



TIM GEORGEON

# The afterlife of a passionate nose

**Our first generation of sommeliers is ageing superbly and reinventing themselves all around the grape.**

When Forty One Restaurant's former sommelier was spotted running his own restaurant just off Sydney's legal precinct, CWK got to wondering just what our first generation of distinguished 'noses' were doing with their 'afterlife'. In Europe and the US, for instance, where sommeliers are superstars, often as celebrated as the chefs whose food they partner, they go on to have rich and successful lives, often as authors or as principals of important wine businesses.

As it turns out, the boys (and one girl) who inestimably extended our appreciation of fine dining from the late eighties on, are reinventing themselves in all sorts of inspired ways. Aria's respected former sommelier Tim Stock, who now runs his own boutique wine distribution firm and writes on wine, laments that, in Australia, sommeliers are all too often seen as "glorified wine waiters" and that's maybe why many move on to other careers.

"If the restaurant industry could continue to challenge people, then

they wouldn't grow out of it so quickly," Stock says. "But sommeliers are often seen as just indulging their own passion and restaurateurs take advantage of them because they are passionate. Often they don't understand how a sommelier can contribute to profitability." But where they do, Stock says, it's excellent training for running your own business later. "Typically, at the good restaurants I've worked at, at least a third of the revenue is generated from beverages, which the sommelier ultimately has responsibility for."

The very educated palates that first guided our wine choices to a better match with the food on the plate include Chris Crawford, who followed Ben Edwards at Melbourne's Circa, and moved on to a position as wine manager for all the restaurants in the group. Edwards himself is now a consultant sommelier. Matt Skinner, who became Jamie Oliver's wine man and sommelier at Fifteen in London is now busy writing wine books as

well as running the Fifteen wine program worldwide. One of our first female sommeliers, Nicole Tuckwell, who won awards while sommelier at Jacques Reymond, today works for a wine wholesale company that also exports wine.

In the aftermath of his tenure at Forty One, Stuart Knox (pictured above) opened a few slick coffee bars in the CBD with his dad, Keith, but couldn't wait to get back to his old forte, matching food with wine. His venture, Fix St James, has just the kind of extensive wine list you'd expect from an old sommelier (18 wines by the glass) and, with chef Kristin McGuirk (who counts Bob Carr's farewell dinner among her triumphs), is providing superb bistro food ("more on the Melbourne model") in portions of piccolo, medio and grande. It's a good business model – the Sydney CBD was crying out for just such an establishment – and the legal set are pouring in. One head of chambers can be spotted there daily.