



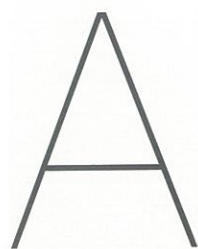
## GLOBAL JOURNEY

Julia Weirich comes from Germany, lives in Byron Bay, visits European wineries for her 'day job' and makes her own wine in the Barossa Valley, debuting as one of James Halliday's 10 best new producers last year. Here, she shares her story so far.

INTERVIEW AMELIA BALL







FTER I finished my Masters in Industrial Engineering in Germany, I decided I needed to improve my English – I didn't feel very confident with it. My best option was to go overseas, but I didn't know where to start. Friends recommended Australia, so after a three-month solo stint in South East Asia, I arrived in Sydney in 2012 and have never looked back.

I started working with [wine importer and distributor] Fesq & Company in 2013 as a marketing coordinator, where I began studying WSET [Wine & Spirit Education] courses, as well as some in-house training and self-study to get me up to speed on wine. I was also lucky to visit winemakers from our portfolio to learn about the different regions. The more I dove into the topics, the more I realised I wanted to learn more about this vast and exciting world.

### The work experience

After completing my WSET 3, I wondered whether to do my WSET 4 [the Diploma, which is the highest level], or get my hands dirty and figure out if winemaking was something I could imagine doing. So in 2016, I spent some time during vintage working with Phillip Jones [of Bass Phillip in Victoria's Gippsland] and I couldn't have asked for a greater teacher.

I'm sure everyone remembers their first harvest experience and the many times you stand around feeling a little lost, scratching your head, thinking 'What am I supposed to do?' I quickly learnt that you have to become some sort of MacGyver because you're faced with new challenges every day and need to think outside the box in order to make things work quickly.

Phillip would always answer all of my questions, even when it was stressful. And because he is a former engineer, he loved throwing me challenges on the spot, such as 'Can you just figure out how much this tank holds?' There weren't even marks on the tank – he'd throw me a measuring tape and say he'd be back in two minutes! There comes a point during harvest where you can either laugh or cry – there's no in-between. So you go for the laugh and dance it off, and pull through with the team; you're all working for the same goals. It was the most exhausting thing I'd ever done in my entire life, but I loved it.

After that, I went to work with Yealands in New Zealand, which produces wine on a massive scale. It has the biggest vineyard in the Southern Hemisphere and even the tanks are huge – the acoustics in the 200,000-litre tanks were excellent for 'cleaning karaoke!' That's when I started to really understand the winemaking process because once you grasp it on a bigger scale, you can dilute it down to smaller operations, so that was really helpful.

After vintage, I went back to Europe and travelled around Italy to get a feel for the different regions, terroirs and wine styles, and also because I simply love this country!

I then had the chance to work with Andrew Nielsen, an Aussie living in London who makes wine for his Le Grappin label in Burgundy. That was another big stepping stone in my wine journey. We had to play 'barrel and tank Tetris' to make things work in the winery. The team was a small, great group and Andrew was an incredible teacher. He made me understand the chemical reactions [in winemaking] in a very fun way and never tired of explaining his natural approach to winemaking. I had a lot of 'a-ha moments' in Burgundy that changed my perspective on winemaking. It was even longer working hours there, but thank god we had beer on tap and good music! It always comes down to the people you work with too.

After that, I went to South Africa, which was very humbling, particularly in regards to resourcefulness. There would be a radio announcement saying there was only enough water for the next 90 days, which creates an entirely new dimension on how to make wine. Working for Mulderbosch alongside Mick Craven helped me uncover new facets of winemaking I'm very grateful for. With every harvest, even if you think you've seen it all – and god knows, I don't – you really haven't!

### The return to Australia

Throughout my harvest adventures, I kept in touch with Dave Fesq [GM of Fesq & Company] and during one phone call, he said they had an opportunity that could suit me. So, I came back in 2017 as imports manager for Fesq to help the company reintroduce premium international wine. This was a new extension of my skills, which was great, but you can't take the girl out of the cellar – I kept thinking about how much I would love to make wine too.

I started talking to Simon Cowham and Corey Ryan of Sons of Eden, who I knew from my previous role because they are part of the Fesq portfolio. Brave Souls Wine is in collaboration with them – I source their fruit and use their winery. I really believe I found the two most amazing mentors on this very first project. When you start making wine, it's a very different chapter, so it's really important to have the right people around you with the right mindset. I've been very lucky with these guys.

I now live in Byron Bay and spend harvest at the winery in the Barossa Valley, and go back when I need to work on the wines. I travel to Sydney frequently for work, and will also head to Europe again soon, so I'm very lucky to have that flexibility and freedom. It works because I like to think I'm quite good at time management, but also because I work with a fabulous team I can trust and rely on.

### The winemaking

I make three wines – a riesling, a shiraz and a grenache shiraz mourvedre [the debut wines scored 95, 96 and 95 respectively in last year's *Halliday Wine Companion*]. I'm trying to make wines that are approachable, young, bright and aromatic, and that let the uniqueness of the terroir shine through. It's not about putting just another wine out there, but something that represents the region in a beautiful way. I want to create wine that is pure and brings people together to enjoy the moment – you don't have to put it away for 20 years to understand it. I love to drink aged wines too, but with this project I'd like to allow people to enjoy these wines in the present, with not much fuss and a smile on their faces. For now, I'm concentrating on the three wines so I can focus on their quality. I want to keep it fun and enjoyable.

The label is about acknowledging the everyday heroes of South Australia's biggest maritime catastrophe [of the 1859 shipwreck of SS Admella southwest of Mount Gambier]. Bruce Goold, a wonderful artist from Palm Beach, and our graphic designer Will Farge, helped us reflect their stories on our labels. I wanted to acknowledge the bravery of the three men who stepped up, opened their hearts and risked their lives by saving people from the sinking ship, but this also relates to today. I believe it's important to make conscious changes in this world to contribute to a better, brighter future. We can all play our part, as little as it may be.

Winemaking for me is like being offered a new, blank canvas with every harvest, and mother nature gives you the colour palette to work with – it's different every year, so your wine will be too. I see it as a balancing act between science, art and the love for it. There's also a whole lot of luck involved too. ●



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Julia Weirich



## THE WINES

**2017 Brave Souls Wine  
The Whaler Shiraz**  
\$28

With a rounded mid-palate, this fleshy wine has good integration and intensity of flavour, showing finesse, focus and refinement.

**2017 Brave Souls Wine  
The Lighthouse Keeper  
Riesling**  
\$28

Citrus notes are supported in this wine by a lingering but well-balanced mineral line, finishing long, fine and dry.

**2017 Brave Souls Wine  
The Able Seaman  
Grenache Shiraz Mourvedre**  
\$28

Silky tannins and texture make up this grenache-based wine, with lifted cinnamon, anise and red fruit aromas.

