

## Winemaker Warren Proft

*Warren Proft is doing great things for Arnie Pizzini's Chrismont label in the King Valley.*

Peter Bourne

Further words from Peter Bourne...

*While many winemakers simply follow their parents into the industry or just happen to be born in a winemaking region, some discover their calling by accident. Warren Proft, from Tumut at the foot of the Snowy Mountains, had surveying down as his first choice at Charles Sturt University but had to settle for his fourth option, wine science. Proft's first job was in Griffith, where the Miranda family introduced him to the King Valley region in Victoria. After a stint at King Valley Wines he became winemaker at Arnie Pizzini's Chrismont Wines. The Pizzinis were a large tobacco-growing family in the King Valley before they switched to grapes in the late 1970s. Today, they are a major force in the valley and Proft's La Zona range is made from Italian varieties such as pinot grigio and barbera. Such is his enthusiasm that Proft may rival the Italians. Given his talent, anything is possible.*

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Originally from Tumut NSW, Chrismont winemaker **Warren Proft** (pictured at right, on left, with Chrismont Director/Owner, Arnie Pizzini) had not planned for a career in wine. Surveying was Warren's first choice for a career when he indicated his course options at Charles Sturt University, marking winemaking as a fourth preference. Fate and serendipity intervened, and Warren, having no information or knowledge about winemaking, quickly caught the 'wine bug' and has not looked back since.

Today, Warren characterises his approach to winemaking as, "I'm a bit of a natural person. Every time there were assignments to do at university, I'd always seem to take the side of organic viticulture, sustainable viticulture or preservative-free winemaking, even though I haven't done anything like that yet in my career." Warren continues, "Basically, as a winemaker, I like to keep it simple. I like to work with the grapes, with the wine, just monitor the process, let the yeast do the work, manipulate it as little as possible in the hope to get the natural expression of the grapes through the wine. *Winemaking is all about balancing, and making a nice, smooth, comfortable drink using the quality of the fruit.*"

Warren started his winemaking career in Griffith NSW, working for Orlando Wyndham and then Miranda Wines. During Warren's four years in Griffith, he gained a valuable insight into the big end of the Australian wine

industry.

From here he broke free to explore the wider world of winemaking by taking on vintage work overseas. For three years, Warren travelled between Spain and Australia, working vintages and taking in the vast cultural diversity that exists in the global wine industry. "I did...vintage in Spain," Warren recalls, "...for three years in a row. The reason I kept going back was the European sense of wine, community and culture...It's quite refreshing (in Europe) to see, for example, wine being sold in a supermarket as a food item, wine being consumed through the day in moderation, wine being socially acceptable everywhere and there being a lot less problems with alcoholism and binge drinking. That changed my whole perception of alcohol, food, lifestyle, culture....That also changed the direction of where I wanted to work and how I wanted to work when I came back to Australia."



Armed with a new appreciation of regional and varietal diversity, Warren was attracted to North East Victoria, a place where many European migrants settled over the years creating a great culture mix and an expanding wine industry. Warren worked for the next 6 years at King Valley Wines, a contract winemaking facility, as Senior Winemaker. He also consulted to small local wineries, including Chrismont. Warren is now a full-time member of the Chrismont team.

"It's much more creative to be able to have a hand from the vineyard right through to the bottle," Warren says, referring to his responsibilities at Chrismont. "You can choose in a sense how the grapes are grown, when they are picked – which are two of, probably, the most vital parts of winemaking. And then of course, there's the carefully detailed and exciting winemaking process. Adding creative input into the bottle, and label design as well as the way it's sold also gives me great satisfaction. I can feel assured that all Chrismont products are made to a premium standard and absolutely no shortcuts are taken."

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