

# **Paradise Rescued**

**From Cabbage Patch to Cabernet Franc**

**By David Stannard**

## Introduction

I can't remember the number of times I have been asked the question, how did a family living in Australia end up owning a small piece of unloved vineyard in a beautiful French village and together with a community create a unique wine and brand. It's been an amazing journey. However this book is more than just a cute French village story.

One way to read this book is purely as a coffee table book about the story, timeline and all the wonderful characters and adventures that brought it all to fruition. We are fortunate to have a second home in a beautiful village with some incredible people who have become our friends and supporters. South West France and the Bordeaux wine region has charm, wondrous scenery and the ever present alluring mix of wine and vineyards. But we wanted this book to be more than just a happy story, because there is no end to this story. It is an ongoing record of development, improvement and work to secure the sustainability of our small piece of France.

At another level, entwined within this story, there is a struggle for reason, a desire to find an identity and claim a life. On a human and personal level, our story reflects upon not only my dilemma but also that I suspect of many others when the 'traditional' life and career goals do not sufficiently empower you. We all know that inner feeling that we have more to offer and the only thing really stopping us, is us! We each have a unique character and set of skills. How we use and express them will ultimately determine both our destiny and legacy. I hope this book inspires everyone to go out there and find your niche in life, to excel and create lasting value for your own life and others and to realise that that opportunity may not find you – *you* have to find *it*. And when you do find it, you have to run with it as if your life depends on it. Because it does! And the only person accountable for it is you!

The third theme for the book is about our journey. In our progress, we have been labelled mad; other wine producers have wanted to run us out of the village; we have been ignored and snubbed completely. But when you have a dream, a goal and a *vision*, those things don't matter. In fact, you come to understand that they are

standard for the journey. And when you get deeper into the success journey, you won't remember them any longer.

I hope that this book leaves behind some important messages and subtle hints for wine producers and marketers everywhere on how to strengthen your business in a *new era of wine*. I also hope this book will bring an unparalleled excellence and passion to everything you do in that business - or any other business, organisation or positive activity.

If you get a bit of all three levels, then I will have succeeded and hopefully delivered a fun experience too. Enjoy.

And always, always, *always* remember, you can do it!

Personal Development Life Message:

“Words may inspire but only action creates change. Simon Sinek”

## Chapter 1 - A Reluctant Francophile

I enjoyed school. Most others didn't but then it's always fashionable and popular to say that you hated it. Good positive news rarely sells well! When you leave school, everyone goes on to say that they hate their work and their job. That really doesn't leave too much time afterwards to actually enjoy something. What a waste of a life!

I went to school in northwest London at a place called Mill Hill. I recall my grandmother paid for me to go there and both my father and uncle had also been schooled there. I loved the freedom of being away from home after a fairly traditional upbringing, but as an only child the pressure and intense scrutiny to do absolutely everything wonderfully well was sometimes too overwhelming. School away from home worked well for me. *Except for the French bit!*

I grew up in a traditional British home in the 1960's where no language was ever spoken other than the Queen's English. My parents were survivors of the Second World War and maintained a healthy dose of mistrust of all foreigners - particularly those south of the English coastline on the other side of the channel. It wasn't until many years after we bought our land in France that my parents first set foot in the country. They didn't own a passport between them and had never left mainland Britain. Century's old wars and political turmoil - not to mention a 22 mile stretch of water have served to separate two peoples whose origins and histories have been entangled since Roman times. While I personally thought that France had been on the same side as the English, it must have been hard to get beyond what had undoubtedly been a ghastly period to have lived through. However, traditional parental hypocrisy – or their desire that I shouldn't maintain some unfounded bias in my future – was demonstrated to the maximum and my learning of French was not an optional extra. Whether I liked it or not, I was destined to be on a boat to France

for the annual school exchange trip. Ironically I was better at Latin – why wasn't there a field trip to ancient Rome?

