

Making a big splash with an old fave, bubbly wine

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STEVE Maglieri, founder and patriarch of Serafino Wines in McLaren Vale, recently found himself in unfamiliar territory.

While he is used to picking up gongs at wine award ceremonies, on this day he was at Government House to receive his AM as a newly-appointed Member of the Order of Australia. He had many reasons to celebrate, not least being a recent personal milestone.

After close to 20 years, Steve once again could trade in the wine market under his own, once famous brand name, Maglieri Wines.

He'd made his first wines under his eponymous label in the 1970s, then after a trip to his homeland and drinking many a bottle of Italy's traditional Lambrusco, decided to make an Australian version from his McLaren Flat winery.

"When I was there," Steve remembers, "I thought, those wines would work in Australia."

"It's hot, and we didn't have a wine like it."

On his return from that first trip, Steve set about making a similar sweet and gently effervescent red. "I wanted to make ours better than the Italians," he says. "Not similar — better."

His original Lambrusco, first created in 1980, was made from McLaren Vale grenache with 10 per cent shiraz. He crafted it in the traditional sweet style, and in the space of 20 years it skyrocketed to extraordinary popularity.

"When people came to our cellar door, the men would like the shiraz and cabernet but their wives didn't, so they wouldn't buy anything," he recalls. "I thought, if I can please the ladies at the cellar door, then this wine would make a name for us."

He remembers giving away the first thousand bottles to get customers interested. "They called all their girlfriends and they loved it," he said.



HE'S BACK: Steve Maglieri at Serafino Wines in McLaren Vale and, below, the Maglieri La Brusco 2018 release.

"They all came back to the cellar door and we began selling a couple, then half a dozen here and there, then 10 dozen in a day and in the space of 10 years it went to 500,000 cases a year. It was unbelievable."

It was the wine at every celebration. Queues of buses lined up at Maglieri's to buy the game-changing bubbly. It became, reportedly, the top selling by volume wine in the country.

But its success irritated the wine industry's big guys and by 1999 Mildara Blass, now part of Treasury Wine Estates, bought Maglieri Wines, including the

Lambrusco. Built into the big-money deal was a caveat preventing Steve from making wine for five years, though not to build another winery — Serafino Wines eventuated and is now a successful family company with Steve's daughter Maria Maglieri at the helm.

However that sweet, bubbly Lambrusco at the centre of the deal was a wine lost in changing times. It soon appeared that the new owners of the brand had no desire to leverage it nor the once chart-topping sparkling.

Close to two decades and several changes in corporate ownership later, a Treasury man-

ager suggested it was time. "I kept at them and eventually it was agreed that I was the one who should have the name," Steve says. "I cried."

A deal was done — a gentlemen's agreement, and eight months ago the whole Maglieri kit returned to its mentor.

In the meantime he and head Serafino winemaker Charles Whish have been developing an updated version of Maglieri Lambrusco. It's still a McLaren Vale grenache shiraz blend but new international trade rules have forced a slight name change, to La Brusco. It sells for \$12 a bottle.

Steve is giving himself two years to bring it back to some

semblance of its past glory. He reckons people now will drink it in a longer glass, perhaps with a block of ice.

And there's the not-so-small export market of China that also beckons. Already a deal is underway.

Sitting with his AM medal and citation, it's an emotional time for Steve.

"It means a lot for me, and more for my grandchildren, to get back my surname for them," he says. "To have what I started with is very special."

"The circle has come around. And that makes me very proud."

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OLD SCHOOL: A bottle of Maglieri Wines Australian Lambrusco from the 1980s.

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