

Drinking in Success

One of Australia's most revered producers of wine, Jim Barry Wines, continues to excel in an industry where only the best of the best survive.

Images courtesy of Jim Barry Wines

For three generations, the Barry family has made world-class wines, cultivating vineyards in the heart of the Clare Valley, South Australia. One of Australia's 'First Families of Wine', the Barrys' commitment to quality has ensured that the 'Clare' (as she's affectionately known by her many lovers) is renowned as a premier spot for wine-lovers the world over.

Jim, the first of the family to become a winemaker, graduated from Roseworthy Agricultural College in 1947 with a degree in oenology and began working at the Clarevale Co-Operative Winery. In 1959, Jim and his wife, Nancy, purchased their first property and established Jim Barry Wines.

Two generations then followed in their footsteps: Jim's son Peter and now grandchildren Tom, Sam, and Olivia, who are all involved in the family business. Winemaking is quite obviously in the Barry blood, and the current managing director, Peter Barry, has been working on the vineyards since he was six years old. He wouldn't change a second of it.

"I started from about the age of six helping my father, topping barrels, watering vines, and just being involved," Peter says. After graduating from high school in Clare, he spent the next two years as a cellar hand and as an apprentice under his father in the winery, followed by attending Roseworthy Agricultural College and completing a degree in oenology. "I enjoyed the mixture of science and the artistic side—it's always a mixture of the two, and that's fascinating to me."

Peter explains that no-one was even asked, let alone pressured, to be a part of the family business, which is testimony to the dedication of Jim's descendants, who have wholeheartedly chosen to become winemakers under the Barry name. Peter has worked in almost every area of the company, and in doing so discovered that he had a flair for managing. "When I came back from university in 1982, I spent a lot of time in the vineyards and in marketing, and not as much time in winemaking," Peter explains. "So it was the commercial side of the business that I settled into, eventually becoming the CEO. In 1983, I became the general

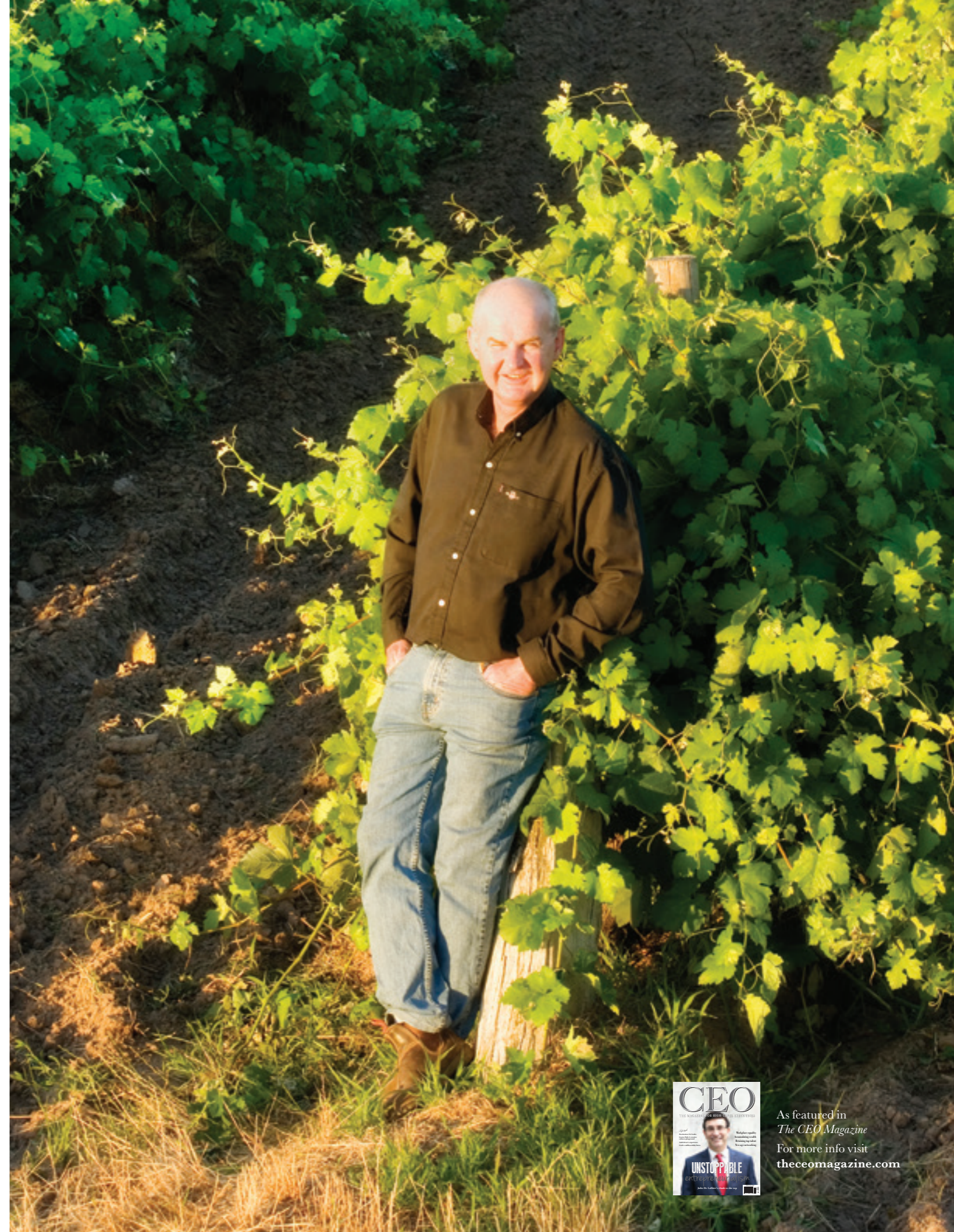
"I lead from the front and by example."

