

## Business Profile: Temple Bruer

# Temple of organic winners

The Bruers are pioneers of biological farming and the number of award-winning wines shows their efforts have paid off. Dom O'Brien finds Temple Bruer a temple of knowledge for farmers entering the organic world.

The name "Temple Bruer" is derived from Bruer family ancestry that dates back to the Knights Templar and refers to a church they built in 1185 called Temple Bruer. Today, all that is left of the church is the lone tower, which appears on the label of Temple Bruer wines.

David and Barbara Bruer established the vineyard in the early 1970s with eight hectares of vines planted over the first nine years and subsequent plantings increasing the production area to 16ha.

Being trained chemists, they were well aware of the harm agricultural chemicals can cause to health and the environment, so they moved away from chemically supported growing and looked for more sustainable ways to produce good fruit.

When they eventually took the step of organic certification in 1995, they were basically growing to certified organic standards and not much change was required.

The Temple Bruer property is also home to a popular specialist nursery that trades specifically in grape vines.



## PRODUCTION

The winery is located on-site at the vineyard and all wines carrying the Temple Bruer label are vintageed on location. This guarantees all grapes have been grown — and the wine vintageed — according to the high standard David insists on.

About 96%-97% of Temple Bruer's sales are from wine, with other activities such as the nursery comprising a small part of the business. The property covers 16ha, about half of which is devoted to grape production.

Importantly, the Bruers undertake a wide range of other sustainable projects on the property as well. A re-vegetation project aims for 30% of

the land area to be covered with deep-rooted native vegetation by 2010.

The sustainability program started on a large scale in 1996 and implements systems that recycle effluent and generate power from sustainable sources. The Bruers have installed solar stills to recycle effluent into pure water and concentrated effluent for compost.

They are also looking at ordering a wind generator and ways to generate energy from bio-diesel. Certified organic growing is the central and most important activity on the property but David believes it is essential to extend the sustainability efforts to a broader scale.

He says one reason they have virtually no pest problems is because of large areas of native timbers they have planted on the property. This encourages predatory insects that keep pest bugs down. To control fungal diseases such as powdery mildew and downy mildew, registered allowed inputs are used.

For wine production and bottling, organic standards allow use of certain inputs in minimal quantities to give the wine a reasonable shelf-life. Tartaric acid, sulphur dioxide, pectic enzyme (breaks down pectin) and bentonite (for white wines) are used to some degree at Temple Bruer.

However, David believes levels allowed in the Australian standards are too high and he goes by the UK's Soil Association standard, which is significantly lower.

Interestingly, he says, using a minimal amount of these inputs does not affect shelf-life of bottled wine, so one wonders why chemically subsidised wine (as David believes it should be called), insists on using much higher levels of preservative.

Temple Bruer has also found that switching to metal screw caps instead of using traditional wooden corks further reduces the levels of inputs used to preserve the wine.

Metal caps, unlike wooden corks, are not permeable and thus not prone to spoilage. Previously, they were only keeping their input levels just below the Soil Association standards, but with the metal screw caps they can now easily keep well within the limit.

David points out that proper growing methods and ensuring the grapes are nutritionally correct on the vine reduce problems in later stages of production.

The vineyard and winery are situated in the Langhorne Creek district of South Australia, which has not been too badly drought-affected. They were hit by the national drought in 2002 but rainfall since then has been relatively normal.

David notes that organic systems make plants more drought-resistant than intensively farmed crops and this has

helped them maintain production through dry periods.

## DISTRIBUTION

Temple Bruer distributes its wines around Australia, mainly through normal wholesale and retail distribution channels and a little through their website. It also exports to New Zealand, the United States, Canada, Japan, Taiwan, China, Singapore, Malaysia, the Phillipines, and Britain.

Interestingly, the current glut of wine grapes in the Australian market has not affected its sales or market prices at all. David puts it down to the fact they supply a niche market and there is still a shortage of organic grapes.

## MARKETING

The company engages in some marketing activities although its advertising budget is very small and restricted to targeted campaigns. One useful avenue is conducting interstate visits with tastings in liquor stores.

Ironically, outside of the local area they sometimes find it more productive to market to the non-organic community, probably because their product is already well-known within the organic community.

Use of the Internet for business is increasingly important. Although the company does not trade a lot through their website, David says, it uses the Internet in various other ways, such as email, VoIP, banking and electronic payments — from customers and to suppliers. About half of the customers pay electronically, saving time and money.

VoIP (“voice over the Internet protocol”) has saved the company a lot of money, allowing phone calls through the broadband connection in its Adelaide office.

Temple Bruer has received some interest through its involvement with Austrade and receives a small number of inquiries through its website. However, the website lists all retailers around Australia that stock its wines. This covers the main area of inquiries that come through the Internet.

## SALES

About 98% of sales are made through normal retail/wholesale channels, with the rest made on-line or at the cellar door. The company finds restaurants more open-minded about organic wines than liquor retailers, with restaurants accounting for about 60% of sales.

Its most popular lines are Cabernet Merlot and Shiraz Malbec in the reds, and Chenin Blanc in the white. Varieties produced are determined by which grapes grow well in the cli-



**ABOVE: Flood irrigation.**  
**Photographer: Dr Peter Crisp**



**RIGHT: Solar stills project for recycling effluent.**  
**Photographer: Michael Bruer**

mate. Tasting notes are available on the Temple Bruer website. The company has won a range of awards, also listed on the website. All up, it sells about 10,000 dozen bottles each year.

## CERTIFICATION

Temple Bruer has been certified since 1995, originally with the OVAA and now with Australian Certified Organic (ACO) since the two amalgamated. One of the reasons David likes working with ACO because parent company BFA has ISO 9001 accreditation.

David says that until recently, Temple Bruer received no marketing advantage from being certified organic but the tide is turning. Last year that gave it a slight advantage, with this year showing a moderate advantage due to increased awareness and popularity of organic products.

Temple Bruer is a long-established member of the Australian organic community. Its owners are deeply committed to sustainability in all areas of life, which is what the organic industry has grown from, reminding us it is about more than just food, and more than business. It is about sustaining the world around us. I'll drink to that. ■

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