The real reason I didn't want to go was that it was my second year at secondary school and at the same time as the exchange trip there was likely to be an opportunity to play in the first XI hockey team for the first time at the Oxford hockey festival. Sport was my passion and hockey was by far and away the best sport that I played. My father had given me a stick at the age of 5 and I played non-stop for the next thirty years. So when I had a choice between going to France or playing hockey, it was not a difficult choice to make. But I didn't have a choice and so off to Rouen in Normandy I went. Back then I could never have imagined how it would change my future life. The trip to Rouen went well, but was also very hard work.

Most of the days there were spent at school in a French class understanding very little but inadvertently learning a lot. Dinner with my host family was followed each evening by homework. A lot of weekend time was spent touring around Normandy looking at old Romanesque architectural style churches. It wasn't really my favourite pastime but it did leave me with a love of France and its culture. Whole roast chicken and frites was the staple, and very tasty, Sunday lunch special. The final few days of the visit were spent touring Normandy in a bus and learning about its geography, geology and industry. All of which had to be written up in – yes – French! Needless to say, my written French remains reasonably good today due in no small part to that immersion.

Upon my return to England I remember getting off the train at Victoria and walking across the platform to buy a drink. I asked politely as always for my drink and back came the reply, "Sorry mate, what was that?" I asked again and this time the answer was, "Speak English mate, this is London, not Paris". My brain had already made the conversion and my mouth just started to speak as if I were in still France! This particular natural gift to speak to people in completely the wrong language is still alive and well today. I am the worst translator on the planet.



The French experiment refused to go away! Following the Rouen trip I sat my O level French exams in the Spring term. O (for Ordinary) level exams were typically taken at an age of 15 or 16 followed by A (Advanced) levels in the final two years of school. A level results effectively determined which course and university you could attend. I passed the French O Level successfully; thinking and hoping it would be the end of my parent's experiment in new European thinking and I could quietly go back to the serious business of mathematics, science and my other O Level required subjects. Alas, that was not to be. During the following year, I had to start studying part time for French A Level and at the same time continue to practice my written French skills by writing my modern European history O Level exams in French! These guys just didn't get it – or perhaps more accurately I didn't see the point at all! My still somewhat Europhobic parents were very impressed that their son was supposedly excelling in French as a means of compensating for their own complete disdain and fear of all things foreign in a country which still today can't decide if it really wants to be European or not.

The two year French A Level programme naturally composed a section of French literature. All read, learned and taught in French – of course! More interestingly too, it was taught to us by an Irishman, Rob Davey, who spoke French with an Irish accent that would rival my heavy Australian French accent today! While I studied I was thinking why on earth would anyone want to read a story about a Plague – *La Peste*, by Albert Camus? This made no sense whatsoever. As a story, it did not seem interesting and reading it in French just added to the sense of wasted time! As the teaching and the book progressed, different things started to emerge. Sometimes a lack of choice in life can be beneficial – you don't have to debate the whys and wherefores, just make it happen! I had to learn this completely the wrong way round! I went out and bought the English exam version copy which started to explain Camus' beliefs on existentialism. Although it was written about a town in North Africa being closed in by a plague it was an allegorical writing about Camus' views about French Resistance and collaboration in Nazi occupied France during the Second World War. I still couldn't believe that I was studying this high level intellectual work – reading like this was not interesting to me at all! However, as I progressed through the book, Davey started to blend in his own understandings and thinking around existentialism philosophy. This led to a deeper, more in-depth analysis of the

characters in the book and an introductory analysis of what existentialist philosophy is all about. Whilst I wasn't excited by the French component of the whole exercise, I started to develop some interest in the philosophy. It was fascinating to me that someone could come up with such a view of life and design characters to describe what Camus viewed as strong behaviour living their lives in such a way that they found meaning in what they did. It triggered a whole chain of thoughts in my mind about my own purpose. There seemed to be little point in just living, doing very little and just disappearing again.

While the French part of this exercise seemed merely academic, the life learning and the belief that there is a purpose for us all – or maybe at least for me – was to become one of my foundational values in life. I became a passionate believer in the view that we are not just here on this planet to exist and then disappear. We all have purpose and meaning – we just have to find it.

