

RESPECT

WORDS MICHAEL HINCE

Society's compelling history documented in a must-read.

David Dunstan's *A Vision for Wine – A History of the Viticultural Society of Victoria* is a must read for not only those in the wine business but also those who drink wine – and that's a good many of us given that the average imbibor consumes 304 glasses of wine annually.

Wine came of age as a popular drink in the 1960s, a relatively short time ago, and the history of both vine and wine in Victoria and their contribution to Australian wine owes much to a relatively obscure wine organisation that is the oldest of its type in Australia.

Great credit is due to Dunstan for this fascinating glimpse into the often perilous travails of all things wine in Victoria, which at times teetered on extinction, as much from indifference, the occasional hostility of governments and the unrelenting influence of the Temperance movement – as it did from the dreaded phylloxera disease.

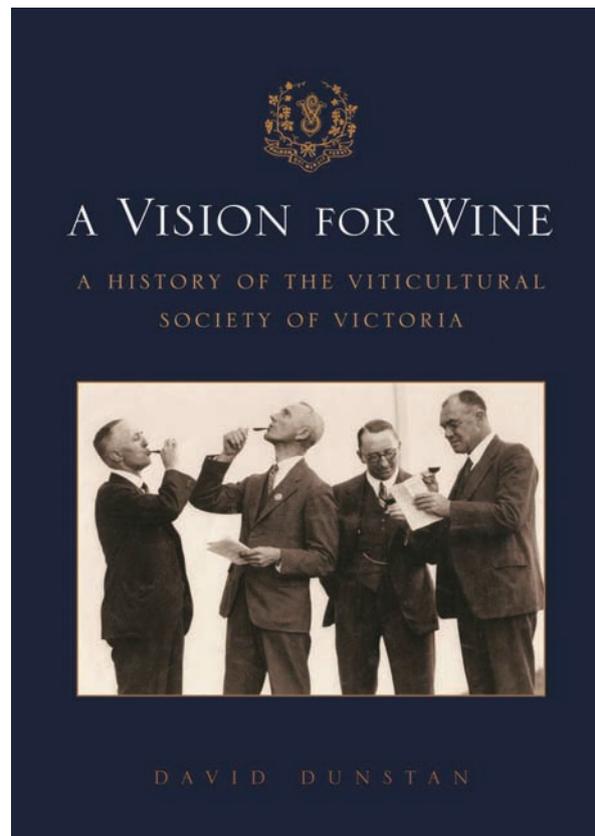
This riveting, richly rewarding social history is of relevance from many perspectives, not least of which is that it shines a light on issues that still resonate today. The most obvious and vexing is the incandescent anti-alcohol lobby that presently threatens wine's good name in much the same way as the Temperance movement and Prohibition of the past once did.

True, the Viticultural Society of Victoria was not the only organisation that fought the good fight, but especially in its first 50 years it played a much more significant role than many would have believed.

From its birth in 1905 as a vociferous defender of the then imperilled Victorian wine industry – through many a turbulent decade which eventually saw the creation of a representative national wine industry peak body – to the present day – it helped influence and advance the cause of wine. And still does in its convivial, unobtrusive way.

Industry politics aside, much of what we take for granted today in regard to wine enjoyment, appreciation, education and connoisseurship is due to the likes of the Viticultural Society of Victoria and to the many wine and food societies and Beefsteak and Burgundy clubs that helped put wine on the modern-day map in the early 1960s and beyond.

As Mike Veseth says in his book *Extreme Wine* – wine (in America) is still recovering from the dark days of Prohibition when it was *reduced to its alcoholic content in the minds of many producers, consumers and (especially) regulators*.



In reading this book it's obvious that wine *is a valuable cultural component or temperate, healthful product* that unites people. It's as much about people, places and stories as it is about the wine itself.

I, and many a Melbourne wine scribe, learnt much about European wines by attending a Society lunch (or two) in much the same way as we did about Aussie wines (and life) at the renowned Jimmy Watson's Wine Bar in Carlton.

The revival and ascendancy of wine today owes much to the individuals past and present of the Viticultural Society of Victoria and likewise the Society owes much to this book's author.

Anyone remotely interested in wine and colonial history, and how both are inextricably linked, will enjoy this book's insights into the significance of the Society itself, its relationship to The Royal Agricultural Society; its contribution to show judging, its relationship to other industry bodies like the influential, feisty, Rutherglen Winegrowers Association and its political and social contribution to the creation of a national wine industry peak body.

As Hubert de Castella said in the late 1880s *within the compass of Victoria alone could be produced all the great wine styles of Europe*. Fast forward to today and this holds true.

So if you want to find out how we have got to where we are today I suggest you read this compelling history of a Society few would have heard of, but on reading, many will begin to appreciate. ■

RRP \$49.95 Hardbound & Illustrated.

Dimensions: 297mm X 210mm.

Published by: The Viticultural Society of Victoria.

Produced by: End2End Books, Clayton Victoria

www.end2endbooks.com.au