

SE Good Taste  
 HD **President role 'an honour'**  
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food&**wine**

Hunter winemaker Neil McGuigan has been shoulder-tapped for a key position in a prestigious global competition, writes JOHN LEWIS.

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IT is a position previously occupied by such global **wine** notables as Robert Mondarvi, Odette Pol Roger, Max Lake, Wolf Blass and Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, and its new holder is 55-year-old son of the Hunter, Neil McGuigan .

In Britain last week, Neil was announced as the 2015 president of the International **Wine** and Spirit Competition (IWSC) - one of the most prestigious and independent **wine** competitions in the world.

He is only the fourth Australian to hold the presidency in the 44-year history of the IWSC, and his appointment was announced at a black-tie banquet and awards presentation night in London.

The other three Australians to hold the IWSC presidency have been surgeon, author, Hunter winemaker, bon vivant and **wine** judge Dr Max Lake, Rosemount founding managing director Chris Hancock and South Australian winemaking legend Wolf Blass.

Neil McGuigan is chief executive of ASX-listed winemaker Australian Vintage Ltd (AVL) and no stranger to IWSC triumphs.

He led the McGuigan arm of AVL to win the titles of International Winemaker of the Year and Australian Producer of the Year in 2009, 2011 and 2012.

McGuigan was the first winemaker to claim these awards three times.

Neil said the IWSC presidency was "quite an honour for a guy from the Hunter Valley" and for the McGuigan **brand** and Australian **wine**.

During 2015 he will host landmark IWSC events and tastings in London, Dusseldorf, **Hong Kong** and Vancouver.

He said he would be encouraging more **wine** companies around the world to become involved in competitions like the IWSC.

Such judgings recognised excellence and helped the global **wine** industry raise the bar by eliminating **wine** faults and embracing new styles.

Neil is a member of the fourth generation of McGuigan **wine** men, who also include his brothers, Hunter vigneron Ross, and celebrated **wine** industry leader and newly anointed Newcastle NRL Knights chairman Brian.

Neil and his siblings were steeped in the time-honoured routines of vineyard and winery as they grew up at Branxton next to the historic Penfolds Dalwood cellars managed by their father Perc.

After graduating with a Roseworthy College winemaking degree, Neil joined Brian as a winemaker at Wyndham Estate where he rose to become **group** production director.

After Wyndham was swallowed up by Pernod Ricard in 1989 in a \$73 **million** takeover, Neil joined Brian and Fay McGuigan and brother Ross in establishing the McGuigan Brothers **brand**, which was to later to grow into AVL.

In 1994 he left the McGuigan **company** to begin a six-year stint as part-owner and winemaker at Briar Ridge at Mount View.

In 2000 he left Briar Ridge to become general manager-chief winemaker at Rothbury Estate and then in 2004 he rejoined Brian at McGuigan Simeon Wines (now AVL) as general manager of production and **wine** supply.

In July 2010 he was appointed chief executive of AVL, a position in which his formidable skills in marketing, **wine** production and innovation have shone.

Casella moves on Lehmann

THE Yenda-based Casella family **wine company**, which last year was Australia's third largest producer and seller of branded **wine**, looks set to take over Peter Lehmann Wines (PLW).

Casella has made a \$57 **million**, \$1.50-a-share buyout offer for the Barossa Valley venture founded in 1978 by Peter Lehmann .

The buyout has been accepted by PLW 86 per cent shareholder, the Swiss-based Hess **wine** and beverage **group**, and by Margaret Lehmann and her family, who hold a 10.4 per cent **stake**.

In endorsing the buyout, Margaret said John Casella was a winemaker, sharing the values that led to the creation of PLW, and bringing back the patient private ownership that better suited the cyclical nature of the **wine** industry.

Peter Lehmann , known universally as the Baron of the Barossa, died in 2013 at the age of 82.

In 2003 he took a pivotal role in Hess gaining a controlling **stake** in PLW after a corporate battle that saw it trump a takeover offer from the giant UK-based Allied Domencq plc.

Casella's managing director, John Casella , said he wanted to increase production at the PLW Tanunda winery and lift Casella's presence in the premium segment of the **wine** market.

The Casella enterprise was founded by Filippo and Maria Casella , who migrated to Australia in 1955 and began making **wine** at Yenda, in the NSW Riverina, in 1965.

The **company**'s phenomenal success has been based on its Yellow Tail **brand** wines, that sell 12.5 **million** cases a year around the world.

Casella's 250,000-tonne-capacity Yenda winery is Australia's biggest production facility. The **company** boasts that its 174,000-tonne 2013 grape crush was the equivalent of three times the weight of steel used in the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

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