After *Camus* came Nobel Literature prize winner Jean-Paul Sartre and his political communist critique play *Crime Passionnel*, in which he espouses his existentialist philosophy to the maximum. It was a much shorter work to read but equally complex in its message to comprehend. My understanding of the structure of the story and reporting it back on paper was a lot easier. I found it easier to see the plan; maybe as it was the second work we had to study. Perhaps I had (partially) mastered the art of understanding French Literature. The bottom line is that I passed French A Level with a D, which seemed like a fair outcome given my relatively modest investment in time, interest and effort. One year later, when I only scored a C in Physics – supposedly a core engineering required subject – working round the clock to learn that mad science, I came to appreciate that perhaps my French result wasn't so embarrassing after all and next time I should try harder.

## **The Route to Chemical Engineering**

It often fascinates me how fine the line is that defines careers and lives. Just minor changes or decisions at key moments can have an enormous impact. Deciding on a career or direction for work seems such a bizarre hit-and-miss process. And after all

that decision making, education, research and job selection, most people still emerge with an unhappy look on their face!

My only reflection leading to sound advice is to find something you absolutely love, pursue it with maximum passion and enthusiasm and you will be rewarded handsomely! Although the difference (with respect to skill, experience and knowledge) between good and excellent can be quite small, very often the rewards are a complete chasm apart.

You have to do what you love, and love what you do; otherwise a career quickly becomes a job, which becomes a chore. I still believe that everyone goes to work and lives life with the objective of doing well. But somewhere, they get thrown off the rollercoaster of interest and passion and then it all goes downhill to boredom, cynicism and disenchantment from there. We then blame everyone else, moan, groan and whinge forgetting completely whose life we are complaining about. If you don't like where you are at, make a change! Otherwise, there is ultimately only one person whose life you'll have let down!

Looking back, I can't say that my decision making process towards becoming a chemical engineer was a well researched, deeply thought out career choice because it wasn't! I liked and did well at science subjects. And when my strength in mathematics and chemistry was combined with a long time family friend who knew the oil and petrochemical industry well, this guided me to choosing Chemical Engineering. To this day I have no regrets. I certainly could have managed my career a little better, but overall, I have worked in very challenging environments where I have learned business excellence together with leadership and management skills and been well remunerated for it. It allowed me to travel the world and work with, for, and alongside many exceptional people; a good number of whom still remain my friends to this day.

Chemical engineering also saved me from doing more French and there would have been no other arts subjects that would have excited me in the slightest. And so it was. I successfully completed my A Levels, stayed back one further term to make a failed attempt at getting into the University of Cambridge and after several months of

learning about 'real work' in the world, I entered Birmingham University. My mother's ego never really got over the fact that I didn't achieve an entrance place into Cambridge and I was consistently reminded of my lack of success and her disappointment for at least the next thirty years. I rapidly came to learn that I had to live my life for myself and what I wanted to gain from it. Someone else's disappointment in what I did or did not achieve really did not matter. Internalising their lack of confidence in me was not an option! I was still the first ever member of our direct family line who went to, and graduated from university.

University was a brilliant period of life – all care and no real responsibility. During my teenage years, I was fortunate to have attended a school where I had the freedom to manage myself and my destiny proactively. I was encouraged to be a leader and was allowed enough freedom to get out on 'the edge' and make things happen. This allowed me to acquire some basic leadership skills, which were built upon later. At university, the boundaries of control are naturally much broader again and that gave me further opportunity to take up leadership opportunities, particularly in the sports management arena.

After a near death experience with a burst appendix during my finals exams, university quickly transitioned into working in the real world. I collected my degree on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> July 1980 and started work two days later. No holiday – after all I had just had three years of minimal work in achieving my degree so why not start some real work! I joined Shell Chemicals UK working in the North West of England and quickly came to learn that three years of unsponsored beer drinking at university had prepared me for only a start in life.



