



## Dr Tony Jordan OAM (1944–2019): Goodbye to a dear friend, colleague, and mentor

Tom Stevenson recalls the life of the academic-turned-winemaker who played a crucial role in shaping Australia's modern vinous story

I first met Tony Jordan 31 years ago. Having visited an embryonic Domaine Chandon earlier in the day, Tony invited me to his home for dinner, where I peppered him with a ridiculous number of “what if” questions, to which Tony responded by opening bottle after bottle to explain point after point. We have been friends ever since. He has even gone out of his way to meet my brother in New Zealand one year and to give him a tour of the Yarra another year. That was Tony—a living encyclopedia of explanation who was always willing to help anyone.

Tony was fighting fit right up until Easter Saturday of this year (2019). In early April, he was in New South Wales on a carpentry course with his brother-in-law Gabriel and had emailed me to confirm his flights for two weeks of judging at this year's CSWWC. It was the third annual carpentry course Tony had taken, and he loved returning home

with a beautifully handcrafted chair for his wife Michele.

He felt his normal self when he drove the nine-hour journey home with his latest chair, and nothing was amiss when the next morning he flew to Western Australia, where he blended wines for Simon and Maaïke Berns of Sitella. He was back just two days later because he wanted to hear Michele singing at a Good Friday concert. On Easter Saturday, they walked down the hill from their house to see some of Tony's family, who traditionally camp over on their property at Easter. He thought he was fine, but as he tried to walk back up the hill, Tony became breathless. This was so out of character for a man who regularly spent weeks walking the foothills of mountain ranges throughout the world that he knew something was not right.

Being Easter weekend, it was not possible to see his doctor straightaway,

but as soon as he did, he was X-rayed, diagnosed with a collapsed lung, and taken to hospital. From his hospital bed, Tony told me he suspected the underlying cause to be cancer, but I was not to say anything. (Apologies to those who were concerned about him to ask at the time.) It was not long before Tony's dreadful suspicion was confirmed and the cancer identified as mesothelioma and incurable. At that point, he told me, “It is probably associated with my exposure to asbestos as an insulating material for equipment in my PhD research days in the 1960s.” The life expectancy of final stage-four mesothelioma is 14.9 months, yet Tony's cancer was so aggressive that no treatment could slow it down, and within just four months he passed away. Toward the end, he had declined any further treatment so he could get out of hospital to spend his last weeks with Michele at home.

### The Tony we knew

Anthony Douglas Jordan was born in Perth, Australia, on May 28, 1944, the first child of Douglas and Mary Jordan. When Tony was seven, he moved from Perth to Melbourne with his parents and two younger sisters, Maria and Frances. He excelled academically at Caulfield Grammar in Melbourne, winning many school prizes. After graduating from the University of Sydney with a first-class honors degree, Tony completed a PhD in physical chemistry, which led to an early career in research at the University of Houston and University College London. Returning home to Australia in 1974, he became a patent attorney in Sydney. Up to this point, Tony had no formal connection with the wine industry, but as he told *Wine & Viticulture Journal* in 2012, “I saw an ad for Riverina College for a physical chemist or enologist, which was the most extraordinary thing. Almost providence, I thought. Since my university days I had been a wine nut, probably a wine bore, and I tried to extend my knowledge in tasting as much as you could in those days. So, I spoke to the principal and said my physical chemistry is fine, but I don't have winemaking skills. But I am willing to learn.”

He was offered the position at Riverina College in Wagga Wagga (now part of Charles Sturt University), where he initially worked alongside Don Lester, chief viticulturist at Orlando. It was on Don Lester's advice that Tony took a year-long sabbatical at Geisenheim with the mad but brilliant and delightful Professor Helmut Becker (my description, not Tony's). On his return, he teamed up with Brian Croser, and together they developed the Wine Science degree course. Brian left Riverina in 1976 to form Petaluma, and in 1978 he suggested to Tony that they should set up a consultancy.

