

2007 Young Viticulturist of the Year & 2007 Young Horticulturist of the Year

Competitions - a way to keep in touch with the industry

Emma Taylor, Otago geography graduate, took top honours at both 2007 Young Viticulturist and 2007 Horticulturist competitions. While on maternity leave, Emma challenged these male dominated professions, to become the first woman to take both titles. Congratulations Emma! Emma tells us how she became a viticulturist and how she became involved in competitions. Her awakened competitive spirit, which also proved to be the winning spirit, are inspirational to all of us.



Photo: Richard Brummer

I never really thought I was a competitive person. I also never really thought that I had an ego problem. However, both of these attributes must have come out in me when I entered the Hawkes Bay Young Viticulturist competition earlier this year.

Currently I am on maternity leave from my role as Company Viticulturist with Villa Maria Estate. The role encompassed heading up the viticulture department – overseeing our wineries crucial relationship with its 100 growers, and working with our team of vineyard managers to make sure that the grapes we were producing were exactly what our winemakers wanted. This was a fantastic role which I loved, although it was sure to have its challenges – I stepped into the role at 26 and headed up a team of 40, almost all of whom were male, older and more experienced than me.

I came to Villa Maria straight out of Otago University. I had completed my Master of Science in Physical Geography, assessing the copper concentration in Vineyard Soils across New Zealand. I drew inspiration for my thesis topic from James Miltons organic vineyards in Gisborne and my supervisor Richard Morgan. I would not say that I was particularly strong at science, and I ended up where I am by not really knowing what I

wanted to do and making decision based on topics that I liked – at school these were Biology and Geography which turned into Geography at university and by then I had started to have a bit of a liking for wine! Wine is a true reflection of the environment – with weather, water and soils all playing an important role in the end result of the wine. Therefore it is appropriate that geography – the study of the environment - has led me to this career.

While on maternity leave I was asked if I wanted to enter the Young Viticulturist competition. At 30 this would be my last chance to have a crack at the title. This is where my ego came in; this competition is the only one of its kind in New Zealand that recognises the viticulturist and the role that they play. We have several wine competitions that award the best winemaker in New Zealand or the world (and I am proud to say that Villa Maria's team of winemakers have won these awards on numerous occasions). While our winemakers always acknowledge the team aspect of the work and viticulturists always get a good mention in the thank you speech, this competition would provide the opportunity to get an accolade independent of a winemaker speech. So I entered the local competition, and after an intense day – which included tractor work, ATV racing (not my finest), pest and disease identification, general viticulture, speeches, pruning and general knowledge, I came out the winner – only just!

This is where my unknown competitive streak came in. After winning the regional competition, I was pretty determined to take out the national title too – so after some studying I successfully competed against regional winners from Marlborough, Martinborough and Central Otago to take out the National Young Viticulturist of the Year title.

The competing was not quite over, on November the 9th I met up with other national sector finalists from horticulture to compete in the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition. This competition modelled on the young farmer competition takes representatives from Viticulture, fruit growing, vegetable growing, arboriculture, landscaping, amenities, floristry and nurseries to pitch for the title of Young Horticulturist of the Year. Again after a gruelling day of physical and mental activities I was pleased to take out the title of Young Horticulturist of the Year. The prize package totals around \$25,000 and includes a spot as one of the 30 students on a Leadership New Zealand course and \$8000 worth of travel to go to a destination of my choice that will help me learn more about my industry. I have been very fortunate that my husband Chris has supported me through this entire opportunity, bringing our seven month old daughter Ellie along to all the events! The competition has kept me in touch with the industry while I am on leave and has also placed me in a very good position to re-enter the industry again.