

Hard work yields sweet life

BY Renee Robinson

ST ANNE'S Winery is strong on flavours and big on family.

Owner Allan McLean bought the 220 acre north-sloping property in Myrning in 1971 from the then Country Roads Board. He began planting vines in 1972 and in 1975 built a cellar door out of recycled bluestone pavers from Ballarat roads and gutters to sell his wine.

As the business expanded, Allan built a second, larger port cellar out of recycled bluestone from the William Angliss abattoirs and, after planting an 18-hole golf course, a complementary function centre from bluestone ripped up from old Caulfield roundabouts.

Allan believes that “vertigal integration” - or diversifying the business with complementary retail and trade practices - has been the key to St Anne’s success. He established the Echuca Chocolate Company, Echuca Coffee Roasters and Echuca Farmhouse Cheeses.

“Each one of these shops has a range of wines to go with the products. They’re all premium products. The coffee sourced from Java is matched with our premium fortified wines, the chocolate is matched with our liqueurs and the cheese is matched with our sparkling wines,” he said. He also owns a cooperage (barrel making business), which uses premium French oak sourced from European oak, to store his wines and ports, and has cellar doors in Myrning, Lorne, Echuca and Moama.

“We purchased and planted out 2000 acres in Echuca and Moama in the 1990s and started exporting in a small way to the United States. That was hard going. They weren’t ready for wine, they still loved their spirits, and many of them didn’t really know where Australia was.

“Then we met a Vietnamese/Chinese guy who bought our wine and we ended up supplying the large Chinese Christian community.”

Allan said in the late 1990s his children Angus, Anne and Richard returned home and became involved in the business. Angus is in charge of exporting up to five containers of wine a week to China, Richard is St Anne’s winemaker and Anne takes care of the accounts.

“My daughter-in-law is a chocolatier and runs the Echuca Chocolate Company arm of the business. St Anne’s make a range of luscious chocolate infused ports for this outlet.

“We do it all ourselves. If I fall off the perch tomorrow, I know it’s in good hands. I’ve had a succession plan in place for 20 years.”

Allan and his wife Shirley returned to Myrning last year after spending 22 years growing vineyards at Echuca because Allan said St Anne’s Winery needed a facelift.

He has developed new partnerships with owner-chef Mark Mills from The Plough, Myrning, to run events at his function centre and with Tabcorp Park to provide his visitors with accommodation options.

St Anne’s Winery produces Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Shiraz and San Gervasi to name a few, as well as a large range of premium ports blended by Allan himself.



Allan McLean at St Anne’s Winery. Photo: Renee Robinson

“We produce four million litres of wine a year and crush between 5000 and 6000 tonnes of grapes. Our yields are about three to four tonnes an acre and we build in losses, particularly in the dryland area at Echuca and Moama, by planting more vineyards.”

Allan said while the industry has hit some hard times, St Anne’s Winery’s strong reputation, vertically integrated business model and succession planning had kept it successful. Proof of this came last year when St Anne’s Winery won the inaugural Ballan District Chamber of Commerce business of the year award.

“I was pretty chuffed and totally humbled,” Allan said.

St Anne’s Winery cellar door is open 9am to 5pm seven days a week at 64 Garrards Lane, Myrning. For more information or to book a function visit www.stanneswinery.com.au or phone 5368 7209.