


Sommelier Xavier Vigier comes of age at Australia's Wine List of the Year Awards

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It wasn't just another restaurant fire when the prep kitchen and outbuildings went up in smoke one fateful Sunday back in February 2018 at Ten Minutes by Tractor.

The renowned Mornington Peninsula dining room and winery was home, among other things – including several vintage tractors – to a 5000-bottle wine collection known widely as one of the country's best.

And much of it had been acquired by owners Martin and Karen Spedding on personal trips around northern hemisphere wine country, mostly France. Cost: around \$400,000. Value to the restaurant? About \$1.5m.

So when Paris-born, proud Australian Xavier Vigier took a job at the now-rebuilt restaurant 18 months later as head sommelier it was, quite literally, to start from scratch.

“There was not one bottle of wine,” says Vigier of the task ahead of him: to rebuild the cellar, to create a wine list that augmented the brand's own chardonnay and pinot noir styles with wine from all over Australia and the world that gave context to the Mornington Peninsula's cool climate Burgundian varieties.

He did, by all accounts, a pretty good job,

Vigier was recognised on Monday as the best sommelier at Australia's Wine List of the Year Awards. The Judy Hirst Award is recognition of his talents in the wine world, building a wine list appropriate to the menu, dispensing advice to diners who are interested and managing a team of like-minded wine buffs. In association with Vigier's personal award, the Wine List of the Year gong went to the reborn Ten Minutes by Tractor.

“I came to Victoria without really knowing the market, so I was quite conservative at first,” says Vigier who emigrated in 2013 and spent six years in Sydney restaurants before falling in love with the Peninsula.

“I'd always been told there were people with money in Melbourne but they spend it a bit differently to Sydney.

“We grew the list organically and the wines by the glass section has become such an important part of the restaurant because we understand that people are coming from Melbourne, from elsewhere. and they’re driving back so there was a demand for it.”

According to Chair of Judges Peter Forrestal: “In its wine list, they have reconceptualised the notion of the winery restaurant; given clearer definition to the idea of evoking a sense of place; offered a unique exploration of the wines of Mornington, placing them alongside the great wines of Australia and the world. All this has made for a fascinating list. Xavier Vigier takes his place alongside Australia’s finest sommeliers.”

Vigier studied international trade in Marseilles before heading to London in 2008 “to conquer the world”. The GFC was in full swing and, confronted by too many closed doors, he fell back on hospitality work to survive. He flatted with Australians in London and soon determined to – one day – move down under. It was in Sydney, he says, working at the restaurant Ormeggio, that his interest in wine really hit the turbocharger.

Despite some big ticket wines on his list, Vigier insists his is an egalitarian approach.

“I have seen in my career too many times the wine being drunk by the sommelier or left of the cellar because they’re priced so that only the richest people in the world could afford it. My view is that we should demystify the world of fine wine It’s about sharing. Our job as sommelier is about educating without patronising. And the best way to educate it is to open bottles of wine.”

His boss, Martin Spedding, agrees.

“The days of the longest wine list in the country being the best are over,” he says. “Quite the opposite.”

Spedding says nowadays his restaurant eschews the ultra-premium trophy labels.

“But we did once have a DRC (Domaine Romanee-Conti) on the list, which was one I bought in 2005 for \$2900 and it stayed on the list all the way through to the fire. There were a few people who tried to buy it, including Malcolm Fraser, but I had to explain to them all that we’re not a bottle shop. They could buy it and drink it, but they couldn’t take it away.”

Other notable winners from the awards include veteran Brisbane wine bar Cru taking Best Wine Bar List, Best Listing of Queensland Wines, Best List of Wines by the Glass and Best Champagne List. Melbourne’s Ishizuka, run by sommelier-turned-restaurateur David Lawler, took Best Small List (50 Wine) for the third time.

For full results: winelistoftheyear.com.au

[See the winning wine list](#)

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