## **What's in the Genes Matters**

My father was a printer, a second generation business owner in the city of London. The business had been founded by my paternal grandfather, who passed away before I was born. I am told that we would have had much in common and knowing a

small amount about his life and business, I would have loved to have learned from him.

Prior to conscription into the British Army in 1914, Grandad had been a print sales manager for a small company in London. As an officer in the Middlesex battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders Division of the British Army, he saw more than his fair share of horror and action, including participating in the first wave of the battle of the Somme where more than 100,000 casualties were sustained in just the first day. He was gassed twice and wounded three times but survived; and undoubtedly these casualties contributed to his early demise. How many bullets must have missed him? Without that thin line of luck, this story would have been someone else's. He returned to London, married my Gran and went back to work at his old job; but it had not been held open for him. Perhaps they underestimated his survival chances? They certainly did underestimate his entrepreneurial skills. Grandad promptly went out and started his own print business, F. Stannard Ltd. and several years later bought out his previous employer! I don't believe in revenge but I do love that story!

My father was the second of two sons. His elder brother Colin was conscripted into the Royal Navy in 1939 and served as an Operations Leading Seaman on HMS Neptune. He died along with 764 colleagues when the Neptune was sunk in the early hours of December 19<sup>th</sup> 1941. There was only one survivor in what was the second worst British naval disaster ever recorded. I am proud to have his Christian name as my middle name. Uncle Colin would have been the natural elder inheritor of my Grandfather's successful print business. But life did not work out that way.

My father finished his schooling at Mill Hill in July 1945 and went into national service as a Meteorological Seaman in the Fleet Air Arm, based all round the UK. He was discharged in 1948, married my mother in 1950 and straight away went to work for 'The Family Firm'. I don't know what Dad would have done, had the responsibility of taking over the family business not fallen on his shoulders. He had a lot of talent as an artist and salesman. But as someone who had spent the entire 1939-1945 war at school with only the prospect of becoming a serviceman to take on Japan, the priority while he was at school had not been placed on academic achievement. The

war clearly changed a lot of things and the art and craft of fine letterpress print was being left behind in a different historical era.

F. Stannard Ltd was housed in a three storey building just off Little Britain, Cheapside in the City of London. Grandfather had spent many nights in Central London during the blitz putting out local fires and saving his own premises. The print machines, paper cutting and packaging lived on the ground floor. The offices and composition rooms where the print plates were built up letter by letter before proofing were all on the first floor accessed by a long steep staircase. And finally, the paper, stores and woodwork were all housed on the second floor. It was a huge factory sitting on leased prime real estate.

My Grandfather had indeed been very successful and in his era; this meant sharing it with his opportunistic brothers and family who all wanted a hand in the proceeds. His will and testament was full of loan write-offs and hand outs to his family. As the business passed down to my father, the luxury of such generosity and unproductive overheads could not be sustained. I recall the heated discussions between Gran and Dad over various members of the family and their apparent attitudes and assumptions about “what Grandad’s business owed them”. Needless to say, it was not a great recipe for creating a harmonious family unit. I have no recollection of meeting any great uncles although I know several existed.

Dad usually took me up to London during the school holidays for a day. It was always a fun adventure either travelling on the 8.03 train from Cobham to Waterloo and then on the so called ‘drain’ on the Bank Underground line direct to the City. Or latterly, Dad drove us up early into London and we had breakfast in town before going into the office. I was given the opportunity to meet everyone – it was a bit like being Simba in the Lion King, being paraded around the company.

Over time, as I grew up, I was put to work in different areas of the factory which I loved, and I got to know many of my father’s loyal employees quite well. It also helped me to get an insight (but not fully understand) how and why employees struggle with the job concept and naturally abdicate themselves into a non-management role. I was also able to see how they took advantage of that

relationship at every opportunity with increasing expectations on wage payment, better conditions while committing roort and minor theft. All of which was a shame really, because my father treated people with respect and kindness, helping wherever he could. He did not act like a big authoritarian tyrant boss, neither was there any great reward for his efforts, given the financial and business risks he undertook and managed on a daily basis.