- Peter Barry

manager of the business, and then my father stepped down over a period of time and I just stepped into the role of managing director and CEO."

Peter leads like his father did: he's hands-on and knows everyone in the company by name. He has a long-term vision and knows what needs to be done to ensure Jim Barry Wines lives on for his descendants as well. "I lead from the front and by example," he says. "Everyone in my family has the skills to do all of the jobs within the business, and we don't ask anybody to do something that we cannot do ourselves. Of course, time doesn't permit you to do everything yourself, so you have to encourage people to take over some roles for you."

Peter treats everyone at Jim Barry Wines as a part of the family, and that inclusive treatment pays off when it comes to staff retention. "Most people stay for 10 years or more in the business," says Peter with pride. "We have a lifelong commitment to our winemaking. People often refer to 'long term' in business as five to 10 years, but we have 20-year programs for the >



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Not only is Jim Barry Wines doing extremely well commercially; the family's wines have been critically acclaimed and won a number of prestigious awards such as winning three trophies at the Dan Murphy's National Wine Show of Australia for its 2012 The Lodge Hill Riesling; and, more recently, being awarded six gold medals and four trophies at the 2015 Clare Valley Regional Wine Show.

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"We make wine to a quality, not to a price," Peter says. "A wine's flavour is what people remember, not the price. We've always shown our wines in wine shows, and there wouldn't be many years that we haven't won gold medals, trophies for the best wine of the show, and other awards."

In 1985, Jim Barry Wines developed a single vineyard wine

called The Armagh, which is a top-tier Langton's classified Australian Shiraz that sells for \$250 a bottle in Australia. "When I was a young man at the age of 26, we set about a journey to develop this wine, and it's now an international Shiraz," Peter says. "We're celebrating 30 years of that this year. One of the great things about wine is that we can go back and open the bottle of wine that we made 30 years ago and reflect. It is always exciting to open a wine that you made more than half your life ago and it drinks very well. It's a very proud moment when you open it. You can sip on it and think about what you were doing in those days."

Jim Barry Wines is in a great position despite tough economic conditions. Its wines are in the top 2 or 3 per cent of wine sold in Australia and in the top 1 per cent in exports. In fact, the company has increased its revenue by 30 times since Peter took the reins.

"We grow organically, and sometimes organic growth is quicker than other times, depending on the economy," Peter says. "Right now, the economy is pretty flat in the world, so we are focusing on maintaining a good business that is profitable in a very tough economy. In that way, there will always be a focus on efficiencies and quality."

The team at Jim Barry Wines are continually striving for improvements in winemaking and viticulture, chasing the latest technologies and often introducing state-of-the-art equipment to the operation. "That was something that my father was doing in the 60s as well—he was always chasing technology," Peter says.

But right now, it's back to the basics, the root of all winemaking—planting the grapes and establishing new vineyards so that the business is around for Peter's grandchildren to enjoy. •

"MGA is privileged to have long term relationships with like-minded, family-owned businesses such as Jim Barry Wines. They hold dear the values of honesty, integrity, and respect, and we respond with the same. It's a win/win relationship." Steven McInerney, Broker, MGA

planning and planting of vineyards. A vineyard takes about 10 years from when you plant it to pay for itself, so this business is always a very long-term proposition, regardless of how you look at it."

Since becoming general manager, Peter has committed himself to regularly travelling around the world promoting the company's wines. "I circuit the world a couple of times a year, generally," Peter says, "and I visit all states in Australia, certainly the east coast, three or four times a year, as it is the face of the brand. I'm negotiating with wine-buyers, retailers, and restaurateurs, talking with them and presenting our wines. It's all very hands-on. A Barry has always been the face of the family business."

In 1983, Peter set himself a mission of developing his family's brand around the world. "Back then, we had 18 million people in Australia who were drinking wine,

but of course when they went to sleep at night, they didn't drink. So it was very important to develop an international market so that when Australia slept, somebody else woke up and had a bottle of wine."

So that year, Peter embarked on his first export trip, but export figures didn't start to climb noticeably until 1986. "We were three years before the curve of people chasing exports," he says. "It was our strategy for our wine to be available in the fine restaurants and liquor stores from London and New York to Tokyo and Geneva. It was always our strategy to develop export markets, and today they represent around 40 per cent of our business."

Peter's travels have allowed him to come across opportunities he wouldn't have discovered at home. For example, on one of his export trips he found a type of wine he had never tasted before, and decided to grow the grapes for it

in Australia. "The highlight of my last decade was stumbling across the Greek wine variety called Assyrtiko," he says, joy in his words. "I tasted the wine on the island of Santorini in Greece and was very impressed by it."

He came back to Australia in 2008 to plant some Assyrtiko grapes only to find that there weren't any cuttings available in Australia. Determined, the following year Peter returned to Santorini, collected vine cuttings, and brought them home, where they spent three long years in quarantine. "That made the project even more exciting, and we have just made our first wines," says Peter. "We made 15 litres of wine in the first year, and this year we made about 700 litres. It looks fantastic; we are terribly thrilled about it. Everybody that we show it to, including wine journalists from around the world, think it's fantastic. It's such an exciting project because you don't always get these things right."

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