Wine pioneer helped put Coonawarra on the map

DON Redman was born on the kitchen table at the family home in Penola, in the South-East. Much younger than his siblings Nancy, Owen and Len, he was to be an important part of the history of wine in the Coonawarra.

His father, Bill, came from a Naracoorte family of railway workers but, at the age of 14, went to work for the Riddoch winery and learned winemaking, becoming head cellarman.

Don's mother, Lillian, was the granddaughter of William Wilson, who was the first to plant vines in the Coonawarra after making money in the Victorian gold rush of the 1850s. He persuaded John Riddoch to grow fruit and wine there, as well. After Riddoch's death in 1901, Bill bought a 16ha patch of the famed Riddoch terra rosa soils and continue to make wine.

From 1908 to 1953, the Redmans grew grapes and made wine which they railed in hogsheads to the big winemakers such as Woodleys, Hardys and Yalumba at a time when most table wine was exported while the rest of the world dealt with the phylloxera wipe-out.

Bill's confidence in the lighter, dinner claret style of the Coonawarra wines led him to establish his own winery, Rouge Homme, in 1953, after keeping back a small part of each vintage from 1948. For years Rouge Homme was the only wine brand in the Coonawarra.

Don grew up in a family dedicated to winemaking and to the Coonawarra as an important wine region.

He went to Coonawarra Primary School and Naracoorte High but lasted only a couple of years before working for a stock and station company, entering the RAAF when he was 18.

DONALD RALPH REDMAN

Wine industry figure
Born: June 1, 1927; Penola
Died: March 18, 2019; Adelaide

The war was over by the time he had finished training but he consoled himself by learning to play the saxophone. While working for stock and station agents in Adelaide he met RAAF worker Joy Buik, and when the two married in 1950 his father asked him to move back to Coonawarra to work in the winery.

They lived and worked and raised their family on a mixed farm with vineyards and became heavily involved in the local community.

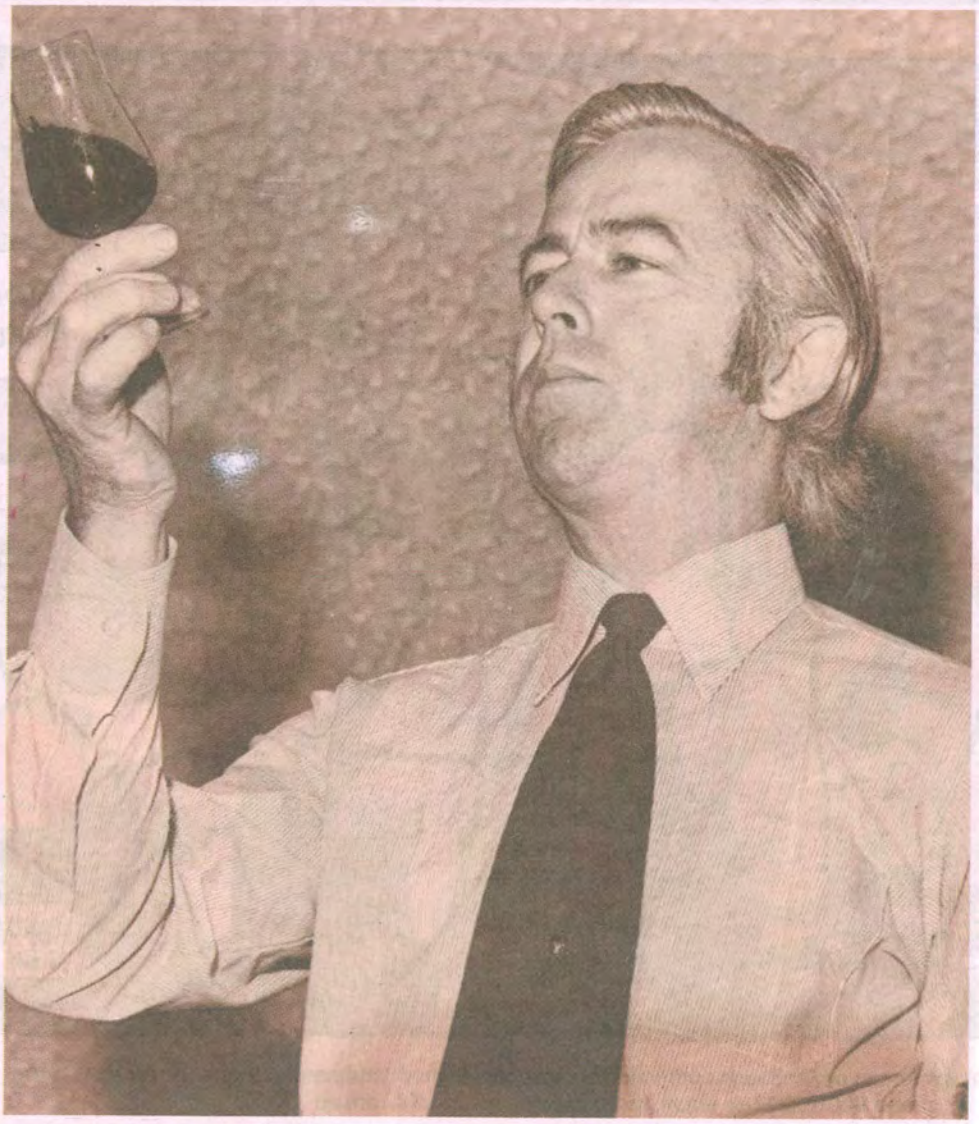
Don played sax in his brother-in-law's jazz band while Lillian officiated over the many large meals and celebrations that were part and parcel of the hospitality of the winery business. By the 1960s, the importance of the Coonawarra as a wine region in its own right rather than a contributor to fine wine makers in other parts of the state was well recognised.

Rouge Homme had played a big part in that, winning medals across Australia for its top quality wines.

In 1965, as the wine industry began to consolidate, Rouge Homme was sold to Lindeman's Wines. Don had decided that with three young daughters it was time to move to Adelaide.

Older brother Owen used the sale proceeds to begin Redman Wines, which has continued the family tradition in the Coonawarra.

In Adelaide, Don bought McGees, a wine shop on Glen Osmond Rd, Frewville, and established Redman's Bodega. It was a statement of confidence at a time when wine shops were for dedicated drinkers rather than connoisseurs. But Don was well-credentialed in helping convince Australians to appreciate fine wines.



His wine knowledge and palate were put to good use and he became a judge at wine shows, eventually across the whole of Australia. For 16 years, he also tested the quality of Australian wines for export, a regulatory requirement. He was ideal as a wine educator at a time when Australians were discovering the pleasures of fine table wines.

Don was the foundation president of the Retail Liquor Merchants Association and the vice-chairman of the Liquor Industry Council. He was deeply involved in various Adelaide wine clubs which, in the 1960s and '70s, played an important role in nurturing the fine wine movement in SA. In 1982, Don sold Redman's Bodega to Coles. He turned his attention to helping his family, particularly Lillian's burgeoning printmaking practice. He cared for her when she became afflicted with Alzheimer's disease, and after her death met Eileen Burvill-Holmes, who survives him along with daughters Julie, Gillian and Belinda, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.