We lived in a nice but cold unmodernised house in Surrey, which my Grandfather had paid for. My Grandmother took care of my school fees out of what Grandad had left to her as legacy. The annual holiday was 10 days spent in south Devon because that was all the time my father could essentially afford to be away from the business. The family car was small by comparison to everyone else's and the company mini van had to be push-started most mornings! This was no life of luxury, by any means.

Over time, I have reflected a fair bit on where, why and what happened to that wonderful business. Was my Grandfather just a genius? Did he simply have a very clear vision of what he wanted to achieve or was he simply king of the niche business model in that era? I would love to ask him today about his key success elements – design, quality, service, price?

I never saw nor heard my father talk about what *he* wanted it all to be or look like in the future. There was seemingly no vision. Neither was there any inspiration for me to join the family firm. It just looked like a tough job for Dad and one that was unappreciated and unrewarding at every level.

As young boy at home, I remember the incessant arguments about business and money and why a private family business didn't seem to be working very well. It was neither a pleasant nor productive environment in which to do homework and score good results. I didn't want to be there every evening in that kind of atmosphere. My father gave me a choice about where I wanted to go to school and what I wanted to do for a career. He could see the writing on the wall. If owning a business was all about endless arguments and seemingly mega-stress, I didn't want to be a part of it. I opted for the seemingly easy way out, to get a 'real job' as an engineer.

Despite making the significant decision to move the family business to East London, reducing overhead costs and working a lot harder, the glory days were gone and my father eventually sold the business. The F. Stannard Ltd. premises still exists in East London but the business does not. For him and my mother, on a personal level, it was an awesome decision and allowed them to semi retire to Sussex and really enjoy life. I was pleased for them.

Some time on into my career life, my father told me how proud he was of my achievements and what I was doing in business. That meant a lot to me. He never commented on whether he thought I made the right decision not to continue what his father had started, nor did he ever criticise me for it. Maybe he saw what an alternative career had brought me in terms of opportunities. Reflecting now, I doubt if I would have had enough experience or wisdom to have come from university and turn around a mid-sized printing company. My father had effectively been second in line to inherit and I never saw in him any real passion for fine art print. I doubt if I would have been able to be passionate about it either. Effectively, the lack of passion made my father's work into a job. That's not a great place from which to be leading any organisation or enterprise. Passion is a must-have quality.

Personal Development Life Message:

“In the gap between stimulus and response there is thought. We need to think before we act”. Viktor Frankl, *abridged*.

## Chapter 2 - The Dutch Diversion

In that first decade after leaving university I threw everything at my work and sport and achieved a fair amount of success in both.

I started by working on an industrial site which employed 5,500 people. Having already decided that I didn't want to end up like my father had been every night (a bear with a sore head) I resolved to simply enjoy my job. Unfortunately, at that time, I did not understand my own character or personality type. I now know that wanting a quiet easy laid back life is not me! I now know that I am fairly (well let's say very!) goal focussed and achievement orientated. Sitting on my backside does not fit my profile at all. So the laid back 'see how it goes' David lasted about two weeks.

I was a new kid at one of the largest companies in the world, working with the best-of-the-best chemical, mechanical and project engineers on a significant new project. I was immediately allocated a number of responsibilities and shared an office with Jim, one of the company's best process engineers. I set about learning everything. When everyone else went home, I went out onto the plant to trace every new pipeline being installed until I knew the plant backwards.

In that era, I was privileged to have been given a lot of responsibility at a young age. The Shell Stanlow site was in the first phase of mass de-industrialisation with massive reductions in the number of people, processing units and overall capability. From a learning and leadership perspective, I was fortunate to have been in the middle of it and was afforded the opportunity to lead one of the new business production units.

The other big advantage that I gained from working at Shell was to meet my partner and future wife, Maggie. She worked in the Accounts Payable team and during a spell in Technical Auditing and Management Accounting, we both found ourselves on the same floor of the Site Administration building and things went nicely from there! Our daughter Lauren was born in July 1988.

