

De Bortoli: Going green

Going green: The path to a zero-waste winery with label 17 Trees

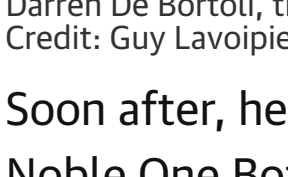
Meet the winemaker trying to regrow Australian forests one bottle at a time.

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About this content

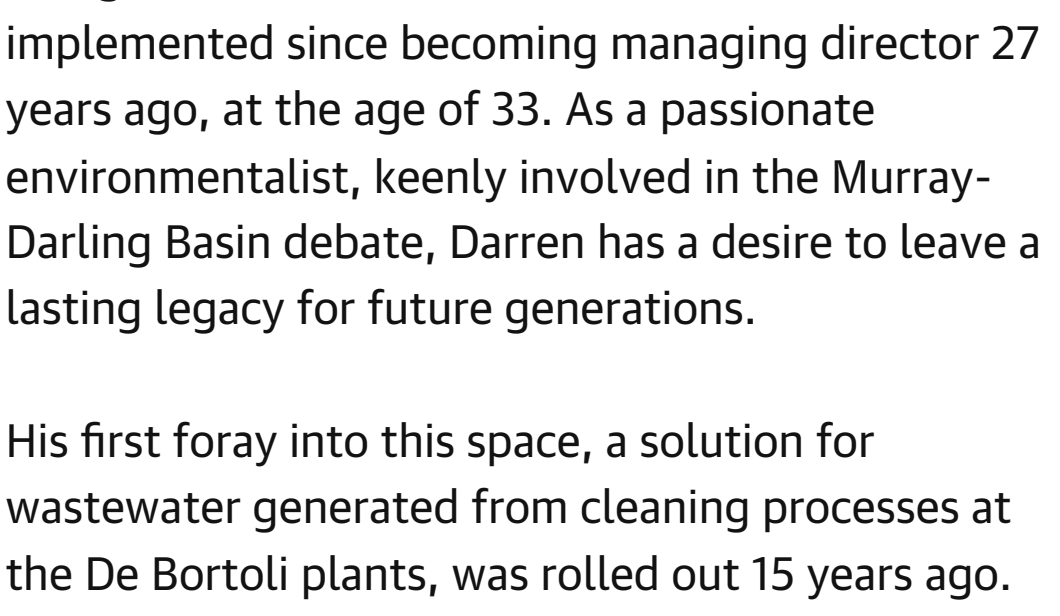
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What kind of 11-year-old knows they want to be a winemaker before they've even had a legal sip? For Darren De Bortoli, the third generation in a family of winemakers whose story is one that epitomises the Australian dream, it was never a question of if, but when.

Following in the footsteps of his father Deen and grandfather Vittorio - an Italian immigrant who founded the now iconic De Bortoli Wines near the Riverina city of Griffith in the mid 1920s - Darren says he was always destined to become a winemaker. However, he wasn't interested in just maintaining the status quo. He had bigger ideas.

Having spent his childhood running among the vineyards and farm machinery, climbing over (and once even falling into) wine tanks, and then learning the ins and outs of the wine industry, Darren joined the family business as a fully qualified winemaker in 1982, aged 22.



Darren De Bortoli, the third generation in a family of winemakers. Photo Credit: Guy Lavoipierre.

Soon after, he struck gold with the creation of the Noble One Botrytis Semillon, one of Australia's most highly awarded dessert wines and a benchmark within the industry to this day. It was a radical innovation at the time, taking the world by storm and leading the family business into a new era of premium wines. Since then, De Bortoli Wines' reputation for producing premium quality has only grown.

As the world grapples with the effects of climate change and the question of what kind of legacy we want to leave the next generation, De Bortoli is again hoping to spark a revolution. This time, towards a greener and more sustainable approach to winemaking.

Through De Bortoli's recently released 17 Trees wine label, an extension of the business's 17 Trees carbon offset program, Darren is hoping to have a positive impact on the world today and well into the future. For every six bottles of the label's shiraz, pinot grigio or chardonnay sold, a native tree will be planted through a collaboration with not-for-profit organisation Trillion Trees.

More than simply jumping on the "green" bandwagon, the 17 Trees label is the latest in a string of eco initiatives that Darren has implemented since becoming managing director 27 years ago, at the age of 33. As a passionate environmentalist, keenly involved in the Murray-Darling Basin debate, Darren has a desire to leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

His first foray into this space, a solution for wastewater generated from cleaning processes at the De Bortoli plants, was rolled out 15 years ago. And the rest, as they say, is history.

"That was really the start of this long journey," Darren says. "We had a problem with our wastewater and what to do with it. When we started looking at solutions with the help of consultants, it became quite obvious that if we replaced the sodium hydroxide from our cleaning regime with potassium hydroxide, we could use that water to grow crops. We were one of the first wineries to switch to using potassium hydroxide."

A raft of initiatives has rolled out in the years since. This has included a complete overhaul of packaging and labelling processes; the upgrade of an effluent aeration system, which resulted in a 90% energy reduction; and the installation of a 230kW solar system and 200kW solar thermal preheater - the largest of their kind in any Australian winery at the time.



Photo credit: Brett Naseby Creative.

Lindsay Gullifer, De Bortoli Wines' health, safety and environmental manager, says the business's ultimate goal is to become a zero-waste winery, establishing a kind of "greenprint" for the industry. It's an ambitious target, and one that is already delivering fantastic results.

Through a mix of recycling programs, greater operating efficiencies, and an insistence that third-party suppliers reduce excess packaging wherever possible, De Bortoli Wines has reduced its waste sent to landfill from 200 tonnes to less than 30 tonnes a year.

Thousands of trees have been planted through De Bortoli Wines' carbon offset program, 17 Trees. Launched in 2008 with the scope of planting 17 trees for each company vehicle, it's now expanded to include wider tree planting activities on all De Bortoli's properties.

For this year's National Tree Day, an annual event co-founded by Planet Ark and Olivia Newton-John in 1996, more than 4,000 native seeds were planted over two hectares of land adjoining one of the De Bortoli properties in Bilbul, in the Riverina. Seedlings were also given to staff to plant at home.

With the launch of the new 17 Trees wine label, a collaborative expansion set to take the carbon offset program far beyond its original brief, De Bortoli Wines wants to stir the soul of wine drinkers and help create awareness about how we can collectively leave a sustainable future for generations to come.

In Darren's words, it's a way for consumers to join De Bortoli on its journey to a greener, more sustainable future.

Whichever way you look at it, that's a goal worth raising a glass to.

Join us to Plant-A-Tree. Every 6 bottles of 17 TREES purchased will go towards planting 1 tree.

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