

THE LEN EVANS *Tutorial*

AN OVERVIEW OF THE LAST 20 YEARS

The Len Evans Tutorial (LET) was founded in 2001 by wine godfather Len Evans AO OBE. Evans had recently retired from his lengthy wine-judging career and was looking for a way to continue to educate and inspire future industry leaders and show judges.

Over the ensuing 19 years, 228 scholars have passed through the program, now commonly described as the most extraordinary wine school in the world.

The overarching intent of the LET is to equip scholars with the tools and skills to evolve the quality of Australian wines, in terms of both style and technical attributes, and to give them the confidence to broadcast the incredible quality of Australian wine both locally and abroad.

In 2016 the LET was the recipient of the highly-coveted Maurice O'Shea Award, honouring its outstanding contribution to the Australian Wine Industry

As a non-profit organisation, the LET is funded entirely by a group of generous industry sponsors and benefactors, who recognise the important role that the LET plays in developing Australia as a true Wine Nation.

The program is run almost entirely by volunteers, with an impressive pool of fly-in-fly-out Tutors, experts in their own category, headed by founding Tutors James Halliday, Ian McKenzie and Iain Riggs.

All logistics are managed by an industry-based team from the Hunter Valley, who give their time for free, year after year, to act as pourers, cellar managers and session coordinators. The only remunerated position is that of the Administrative Assistant.

The Tutorial week takes place in the first week of November in the Hunter Valley, with twelve fully paid scholarships offered each year. All wine, food, travel and accommodation all included, valued at over \$10,000 per attendee.

In 2021 the Tutorial will be held on site at Spicers Guesthouse, a 5 star hotel complex in the heart of Pokolbin.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES

Evans' overarching vision was to make Australia a truly great wine nation, primarily by developing the wine-judging skills of the LET scholars.

The Australian wine show circuit is a highly developed and important part of the industry, being one of the primary arenas for exchange of views, evolution of Australian wine styles and development of quality. In Evans' mind, better wine judges, such as those produced by the Tutorial, meant better wine and a better wine industry.

While the modern Australian wine industry had expanded at a great pace, the problem of an obsession with 'technically correct' wines had arisen, preventing the broadening of Australian wine styles. By tasting and analysing a wide range of wines from around the world, the LET scholars would develop an increased appreciation of where they may take the Australian wine industry in the future.

As the price of great wine continues to escalate, and supply contract, access to the wines presented during the week had moved out of reach for most of the scholars. By tasting and analysing the greatest wines of the New and Old World, scholars would aspire to the development and support of such greatness in Australia.

Whilst Evans' original vision is still a big part of the LET's intent, over the last 10 years or so, the remit of the Tutorial has expanded, providing high-level tasting experiences and education to participants who are then well placed to influence their peers and associates well beyond the wine show forum.

These days the aim is to improve the overall skills and knowledge of our emerging industry leaders, who will go on to influence the evolution of the Australian wine industry in a multitude of ways. One key benefit is arming scholars with the skills and assurance to talk confidently about the quality of Australian wine on the international stage.

WHO CAN ATTEND?

Applications are open to people from all sectors of the Australian wine and hospitality industry, with priority given to Australia-based applicants.

The overall diversity of the attendee group is essential. A broad mix of industry backgrounds is targeted in the makeup of each cohort - from the fields of winemaking, liquor retailing, importing and wholesaling, restaurants, viticulture, marketing, education and journalism. To ensure a healthy spread of perspectives, a mix of represented regions is also considered, as well as a mix of genders.

The LET is about the exchange of ideas between the attendees as well as tutoring and tasting. The scholars learn a great deal from each other.

Of the 228 scholars who have passed through the program, 58% were from a winemaking/growing background, 21% were restaurateurs/sommeliers or those from the hospitality/service industries, 7% were from media/communications, with the remaining 14% from a mix of sales & marketing, purchasing, education or other background.

While winemakers make up around 75% of applicants, but only 58% of attendees - evidence of the LET's focus on including a broad range of professional backgrounds.

The LET consistently receives around 100-120 applications per annum. Scholars are selected by a panel of approx. 15, made up of current and past tutors, past scholars, Chairs of Capital City wine shows and other industry advisers.

Applicants are asked to submit their CV and references with a detailed letter expressing why they wish to attend how they might contribute to the Australian wine industry in the future, beyond the remit of their employment positions.

The criteria is purposely broad because we are aiming for a mix of approaches, industry experience and points of view. While tasting experience and a solid base knowledge of the wine styles of the world and is preferred, the determining force with all the applicants is their potential.

Experience as an Associate Judge at regional shows is beneficial, as is an expressed interest in developing a career in wine-judging. Whilst this is not necessarily a must-have, it will inform the mix of scholars chosen for each year's cohort.

THE LET & SHOW JUDGING

The best-performing LET scholars are guaranteed positions as associate judges at the next Sydney Royal Wine Show, and a range of other shows. The majority of scholars are engaged with show judging for 3- 4 years after attending the LET, with over 50% of past scholars still active as Chairs of Judges and Panel Chairs.

A recent review revealed that all capital city wine shows bar one, as well as many regional shows, had a past scholar as Chair. It has also been pleasing to see many female LET scholars rising to Chair at a high number of national and regional shows.

THE NUT & BOLTS

The twelve scholars attend the residential Tutorial for 5 days. Throughout the week they are lead through a series of workshops, master classes and tastings by

a panel of highly-experienced, internationally-recognised industry experts. Our panel of tutors includes a broad range of professionals, such as winemakers, importers, Masters Of Wine and business owners, who are chosen for their insights into a variety or wine style. Several past scholars are now invited as tutors.

Scholars participate in 5 judging workshops, each including 30 wines served blind/masked. These brackets of wine follow a theme, based on a single variety/style. Approximately half the wines are from Australia, the rest from around the world. The focus of the workshops is on the variety/styles that Australian grape growers and winemakers work with, wines that are considered 'iconic' in the Old World, such as Shiraz and blends, Cabernet Sauvignon and blends, Pinot Noir, Riesling and Chardonnay.

The aim of the judging workshops is to teach the scholars about quality, asking them to identify the wines worthy of medals in line with those selected by the tutors.

In addition to the judging sessions, scholars attend a range of master classes featuring either an individual variety or style or producer. These classes feature world-class examples of the feature category. The aim is to place Australian wine in context with the great wines of the world.

The scholars are asked to write a dissertation relating to one of the master class feature varieties, showing detailed knowledge about where the grapes are grown, how they're grown, how the wine is made and overall quality. This exercise is marked by the tutors and the scores are used to establish the overall Tutorial Dux.

Each evening there are tastings and discussions of a curated selection of great wines of the world. Generally, they are wines of extreme rarity and high cost, wines that the scholars would not have an opportunity to buy and taste. They are not necessarily wines of great age, as some of the world's most expensive wines are from recent vintages and are chosen as benchmarks of the modern era/wine industry.

The scholars' performances are scored throughout the week, and at the end of the week a Tutorial Dux is awarded the Basil Sellers Prize, in the form of a return Business Class trip to Europe and introductions to many of Europe's great wine houses. In recent years, the LET has also collaborated with The Institute of Masters of Wine to assist a scholar from each Tutorial to attend the introductory MW course held in Adelaide at the end of November.

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