

World grape expert was an inspiration

Dr Peter May, AM

Viticultural researcher

Born: September 29, 1922; Budapest

Died: April 22, 2007; Adelaide

DR PETER May was one of Australia's foremost viticultural researchers. He was not only respected in the wine and grape industry but admired by most and loved by many of his colleagues. Peter led an active life, continuing to advise colleagues. As recently as February he made a taxing trip to Mexico to consult on problems with grapevine flowering. His enthusiasm was unflagging and his energy belied his 84 years.

Hungarian by birth, Peter spent his early formative years in Vienna. World War II saw him working on a number of farms in Switzerland, and those experiences led him to study for a tertiary qualification in Agricultural Science from the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in 1950.

He migrated to Australia that same year and, after a brief sojourn in Gippsland, was made a technical assistant at the then CSIRO Commonwealth Research Station - Merbein, in Victoria in 1952.

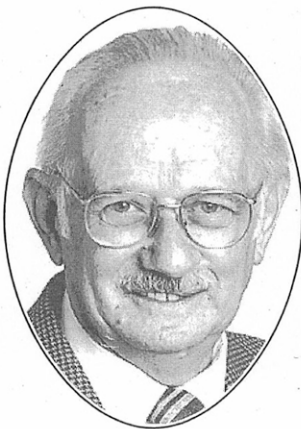
Viticulture, and in particular the physiology of *Vitis vinifera* L.c.v. *sultana*, quickly became his professional passion. Driven by the meteoric rise in his standing in the global viticulture community resulting from his work at Merbein, Peter was awarded a CSIRO Postgraduate Scholarship in 1963 to complete his doctorate dissertation at his alma mater in Switzerland.

Equipped with original insights into grapevine reproductive biology, and especially the

drivers of bud fruitfulness, he returned to the newly created CSIRO Division of Horticultural Research, in Adelaide.

His insightfulness and practical skill as a researcher, infectious enthusiasm and his boundless energy, all contributed to a lasting impact on viticultural practices that became widely adopted within an emergent industry. Those impacts continue to this day.

In Adelaide, Peter was promoted to assistant chief of division, and served as acting chief for lengthy periods. As a senior administrator, he became a mentor to many - especially younger scientists; a source of



inspiration; a stern critic with an eye to rigour, and divisional advocate for all.

Those lasting contributions to viticulture, and his efforts in promoting viticultural research worldwide, were recognised with the award for the prestigious Urrbrae Medal in 1977, and a medal from the University of Bourgogne in 1985. As further recognition of his generous personal and professional life, Peter was invested as a Member of the Order of Australia in 1996 and as a Life Member of Australian Society of Viticulture and Oenology in 1997.

Retirement from the CSIRO as a Chief Research Scientist heralded the start of a new career as educator, editor and consultant. Freed from administrative constraints, Peter's activities blossomed. He seemed to tap into fresh sources of energy that sustained his endless quest for new knowledge in human affairs, plant science generally, and viticulture in particular.

During that period, he spent three years as Visiting Professor of Viticulture at the University of Burgundy, and had a tour of two years as Visiting Professor in the Graduate School of Agriculture, Universitas Brawijaya Fakultas Pertanian - Malang, East Java, Indonesia.

Returning to Australia, he became founding editor of the *Australian Journal of Grape and Wine Research* in 1995.

Peter was unfailingly modest and never one to trumpet his own achievements.

Perhaps his greatest legacy is the help he offered other researchers. His energy was inspiring and infectious.

Peter will be greatly missed by the grape and wine industry but remembered with great respect and affection.