

Cassegrain
John Cassegrain
Hastings River, New South Wales

“John Cassegrain could not have received better training for the wine industry—his mentor was Murray Tyrrell, one of the Hunter Valley’s legends. Tyrrell’s motto was *nisi magnum nisi bonum*—if it is not great it is not good, or effectively, only the best will do.

“My interest in the wine industry was seeded at the age of thirteen. At the time I was at boarding school in northern New South Wales, a long way from any wine regions. It was a time when, outside wine regions, the industry had very little profile, but because of my French background, and being brought up in an environment at home where wine was part of everyday life, I found I had a basic knowledge of wine not shared by my classmates.

“I was in second year high school when the geography class covered the Barossa Valley and the wine industry. On returning home for Easter holidays, I mentioned the interesting geography lesson to my father. He said he felt that winemaking in Australia had great potential. The seed was sown.

“I worked at Tyrrell’s from 1975 through to 1984, including during my study years. In 1979 I took six months leave to do winemaking in Burgundy and visit European wine regions. Then, in 1980 I stopped working at Tyrrell’s on a fulltime basis to move to Port Macquarie to establish Cassegrain Wines.

My ancestors came from the historically wine rich region of Cognac in France and the fertile plains of Lake Balaton in Hungary. In the 1950s two families made their way to Australia to make a new start, and thirty years later, Eva and I—the children of these families—began the revival of the wine industry in the Hastings River Region of Port Macquarie.

“I have many wonderful memories of winemaking over the years, and some that I wish would fade, such as when overseeing the blending of Tyrrell’s first botrytis Semillon (and I believe, the first botrytis Semillon for the Hunter, in 1978) and a cask of Shiraz was accidentally pumped into the Semillon. Fortunately we were able to remove the red wine which, because of its lower viscosity, actually floated to the top of the rich botrytis wine. A scary moment and disaster prevented.”

Excerpt from **Confessions of the Winemaker**, by Kristin Westlake, Judith Kennedy and Catharine Retter, Halstead Press 2004