jaunt with Petaluma's Brian Croser. He told me that while they were driving back to Adelaide he was reading Halliday's column in the Australian. He told Croser to pull over, and read out the latest wine trade figures. He then shook Croser's hand and they both congratulated each other as-appropriately as it turned out- they were both instrumental in achieving the nation's stunning growth in export sales.

It should not be forgotten what Len Evans has done for Australian wine. In 1997 Len joined the likes of Max Schubert, Hugh Johnson, Emile Peynaud, and Robert Mondavi in becoming Decanter Magazine 'Man of the Year'. His reputation, and particularly his contribution to the Australian wine industry, lead Huon Hooke to write "As a leader, a spokesman, an ambassador for Australian wine, he has no peer. He is the only truly international wine personality the country has ever produced" (Decanter magazine March 1997)

Born in England in 1930 to Welsh parents, he moved to Australia as a young man in 1955. He first entered the hospitality industry as a casual glass washer at the Ship Inn in Sydney, and quickly moved up to become Bar Manager. He then became a Stock Controller and Systems Analyst to the major hotels of the day. In 1960 he moved to the newly built Chevron Hilton and eventually became the Food and Beverage Manager. It was here that he developed a great interest in wine and during this period he became Australia's first regular wine writer with his 'cellarmaster' column in The Bulletin. Whilst there the hotel invested heavily in both local and overseas wines and by doing so he reinvigorated the Hunter valley wine industry by persuaded the likes of Murray Tyrrell to bottle his wines, the year was 1962.

So much had his reputation grown, that in 1965 he left the hotel to establish the Australian Wine Information Bureau and became the National Promotions Executive. Shortly after he established the Australian Wine Bureau and became its first Director. He did not stay long but his contributed to the growth in popularity of table wines throughout the country cannot be underestimated.

In 1969 he established Bulletin Place which became the 'wine and dine place' of Sydney. It was here that many of our current wine icons first cut their teeth. James Halliday and John Beeston were amongst its regular clientele.

His most prolific business ventures occurred during the 70's with the establishment of Rothbury Estate and Evans Wine Company. For a short time his company owned two French Chateaux in Bordeaux, France. Rothbury Estate was the target of a corporate takeover and he lost control of it in 1996.

Throughout his career he has been actively involved as a judge in Australia's wine show circuit. With the exception of Melbourne he has been chairman of all the major capital shows. This year he retired as chairman of the Royal Sydney Wine Show and was replaced by Brian Croser.

Len's hobbies include ceramics and stone sculptures- he enjoys creating them for friends. There is one huge sculpture that is an on-going project in France which he returns to work on each year.

He celebrates his seventieth birthday this year. A three day event is planned around a meeting of the famous 'single bottle club'. James Halliday, Brian Croser and English wine writer Hugh Johnson are amongst the guests. Evans has laid the ground rules, each guest must front-up with an 'Impériale' for dinner, (to us mortals that means a six litre bottle of wine or the equivalent of eight bottles). He emphasises, 'It's all just for fun'. The Loggerhead household is expected to consume 40 dozen bottles over the long weekend. I hope to follow suit on my seventieth birthday (and live to remember it!)

Len has one of the best palates in Australia -he should have, as he has drunk more wine than anyone else in the country! His career began at the tender age of 15 when he sneaked a bottle of his father's Château d'Yquem. "I think it was from the 20's but cannot be sure" and drank it secretly in his room. He was always into the finer things in life. As a prefect at school he drank Madeira with Madeira cake whilst other youths of his age would have been content with sneaking a warm beer. He got many of his attitudes to life from the books depicting late 19<sup>th</sup> Century England. "The greatest epoch in life, from a comfort point of view, was the Edwardian era" he comments.

Len's advice on wine is spot on, in my book. "I'm a structure freak" he begins. "A wine has to have fine structure, line and length. An intensity of flavour compared to a lightness of body". That is a fine description of the wines of Burgundy.

Loggerheads is both his home and office. He has always been in high demand as a public speaker, and can be very amusing whilst bringing home his point of view. When he talks, people listen. He has perfected the wine options game which is a standard component of any wine gathering and personifies his belief that wine should be fun. As well as consulting to a number of companies, his current major business concerns are Tower Estate and Winepros.

Len is chairman of Tower Estate. There are twelve others on the board including winemaker Brian McGuigan. You can check out the ceramic that Len made of the thirteen partners that is on display at the Hunter winery over the front door, 'I'm the grumpy little \*\*\*\* at the bottom" he adds. The aim of Tower Estate is to make it into a national boutique winery with grapes being sourced from choice vineyard sites across Australia.

Evan's touch is everywhere at Tower. He helped design the winery including a 'lodge' style conference facility. Their winemaker is Dan Daneed who has a model winery to practise his art. Previously Dan made wine for Brokenwood under Ian Riggs and before that he worked at McWilliams Mount Pleasant. There will only

ever be 1,000 cases of each variety made, and as Dan puts it “only the right grapes from the right regions will ever be sourced” In 1999 they chose sauvignon blanc from Adelaide Hills, riesling from the Clare, cabernet from Coonawarra, and semillon, verdelho and shiraz from the both the Barossa and Hunter valleys. The whites are currently in bottle and the reds will be for sale early next year.

Len is very excited about WinePros which was launched in late March. It is destined to be the finest wine portal and search engine on the Web, providing wine assistance to the public on a number of levels. Joining forces with James Halliday, the company is headed by Len’s daughter Sally Evans. They have ‘signed up’ to access the Oxford Companion to Wine, edited by Jancis Robinson. An extremely easy to use search facility allows you to find exactly what you need to know. As well as the Oxford Companion the site has works by Michael Broadbent and Clive Coates. Subscribers can access an on-line magazine once a month free of charge. There are lot of wine reviews, hyperlinks to other sites and articles from Evans and Halliday. The site only has a small amount of e- commerce with links to Oddbins and Dymocks. Winepros has also struck a partnership with Langton’s Auction House and provides Web visitors with free on-line valuations and reports on recent and up-coming auctions. The site is well worth a visit at [www.winepros.com.au](http://www.winepros.com.au)

Life at 70 for Len seems as vibrant and productive as it ever was. He is indeed the elder statesman of the industry and has contributed on all levels to make the Australian wine industry what it is today.

Happy Birthday Len.