

Wine & **SALTWATER** *in the veins*

William Hardy, like his uncle before him, Sir James, is the latest Hardy family member to have a wine range named in his honour. Bill shared his thoughts on his 40 years with the company and Sir James opens up about his role in the America's Cup victory 30 years ago this month.

WORDS KATRINA HOLDEN

With 160 years of winemaking history, there's been more than one Hardy family member to name a wine after. The latest person to receive the honour is William (or Bill) Hardy, who this year is celebrating 40 years with the company, which itself is celebrating 160 years of operation since Thomas Hardy purchased the Bankside property on the River Torrens.

The official brochure for the new William Hardy range quotes Bill as saying: "When Hardy's paid me the great compliment of suggesting a release of wines under my name to celebrate my 40 years in the business – I had huge pleasure in participating in the development of the philosophy behind the wines." However, in person at a launch event in Sydney, Bill admitted that to have a wine named after him was kind of embarrassing. "Of course incredibly proud – it's humbling but it's also an honour," said Bill.

The range is initially made from the best grapes from the best regions and to begin, all four varieties are from South Australia. "I make no apology for that," said Bill. Led by chief winemaker Paul Lapsley, there's a Hardys William Hardy Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc 2012; Adelaide Hills Chardonnay 2012; Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon 2012; and Barossa Valley Shiraz 2012.

Bill gets a kick out of the fact that every day, more than two million glasses of Hardys wines are poured and drunk around the world in 180 countries. But it's when Bill begins to talk about the family's prized yacht, now owned by Sir James Hardy, that he becomes emotional with an audible quiver in his voice. Bill's uncle, Sir James Hardy is also in the room, ready to sail in his captain's hat. We hear how James' father and Bill's grandfather, Tom Mayfield Hardy, was killed in a plane crash in 1938, along with Hugo Gramp of Orlando, Sydney Hill-Smith of Yalumba and Charles Hawker – when James was just six. This left his widow Eileen Hardy to care for her four children. She wasn't sure whether to sell the house or the prized *Neridah* yacht which she had named – it had been designed in Glasgow. Sadly, the boat had to go. But the sons kept watch on her over the coming decades, always knowing her whereabouts. She also won a Sydney to Hobart yacht race while out of Hardy ownership.

Eileen is spoken of with much affection. In 1973 the family created a flagship wine in her honour, Eileen Hardy Shiraz, to mark her 80th birthday. Bill and James still remember the party she threw at the Seacliff property where Bill now lives today. "It started at 4am on the Sunday when her fisherman named Albury rocked up and it went 'till Tuesday night. Word got out she was serving a special Shiraz – I think she and her friends pretty much drank that first release for themselves," said Bill. Eileen would receive the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to Australian wine in 1976.

Sir James Hardy's love affair with the water is not surprising, given his late father Tom had been awarded Australia's first Master Yachtsman Certificate in 1965. Though he was only six

when Tom died, he clearly inherited sailing in his blood. After a sail around Sydney Harbour on board *Neridah*, in which Sir James at 80 years of age is still very much in command and control as captain, I had the pleasure of sitting with Sir James over lunch where he opened up about his love of sailing, wine and the sweet taste of victory when he was the back-up skipper and director of the challenge during the 1983 America's Cup – which took place 30 years ago this month.

He says his "mad keen sailing bug" began age 10. It was 1942 and World War II was still raging. They couldn't afford new sails so he used to help repair cotton sails. At just 14, he built his first boat and began his career of winning state and national championships. "I was eventually invited to join the America's Cup 12m racing class in 1967 and witnessed the *Dame Pattie* being beaten – I was hooked by then," said Sir James.

"In 1970, Sir Frank Packer invited me to try out for *Gretel II*. I invited John Bertrand to join my crew. I raced in the America's Cup three times before the 1983 victory on board *Australia II* – on the *Gretel II* in 1970, *Southern Cross* in 1974 and *Australia I* in 1980," said Sir James.

In 1971, the opportunity came up to buy back the family's *Neridah* yacht. None of the family had the funds at the time, so Sir James put it to the Board of the company that they



The famous boat, Australia II.

should own a company boat. "My sales pitch was 'vintage yacht, vintage wines – they go together like ham and eggs!'"