There were many daunting moments for me in that position. The greatest positive was indeed the personal growth and insights into leadership and motivation. Leading a team of 120, we were able to turn around the manufacturing side of several smaller businesses groups. This resulted in my being moved to Shell's Global Technical HQ in the Netherlands in 1989.

It was one of those rights of passage common to many big companies - if you wanted to be successful, do a spell in Head Office. Going from leading a production team of 120 to being an international waste management consultant, managing just a telephone and a computer in a sterile foreign office environment did not seem like much of a reward for the previous ten years of success and hard work I had given to the company. I was now considerably overpaid as an expat and spent much of my time shuttling between London, Paris, Rotterdam, Brussels, Amsterdam and a whole range of different plastics recycling and waste-to-energy facilities across Europe. I went to wonderful places such as Davos Switzerland, Tampere Finland and Santander, Spain, talking and presenting to anyone who listened. It was enjoyable but not leadership and I first came to understand what a *job* was really all about. I didn't know it at that point yet but I had 'peaked' my career in terms of promotion and seniority. I was only 34 and already past my use-by date!

The three years in Holland changed many things in our lives and blew away paradigms in my thinking that I had inherited through my traditional British upbringing. From a background where a four hour car journey with a packed lunch seemed like an adventure to another planet, living in a small relatively introspective world, I had been let out of the cage. The initial fear of working in different countries with different languages, peoples and customs became a high point of the experience. You quickly get to learn that although different peoples and cultures do different things, at the end of the day they are all still wonderful people just locked into their own happy (or unhappy) model. Whether it was eating raw herrings covered in diced onion on the side of the street in Holland, croissants in France or drinking traditional flat beer in England, I appreciated it all. And, as a matter of fact, it made me see the world as a far more interesting place.

We moved to Holland on New Year's Eve 1989. If you have never been to Holland before, do not make the mistake of arriving there on December 31<sup>st</sup>. We were staying in a hotel in Schevingen, having travelled from Manchester to Amsterdam in the afternoon, bringing Sammy the budgie. As the plane was essentially empty the three of us and Sammy in his travel box all sat four abreast across the front of the 737 Business class together. This was where Lauren developed her passion for travel! We arrived at the hotel in the early evening, dined in the hotel restaurant and went to bed. Then it began. The Dutch are wonderful people but on New Year's Eve it all goes a bit mad. World War III erupts on the streets. Everyone seems to let off fireworks randomly all over the place happily blowing up letterboxes whenever the opportunity arises. They throw their Christmas trees out of apartment windows and burn them in the street along with cars or anything else that happens to be in the way. Some party!

As part of the general background chat between the Dutch and the British at that time, there were always two lines of teasing from our Dutch colleagues. Firstly that the Brits (in that era) didn't care about the environment or at least as passionately as the Dutch did but I have always maintained since, that the New Year's Eve performances eliminated all the good work that they did during the remaining 364 days of each year! And secondly that Brits were completely useless, unwilling and arrogant in regard of speaking any other language than English. My UK operating company sent me with instructions to learn Dutch. Period. I eventually did, even having to do business in far off northern corners of Holland where there was limited English spoken.

Early on in the assignment, I also recall being part of a four person team to domestic refuse sorting facility to the east of Geneva, in the French speaking part of Switzerland. The standard assumption that our hosts would have a strong command of the English language failed completely! My two Dutch colleagues only spoke flawless English and German whilst our English overlord maintained his traditional stance and just kept asking what was going on. The following minute I was translator and inquisition leader. How the tables had turned – that French was coming in useful after all!

We had a lot of trouble finding a suitable location and house to live in and around The Hague so when we finally rented something it was already early April. Suddenly we realised that if we didn't organise a holiday soon, we would have to join the rest of the European world in peak season between mid July and end August and so we hastily arranged to hire a colleague's holiday home in the Charente area of France.