Under the banner of Oenotec, Brian and Tony became Australia's most sought-after wine consultants, and the term flying winemaker was coined to describe the work ethic they pioneered. Prior to Oenotec, a wine consultant was often an Old World academic who did a fine job but rarely got his hands dirty. By contrast, Tony and Brian provided

Opposite: Dr Tony Jordan at Ao Yun, Moët-Hennessy's red-wine venture in China, which he helped set up.

not only all the academic and technical expertise required but also hands-on winemaking. They found the staggered picking dates dictated by the spread of vineyards in a country the size of Australia to be a real boon for the expansion of their business, since it allowed them to work for clients in one region before moving on to clients in the next. Hopping by plane from harvest to harvest, they became known as flying winemakers.

By 1984, Oenotec was servicing 30 clients, including Moët-Hennessy, which wanted to establish the Domaine Chandon concept in Australia. James Halliday had recommended Oenotec to Moët-Hennessy, and Tony Jordan had been tasked with finding a suitable location. He proposed an old dairy farm at Green Point in Victoria's Yarra Valley, which was duly accepted and James Halliday, in his capacity as a lawyer, was instructed to register the company as a subsidiary of Moët-Hennessy. In the process, James was made a director of Domaine Chandon Australia (a position he held from 1985 until 1994), and he was asked to head-hunt a top winemaker with business experience to run the venture—another task he outsourced to Oenotec. After a couple of days, Tony Jordan told James that he would like to put his own name forward, and in November 1985 he was appointed CEO & chief winemaker of Domaine Chandon Australia, fermenting the first Chandon wines at James Halliday's Coldstream Hills Winery.

Tony was given an open brief and immediately began looking at various locations, not only in Victoria but also South Australia, Tasmania, and even New Zealand. It was this strategy of sourcing far and wide that led me to conclude more than a quarter of a century ago that he “achieved an international standard at Domaine Chandon Australia in 1989, after only three vintages, when the quality of Domaine Chandon California was still struggling, despite having had a 13-year start.”

In addition to his Chandon Australia duties, Tony became a consulting winemaker in the 1990s to Chandon outlets around the world, where he would often team up with Richard Geoffroy. Tony, the physical chemist turned winemaker, and Richard, the medical doctor turned winemaker—they got on well and

enjoyed each other's company.

In 2000, Tony was appointed CEO of Cape Mentelle and Cloudy Bay, and in 2001 he assumed full technical and winemaking responsibilities for all Chandon ventures not just in Australia but also Argentina, Brazil, the USA, and Spain.

In theory, Tony Jordan retired in 2008, after 21 years of service. In practice, he stopped working directly for Moët-Hennessy and continued to work for them (and others) on a consultancy basis. He reactivated Oenotec, which was now under his sole ownership, having bought out Brian Croser in 1987. Tony achieved more in ten years of so-called semi-retirement than the rest of us manage in a lifetime of full employment. From 2009 to 2014, some 15 years after his first exploratory trips, Tony was appointed lead consultant in locating the sites for and setting up Chandon India, Chandon China, and the Ao Yun (which means “Flying Above the Clouds”) red-wine venture in China. From 2014 to 2018, he was one of the three judges for the CSWWC, where we all benefited immensely from his vast knowledge and experience. He continued to judge and chair in Australia, where he also chaired the Wine Show Technical Advisory Committee tasked with updating the Best Practice Recommendations for the Australian wine-show system.

### When Tony met Michele

Tony met Michele in May 1992, when she was working for Moët & Chandon in London, and he had come over to present the Green Point project to the chairman David Marchwood. Michele told me, “As soon as we met, that was that! The day is as clear as a bell for me. We spent many years living on the opposite sides of the world, meeting up occasionally, running up huge phone bills and writing letters, and then married in London on December 29, 1998.”

“We not only shared a passion for wine for the 27 years we were together, we both loved gardens and used to visit many in England. Then together we built up our own garden. His particular passion was for trees, and he planted an arboretum here in the Yarra at our home. A lovely legacy, which is just springing into life now with blossoms and fresh green leaves.” ■