

Cirami's touch in SA's vineyards

RICHARD MELCHIOR CIRAMI
SA State Viticulturist

Born: January 3, 1941;

San Francisco, US

Died: November 1, 2015; Adelaide



RICHARD was one of a group of researchers who revolutionised the Australian viticultural industry during the 1970s and 1980s. They laid foundations for today's large grape and wine industry.

A Californian by birth, his earlier life had included completing a masters degree in viticulture at the University of California, Davis. He served as a US Marine officer on tours of duty during the Vietnam War.

He and his wife Shirley

chose to settle in South Australia in 1968, the year he completed his masters degree.

He worked as a viticulturist in South Australia and Victoria, appointed SA's State Viticulturist in 1973. He also had a

national role in improving wine grape varieties through clonal selection and imports.

His enthusiasm and communication skills helped his work, giving technical support to local vine improvement societies as grapegrowers made clonal selections searching for better production, berry and vinification qualities.

He introduced new grape varieties and rootstocks from overseas and helped with their comparative trialling. These long and complex procedures minimise the risk of importing unwanted viruses and bugs. The selection of rootstocks had a dramatic effect on the quality of some varieties.

The improvements these

changes wrought in the Australian grapegrowing industry continue to have a major impact on the international competitiveness of our wines.

Richard was the government representative on SA's Phylloxera Board, charged with keeping the deadly phylloxera vine louse out of SA, for more than 20 years.

The scale of his impact can be judged by the decision of the large Riverland Vine Improvement Committee to name their 40 hectare vineyard of 'more than 80 wine-grape varieties and 200 clones the Cirami Block.

They went on to establish Cirami Estate Wines, which makes wines from some of the

newer varieties. Richard and Shirley Cirami, together with Mike and Sandy Fitzpatrick, had also established their own, Bonnonee Winery near Irymple, Victoria, in the early 1970s.

Richard's books and scientific papers included contributions to the Australian "bible" on viticulture, and writing *Tablegrapes for the Home Garden*, (published by Winetitles) in 1996.

His later life was affected by multiple sclerosis. He was proud to become an Australian citizen, and gained a Medal of the Order of Australia for his viticultural work in 2007.

He is survived by children Caroline and Christopher and four grandchildren.