Raising a glass to wine pioneer

COLIN Gramp was best known for pioneering a cold-pressing technique used to create Barossa Valley sparkling riesling in the 1950s.

He launched his winemaking career in 1947 by creating some of the first modern Barossa table wines.

At the time, about 80 per cent of wine grapes were being made into fortified wine.

But Colin, after beginning his winemaking apprenticeship in 1940, gained valuable knowledge while travelling to California, France and Germany to become one of the Australian industry pioneers.

Born and raised in the Barossa, Colin was immersed in winemaking from an early age; his father was fellow winemaker Hugo Gramp. Colin’s earliest memories included watching his dad crush grapes.

He began his education at Rowland Flat School, spent his first year of high school at Nuriootpa and then completed his studies at St Peter’s College.

Colin’s interest in winemaking was sparked while at St Peter’s, encouraged by the rich history of his family tradition.

Its connection to Barossa Valley wine dated back to 1847, when his great-grandfather Johann Gramp, planted vines at Jacob’s Creek. Johann had moved to Australia from Bavaria in 1837.

Colin’s grandfather, Gustav, started G. Gramp & Sons, which would incorporate Orlando, then become Jacobs Creek in the 1970s.

While still at school, Colin’s world was turned upside down in 1938 when his father was killed in a plane crash, along with 13 others, just outside Melbourne. Colin, 17, heard the news on the radio in the boarders’ common room just after school had finished for the day.

“I was completely shocked,” he told wine writer Tony Love in 2017. “But I didn’t want to be seen crying in front of the other boys, so I went out to the back of the schoolhouse and sat down on the pavement and had a good cry.”

The next day, Colin was shocked to receive a final letter from his father, sent not long before he got on the plane.

Hugo’s best friend, Rudi Buring, took Colin under his wing following the crash.

Colin told journalist Katie Spain earlier this year how important Rudi became.

“I can remember the day of (my father’s) funeral; Rudi introduced himself to me and said, ‘Colin, I’m here to look after you’, and he certainly did,” Colin said.

Colin met his future wife, Josephine, at a ball in 1940, but they would not marry until Valentine’s Day, 1946.

Colin’s winemaking apprenticeship and romance was interrupted by World War II.

In 1942, he joined the air force as a gunner in the 461 Squadron. He began flying in March 1944, with a rank of flight sergeant with just 85 hours’ flying experience.

However, he would go to complete 49 missions.

Upon returning from the war, Colin rekindled his winemaking career at Gramp’s Orlando. He pioneered the first vintage Orlando Special Reserve Claret made from shiraz and cabernet sauvignon grapes.

In 1953, technical advances helped Colin’s team perfect the light sparkling wine with which his name has become synonymous, Barossa Pearl, first sold in 1956.

Colin recounted in 2014 how they invented a new technique of fermenting riesling using temperature and pressure.

“We revolutionised white table wine made in the Barossa Valley,” he said.


In 1962, Colin established the Steingarten riesling vineyard after visiting Germany’s Mosel Valley. The grapes were grown on cold, rocky slopes, causing them to fight for survival. This had the effect of producing high-quality, intense fruit. G. Gramp & Sons was sold in 1976, becoming the powerful Jacobs Creek winery.

Colin ran the Weinkeller Restaurant from 1972 until 1983. This became St Hugos, named for Colin’s father. The first St Hugo wine range was released in 1983. Its Legacy Collection included the 2013 The Last Letter cabernet, named after the letter Colin received after his father’s death.

In 1986, Colin was named a Member of the Order of Australia in recognition of his service to the wine industry technology.

He is survived by Josephine, three sons and a daughter.