1990 was a good French summer – as I later found out when starting to understand the relative success of Bordeaux vintages. The weather was warm and the evenings beautiful and balmy. We were sitting around outside just admiring this wonderful French country house when we got into the debate of whether we should do the same! The career plan had always been for us to return to North West England after 'doing time' in Holland. Having spent almost every previous holiday in England, I was well aware of what that meant. Unpredictable usually cool weather and limited fun – the word holiday was actually a perception rather than a definition! The idea of a permanent holiday home in the South of France was therefore a very tempting one to say the least!

As a teenager my Gran had given me a thin hardcover book on the wines of the world, and I had developed a fascination about wine. I had also been introduced into the UK International Co-operative Wine Society of which I am still a member. Even in Holland, I spent a lot of time looking at wine in shops and generally finding pleasure in that space. Bordeaux captured our imagination because of the beauty of being in and around vineyards, its reputation as one of the world's premier wine producing regions and its ease of access through the international airport. So when we would be back in the UK, long weekend access would have been practical.

And so the treasure hunt began! The following day we made a trip down towards Bergerac in the Dordogne and talked to a couple of agents who were able to provide us with initial contacts in the Bordeaux area. We were able to open a dialogue by letter and slowly get the project moving over the next year or so.

By the spring of 1991 we were finally able to organise a long weekend visit to the region in order to look at potential property. This all started very badly! During that first property exploration visit, the agent had found only two places he thought would

be suitable. Despite our best efforts to dissuade him, he assumed that we wanted an old wreck to renovate. Since we knew that we would not be living in France for any considerable length of time, we didn't want to undertake a renovation project – we were focussed on something reasonably modern, not too large, in a rural area and above all practical to manage. Well the agent failed his brief and apart from having plenty of time to look around the whole region, we achieved nothing. We did however agree on the preferred location as being in the Entre Deux Mers region also known locally at that time as the 'Petit Suisse' – Little Switzerland due to its rolling hills and woodlands.

We returned to Holland and agreed to come back towards the end of the year for another attempt, staying in a beautiful *Gite* (guest house), a short distance up the road north from Cadillac. We arranged to meet up with the agent again at the agreed time and location. Despite several months interval and adequate notice, he had succeeded in finding one half broken down house. And that was all. We had allowed three or four full days in the region to provide adequate time to inspect lots of property especially as we now had a good idea of what we were looking for.

By lunchtime on the first day, we were disappointed at the progress. The agent had nothing left to show us and we parted company! We didn't particularly have a plan for lunch or anything and we were slowly driving through the town of Langoiran on the north (so called Right Bank) of the Garonne when we passed an estate agent with masses of photos of property in its show window. It was just approaching 12.30, the magical time in rural France when everyone stops for lunch. When we looked at the pictures in the window, we could see a lot of potentially interestingly priced and attractive property in the region. Why hadn't our so-called agent found these? Inside the agency, the sales manager saw our excited faces, opened the door and asked if he could help. We explained our goals and he passed us a card to meet up with his colleague on the other side of the river in Beautiran after lunch.

That wasn't so hard? Of course, he then religiously hurried off to lunch!

In our usual style, I suspect that we had already prepared a sandwich or something and we were ready to meet Monsieur Bourel at 2.15pm. We were there on time and

so was he! He listened specifically to what we were looking for and got out a huge portfolio of properties for us to consider. Together we drew up a list of suitable houses and he proceeded to organise a viewing schedule.

Monsieur Bourel was a clever salesman. He knew his property well and he knew how to get clients to see the best possible property in the best possible way. He started with the poor quality houses and slowly worked his way through to the best, culminating in a big villa overlooking the village of Rions from the heights of the Coteaux hills above. The views are unbelievable but the property was too large for what we wanted – and our budget!!

I still pass that house regularly. It overlooks vines but is not surrounded by them. It sits right on a country road and the views are spectacular. I often wonder what our lives might have looked like if we had purchased that house then. But you must never look back – the future relies on thinking today, not yesterday. We thanked M. Bourel and agreed to advise him of our next visit so that we could prepare in advance. He was ready!