The September 1983 victory for *Australia II* in the America's Cup marked the first victory for an Australian crew and ended a 132 year winning streak for the New York Yacht Club. The crew, including Alan Bond, are all meeting up in San Francisco this month to mark the 30th celebration. "I'm glad his memory has come back," quips Sir James. "Alan is the only man I know who could convince the passengers on the *Titanic* they needed to buy ice," says Sir James. "John Bertrand was really my protégé – he was the guy I ran my ideas by. My team was not fussed by the dizzy lights of it all. We stayed inside a metal eggshell and no one could get to us."



The footage of the post-victory celebrations is legendary; I ask what they were drinking. "There was a magnum of Champagne cracked, I remember that. Swan Lager was the beer of choice – Bondy owned it. And quite a bit of Hardys wine!" said Sir James. Dennis Conner came up to me first straight after the event. He said, 'Jim, I can't sail any better than that,' and he had tears running down his face. I put my arm around his shoulder and I said, 'Dennis, I know how you feel. I've lost this three times before, you've only lost one!'

"Just after Dennis approached me I went up to Bondy and said, one to one, 'Alan, you've got to show people the keel'. And you know what he said – not many people will believe this but it's the absolute truth. He said, 'I couldn't do that, Jim'. I didn't understand so I asked why. 'I'd be showing off,' he said. 'So I went up to Rupert Murdoch who had invested in the race and I told him about my conversation with Alan. Rupert said, 'I'll fix that' and you can see in the footage the two of them talking on the aft deck. It was only after that that Alan famously waved for the keel to be revealed."

In typical Australian fashion there were some fun moments along the way – despite the high stakes and desire for victory. When two Canadian underwater photographers were caught diving under *Australia II* trying to capture a snap of the elusive keel, one was dragged off to the courthouse while the other escaped. In dramatic American fashion, the photographer was still in his wetsuit and flippers with the police. "We almost felt sorry for him, standing there dripping and it was so ridiculous the police didn't let him change," said Sir Jim.

The concealment of the keel was part of a game of "psychological sportsmanship" more than anything else, Sir James said. They had got word that Dennis Conner may have seen the plans while the boat was being built. So to keep him on his toes and guessing, they decided to conceal the keel for the duration of the challenge period – a feat that Sir James admits would be near impossible in today's technological age. I ask Sir James if he's gone down the iPhone path. "Yes, I have one – mostly to text my son David and to check the weather conditions," he says as he shows me his favourite

weather apps. It also comes in handy to remember his wedding anniversary too!

"One of my favourite stories from that year involves the late Richard Pratt. He was behind one of our two Aussie competitor boats during the trials. At Newport Rhode Island at the yacht club, I heard that Pratt said to the staff, 'I want to drink some Australian wine – so long as it's not Hardys'. The staff member came back and said to him, 'Yes I've found something for you, this Houghton's Wine from Western Australia', to which Pratt said, 'Brilliant, we'll drink that!' Of course it was a wholly owned subsidiary of Hardys. I love that – I never let on the whole summer!"

Of course Sir James too has a wine named in his honour, which was suggested to him by Guenter Prass, "a wonderful guy who we snapped up after he finished at Orlando," said Sir James. "At a board meeting when I was then chairman, we were wanting to produce a new bottle fermented sparkling wine. Guenter said, 'Jim I'm trying to come up with a name for it – what about Sir James?' I thought, ooh sounds a bit like Pol Roger. 'But Guenter, what if I don't like the wine,' I asked. He said quite firmly in his German accent, 'You will like the wine!' and I did."

Sir James also has a fondness for Ed Carr, who got the job over the phone with Hardys. "He's a genius. I remember he came to the board and said he wanted to source some grapes from Tumbarumba. That was near Mt Kosciuszko. I thought, Jesus, that's a long way to go for some bloody grapes. But sure enough, we started winning award after award and I said, 'You better go back to Kosciuszko and get some more of those grapes'," recalls Sir James.

Sir James glances at the front cover of the brochure for the new William Hardy range, which shows some boots walking through the vines, presumably Bill's soles. Sir James said it reminds him of one of his all-time favourite comments from one of their top quality grapegrowers.

"I asked this guy once what does he reckon is the best fertiliser? And he answered, 'The footsteps of the owner.' That's always stayed with me." ■