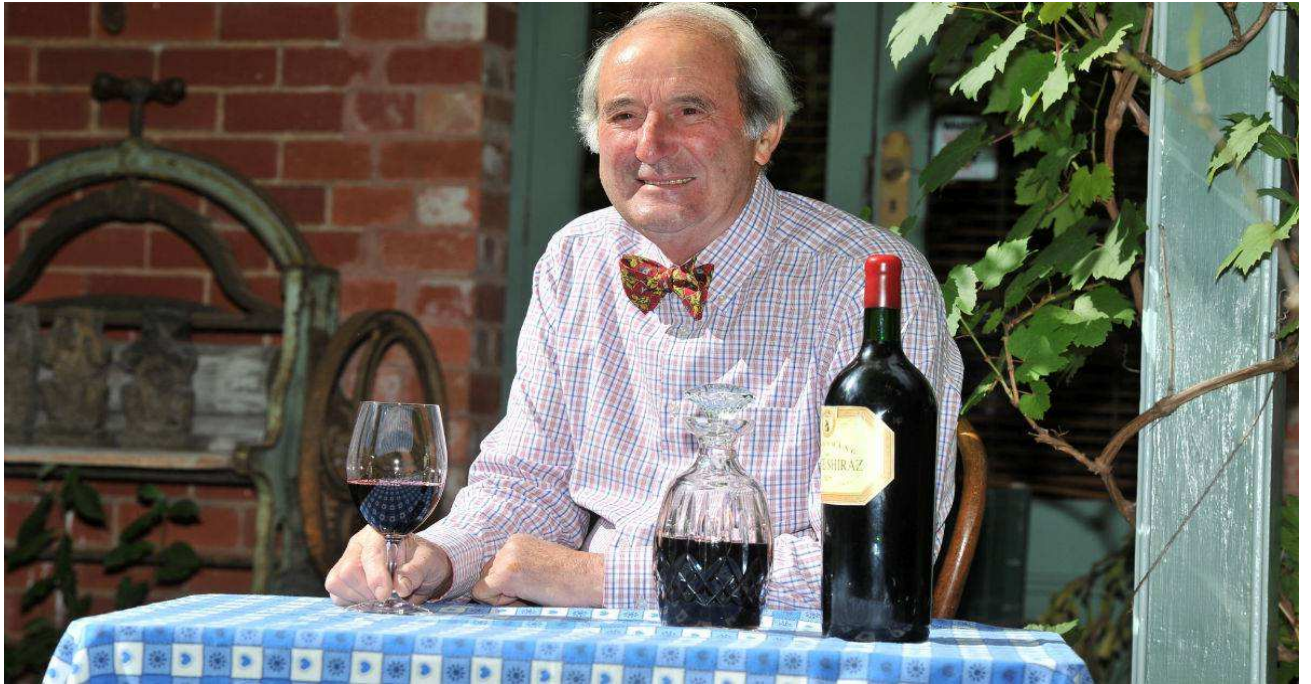


By GAV MCGRATH

Restaurateur Luigi Bazzani gets Order of Australia medal



Former La Scala restaurateur Luigi Bazzani has been appointed to the Order of Australia. PICTURE: LACHLAN BENCE

Forty-five years later he holds one of its great honours.

The 74-year-old was appointed to the Order of Australia for service to the food and wine tourism industry this year. It is a recognition of his contribution since coming to Australia.

However Mr Bazzani believes he owes as much or more to his adopted country.

Born in Italy, and still with a trace of an accent, Mr Bazzani proudly calls himself an "Aussie".

"It (the OAM) is extremely special to me," Mr Bazzani explains.

"I spent 10 years in London and when you were there you were always just an immigrant. When I came to Australia and I had the feeling that it was a fantastic country and I could do and achieve anything I wanted. I was made to feel like I was an Australian.

"I brought that energy to my first restaurant here, The Copper Pot Restaurant in Bendigo."

As a young man, Mr Bazzani left Italy for England to learn all he could about the food industry. It was there he met an Aussie girl – now wife Athalie – who convinced him to come to Australia.

Athalie says he became an Aussie the moment he arrived.

"He loved it the moment he got here," Mrs Bazzani says.

"There were only two things he wasn't sure about: the swearing and the cricket. Luigi is now a devoted Test cricket fan and he might not want to admit it, but I have heard the odd swear word slip from his mouth too."

"I think this is a country if you put in the hard work you can achieve what you want"

Mr Bazzani says his wife should be considered part-owner of the medal.

Together they established The Copper Pot in 1970, La Scala in Ballarat in 1976, and Lamby's Bar and Cafe Lascelles at the National Wool Museum in Geelong in 1988.

They established the Warrenmang Vineyard and Bazzani Wines near Avoca in 1979, expanding it into a resort in 1989.

Along with a German solicitor and a Scottish doctor, Mr Bazzani also started the soccer association in Bendigo.

Mr and Mrs Bazzani live in Ballarat after buying a property on an impulse in 1975. They've never regretted it.

Luigi was a founding sponsor of the Ballarat Art Gallery Foundation, is a committee member of the Industry Professionals Board at Federation University's faculty of hospitality and supports a range of organisations across the goldfields region, including Bendigo Overton Children's Home, Ballarat Cancer Research, Ballarat CAFS, the Avoca Regional Suicide Awareness Program, and the Ballarat Base Hospital.

"I think this is a country if you put in the hard work you can achieve what you want. A lot of my former staff are now also achieving great things," Mr Bazzani says.

Luigi Bazzani OAM

- ✪ Life member and former president, Ballarat Wine and Food Society
- ✪ Winner, Victorian government Small Business of the Year, 1993

- 🌟 Winner Inaugural International Wine Tourism Award – Great Wine Capitals of the World 2003
- 🌟 The Age Special Annual Award for Professional Excellence, 1999
- 🌟 Named a Legend, Melbourne Food and Wine Festival 2009
- 🌟 Best Restaurant and Best Winery, Goldfields Tourism Award, 1999