

As I contemplate the resounding success of the past year for the Cellar Club it remains somewhat overshadowed by the current challenging pandemic situation we have all been involved in from April to June. The club's committee and all of our members trust you personally are staying well, and for those weeks you have avoided the great outdoors, social distanced for the good of your health, thrived in your bubble and have some plans for the new normal that lies ahead as we contemplate beyond July. I am sure you are thinking *"as long as there is some wine in whatever is to be my new space, I'll be ok"*.

It is my privilege to present to club members the club's Annual Report for the 2019 – 2020 year.

The imposition of the pandemic lockdown and the speed at which our normal life has been changed are unprecedented. What we are facing is challenging and an uncertainty for some time ahead. Plans for the club's forthcoming year were progressing well but have been in a little disarray and hence some of our priorities will need to be re-examined. Managing and protecting our health is of paramount importance as is resuscitating our economy and growing employment. I hope your personal situation is manageable and that in a small way the Cellar Club can offer us all some continuity, some much needed pleasure with friends and a regular monthly event as we contemplate a new normal and the immediate year ahead.

At the beginning of June, we were still to determine exactly when the AGM for 2020 could be held, preferably being able to gather in person. The committee continues to work hard on the club's activities for the year ahead. It is a shame this being our 40th year, with celebrations planned, that the best laid plans have been hijacked. But we will endure and find a way for the club to head into the next decade with purpose and spirit, to gather with glass in hand and stress the social side of social distancing.

Reflecting on the club's 2019 – 2020 year is a source of much satisfaction and we thank you as club members for your continuing involvement. Significantly, this being an anniversary year, it is a special focus going forward. Despite current challenges, the past year has been really memorable. Our membership remains strong (with just under 60 including life members) and attendance at meetings and dinners has never been better. With attendances at the (nine) monthly tastings well exceeding 300 for the year we are encouraged by your interest and sociability. The vibrancy of the club is its standout feature. In particular I want to thank members for their support for, and ordering of wines from presenters at our regular meetings. Such ordering is appreciated by presenters who largely cover their own attendance costs often from outside Wellington. It certainly helps the club to relate well to wineries and distributors. There were some very memorable presentations this last year and with support for dinners and other activities this remains a significant strength of your club. There are some notable groups and tables of friends in the club and your 'bon ami' is admirable and well appreciated.

Ensuring we maintain and grow our membership numbers, sustain the good shape of our finances, work to attract the presenters for our meetings and indulge ourselves in a welcoming tasting environment, to meet members' expectations, are prime objectives of the club. The fact the club has endured as it has is testimony to the ability to enthuse members' interest in wine socially and as a learning opportunity.

It is pleasing to report that the club continues to operate on a very sound financial basis, as the annual financial report illustrates, and hence our thanks for astute budget management and oversight of our fixed costs goes to the club's esteemed and long serving treasurer. With healthy finances we were able to subsidise events from membership dues, operate a modest cellar, ensure the club's viability, and readily meet the council's license fees and venue hire liabilities, all whilst being conscious of affordability.

Our operating model is one similar to many wine clubs but is also different to some other wine societies. We are told that our club's style suits many presenters and wine producers and leads to many wineries seeking to return to the club, however, meeting members' expectations remains paramount for the committee. Suggestions and options for events and tastings are always welcome to ensure the club delivers educative and social experiences that maintain your interest. Please talk with committee members at every opportunity. We are grateful for member's willingness to help with monthly meeting logistics, organisation, distribution of orders and being inclusive with new members and guests.

Your committee has been tireless in their organisation of presenters and meetings and handling the vast array of issues that arise. Flexibility with planning is also key when occasionally things unravel. All committee members have worked selflessly again this last year to keep the club thriving. Managing the website, the newsletter, the finances, licensing and venues, our secretarial support, tastings and catering all ensure the club's affairs tick over efficiently. These are the matters that distinguish our club. I am indeed grateful for these collective efforts. Their work is always supported by an extensive email flow between monthly meetings and good interchanges. I wish to acknowledge two committee members who have opted to stand down from their committee roles and to them and the committee my sincere thanks.

- **Robin Semmens** has a most outstanding involvement and longevity of 20 years on the club's committee. He has held with distinction the roles of secretary, newsletter editor, tasting organiser and been a source of great advice and support for those years, for which we are most grateful;
- **Steve Eades**, who has created and managed our current website, and who has been invaluable on our committee, has also opted to step down from his committee role (but will keep an oversight of the club's website for us) and we have much appreciated his contributions;
- The club's sincere thanks are extended to both Robin and Steve for their involvements and years of hard work. We are certainly encouraged to note that both will keep their membership current and will ensure their respective palates remain finely tuned.

Hence, I raise a glass and commend to you this fine committee, and I am pleased to report that all others have expressed a desire to continue with their valued and active committee involvement.

And so to the year that was. Attendances indicate a well received programme. The year was varied, illuminating, international and well patronised. We extended our wine knowledge and horizons, were privileged to host a number of iconic wineries, "visited" wine regions afar, and mixed wine and rugby with

- *Waimea Estate (Nelson).*
- *Colab's wines and a taste of Europe*
- *Central Otago wine style and tastings from two wineries hosted by Cenna from Negotiants*
- *Compared South Africa, Australia, France, USA and Italy (plus England) with Keith from Eurovintage*
- *A South American theme, both food and wine with Negotiants and in-house catering and a tango surprise, and*
- *Maison Noire combined the iconic Hawkes Bay with something very French in style*

Our two annual dinners attracted collectively nearing 100. Thank you members for your support, your company and the great BYO wine from your cellars - as it was also at the traditional January BBQ, with all venues excelling and members certainly able to mix and mingle (very pre-pandemic) at :

- *Trade Kitchen (July)*
- *Cashmere Lounge (December)*
- *The BBQ at Derek's place (January)*

We have over time as a club traversed the horizons and interests of many wine enthusiasts in both our immediate northern suburbs and the greater Wellington area for 40 memorable years. This is an achievement well worth noting. Our challenge is to continue our interest and grow our membership in the immediate decade ahead and to mark a truly great 50th year anniversary. Thank you for being part of this journey in wine, I hope you and friends will nurture your cellars, indulge your interests and be part of the next period of the Cellar Club's history in wine.

It is my pleasure to thank you as members for your support, active involvement, sociability and attachment to 'vino'. We raise a glass to you in these challenging times, and welcome you continuing your wine experiences at Wellington's pre-eminent wine club meetings and at our dinners and social occasions as we celebrate your club's longevity in Wellington.

Murray Jaspers
President, The Cellar Club