

## CAPE JAFFA WINES FINDING BALANCE IN BUSINESS AND BIODYNAMICS

*"We've gone through phases in our growth over time, we took biodynamics and sustainability very seriously when we first set out, doing everything "by the book". We have since learnt that it's all about learning what works for us, our values and our business."*

### Background

Cape Jaffa Wines is at the forefront of sustainability in the wine industry. They produce a range of whites and reds all grown locally within the Limestone Coast Region. Their approach to winemaking is not text book by any stretch of imagination.

Fruit is grown in predominantly biodynamic vineyards and they like to work with the elements to get the best out of their grapes.

Theirs is an adventurous approach to business, they are always looking for new ways to incorporate sustainability and be in tune with their environment. But these decisions also have to make good business sense.

Anna Hooper and her husband Derek have always been passionate about the environment that surrounds them on the Limestone Coast, in the Mount Benson Wine Region. They spend as much time as possible taking their recreational pursuits into the beautiful outdoors that surrounds them. It's the appreciation for these areas of rugged limestone coastline, native vegetation and gently undulating hills that inspired them to settle in this region.

Whilst the Hooper's love the "off the beaten track" feel of their surrounds, it doesn't stop them from aspiring to produce world class wines in their 25 Ha vineyard. At the core of Cape Jaffa Wines is an ethic of conservation, striving to minimise their impact on the environment and local landscape.

There are many challenges in running any wine business - you are at the mercy of a plethora of influences not limited to the elements, the markets and the red tape! However the Hooper's don't shy away from a challenge, and are intent on ensuring their core values are integrated into their business.

Cape Jaffa Wine's drive for sustainability has been recognised locally and internationally. The winery was inducted into the advantage SA Sustainability Hall of Fame in 2012, and was Runner Up in the Drinks Business Green Personality Award in the UK in 2014.

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### PROPERTY INFORMATION

**Producers** Anna and Derek Hooper

**Location** Cape Jaffa, Mount Benson Wine Region

**Property Area** 25 ha under vines

**Enterprise** Vineyard

**Rainfall** 520mm

## The Biodynamic Journey

Anna Hooper has long held an interest in organics and biodynamics, sparked by her first role working at an organic vineyard. Cape Jaffa vineyard became fully certified as biodynamic in 2006 and has also held environmental sustainability certification since 2012. The Hooper's chose this path, determined it was a good way of ensuring their environmental credentials were solid. Their commitment to sustainability extends beyond biodynamics.

Anna says "Sustainable farming and care for our environment has, and will always be an important part of the story we take to our markets. We want to make sure our environmental values are well understood and that we are transparent in what we do, demonstrating our commitment through our business."

Fifteen years ago, when the Hooper's started experimenting with the practice, organics and biodynamics were very new. Along the journey there has been much to learn, particularly given they are the first in the region to travel this path. Anna respectfully says "We didn't want to lay claim to being the most sustainable vineyard just because we were biodynamic, we are truly committed to achieving sustainability."

Over time they started to question what they do, each method scrutinised making sure it met their needs. Anna adds "We have learnt that things need to be tweaked and adapted to your area, your property and your issues. We have also learnt that there is always a trade-off – we don't apply herbicide which is great, but this does mean we utilise more water in some areas of the vineyard. A trade-off we chose to accept at this point. The lesson is there's no silver bullet to sustainability, you've got to make your own map."

## Balancing Biodynamics and Business

The Cape Jaffa experience highlights that finding the elusive balance between sustainability and business requires commitment, an open mind and a willingness to look outside the box for ideas and opportunities.

Anna shares an example "Where biodynamics has restricted us in being sustainable we've looked for other solutions – we graze sheep under vines and we use geese for insect control, but biodynamics isn't always the perfect answer for us. Our practices have worked for certain grape varieties, particularly our reds, but we are not convinced it has worked for the white varieties. So we are currently testing this idea more rigorously.

We have taken one of our blocks of a white variety out of certification to evaluate what impact some other methods might have on the production of certain varieties.

We'll trial some things, measure them, learn from them and then make decisions about which way we go with it."

"We cannot be hard and fast to the 'biodynamic rule book'" Anna continues, "We have to be pragmatic – there's no point saying you use minimal input when you don't measure what comes out. There's also no point being the best "sustainable farmers" if we can't make a living and put food on the table."

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## Continuous learning

Biodynamic and organic farmers all have different challenges. The Hooper's have visited many wineries across Australia and learnt that there is no "one size fits all" model. The challenges and results vary from state to state, region to region and even property to property. Given there is no blueprint, Anna comments on their approach "We look at our highest level risks and try to address these first, researching, trialling and documenting different methods to mitigate these. We can look at what others have done and pick out the bits that might work for us, based on what we know and what we are willing to trail."

She adds "We are continuously managing the environment we work in, we don't just keep doing what we've always done - even when it's working, we review it." An example of this is the consistent soil testing regime at Cape Jaffa Wines, which allows inputs to be accurately matched to requirements – not only makes better business sense, but also better production sense and better sense for the environment.

Sometimes the journey is just about waiting. Several years ago the Hooper's looked at adopting power

systems based on renewables. Being "off-the grid" from inception, they aspired to be the first fully renewable winery in the region, but unable to feed back into the grid, initially the figures "didn't stack up". As Anna explains "Our business involves vastly different peak usages of power, our highest point is at vintage – so we've had to look at options that can cater for this." As technology has evolved and sustainable power has become a more affordable technology they can now seriously look at putting in systems that will provide 75% of their power drawn from sustainable sources. Anna is excited about the opportunity "This will be satisfying from a personal perspective, because it aligns with our values – but now it will also make good business sense too." It's just another example of the Hooper's finding balance in what they do.

The Cape Jaffa story is inspiring, and the Hooper's hope that what they do motivates others, not just in the wine industry but across the board to adopt more sustainable practices. Anna describes "We try and live by our values in our personal life and our business life, but we can't always afford to be stoic about things that don't stack up, we have to find new ways to meet these goals, and sometimes they are outside of the box – but if it looks like a possibility we'll give it a go!



## CONTACT

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