It was now March 1992. M. Bourel had prepared a list of eight properties, once again all building up to the best ones at the end. It finally came down to a competition between two great small villas. The first was in a quiet hamlet in the commune of Arbis alongside a few other houses in a more wooded environment than vineyard. The second was at Cardan. It was surrounded on almost all sides by vines situated at an intersection in a hamlet 200m away from a country road. It had good views to the front overlooking the local chateau. And towards the west, as the sun set, there was a 12<sup>th</sup> century church.

M. Bourel was smart, he could see which property we preferred and sneakily showed us the price that he believed would win the offer. We shook hands and wished him a *bon week-end*.

Personal Development Life message:

“Commitment is an act; not a word.” Jean-Paul Sartre

## Chapter 3 - Crossing a Foggy Bridge

On Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> March 1992, we were enjoying our fourth day staying at a very cold Chateau Logis in Beautiran. It was the end of winter after all so one could hardly expect summer warmth. Due to our plans to return to Holland via London straight after lunch the contract needed to be signed that morning at 9am in the real estate office in Langoiran where we had first seen all those properties in the window.

The Bordeaux region is famous for its early morning fog. The cold water flowing down the river Garonne comes from the Pyrenees and when it mixes with warmer water coming off the vast sandy warmer forests of Les Landes, a particularly dense fog is created. It was a very cold morning that day and as we drove from down the other side of the river, turned left at Portets and headed towards the river to make the crossing, only the bridge could be seen above the top of the fog – almost floating. A strong image I will never forget, and one that signified to me that something important was about to happen.

I had expected a more Anglo Saxon approach; exchange of contracts by mail, lawyers at arm's length. No, not in France, the vendors' lawyer act for both parties and so it shall be!

Did Monsieur have a deposit?

No Monsieur did not!

In fact I had barely a couple of thousand Francs in my pocket plus a credit card that didn't, in those days, work very well in France! Nor was Monsieur expecting the question! Monsieur Stannard was operating on pure excitement and a couple of unfounded ideas as to how this would all work.

They were very kind, explaining everything in good detail in perfect French which fortunately I did speak but not that well back then. Even to this day, legal French is really painful!

Either way, the deal was done! By 10 o'clock on a cold Sunday morning, the *Compromis* (Contract Agreement) was signed and I had a couple of weeks to try and figure out a plan as to how to get a deposit to France and then how to pay for the rest. It wasn't as if there weren't sufficient monthly funds to pay for a mortgage, just there wasn't any sort of a plan to actually get one or any thought as to how one might be obtained!

Before setting off back to Holland, the vendors offered us a further opportunity to go back to the property for a second look round. They went to great lengths to show us every detail of the interior. It was a kind gesture and the start of a relationship that lasted well up to and including settlement day. The foggy start had given way to a beautiful sunny and mild morning as we set off back to the airport - a good sign for what we hoped was to come.

On the way back towards the village of Paillet we pulled off into a vineyard track and stopped for lunch. Bread and cheese, well to be more correct French baguette and French cheese – a combination which I love to this day and every day when in Bordeaux. It gave us a few minutes to contemplate just what the heck we had achieved and more accurately what that now meant!

Signing a bit of paper was easy enough; making it all happen might be very different!



Thankfully the following week was a quiet one scheduled mainly to be in the Hague office with only one night away in the UK. Needless to say, on my first day back, I was outside the door of my ABN bank a couple of minutes after opening time, anxious to work out just how much trouble we might have signed our way into! As it happened the ABN had a relationship with another French bank based in Bordeaux. After a few days of work on their part, I was called back to the bank, some simple forms were filled out and the rest happened as if by magic.

To be fair, we had done some planning and there was already some savings and a small inheritance that my grandmother had kindly left me. I reckon she would have had half an idea that something like this would happen and would have been keen to see her No.1 Grandson taking on some adventurous project or other. She had very Victorian English values about the integrity and *prosperity* of the family name.

At that time, we were just a couple of years into the fax machine revolution – although still significant volumes of business were conducted by Telex messages – and much quicker arrangements could be put in place to transact money around. With a few phone calls and fax notes and a form to England, the deposit was transferred to the lawyers in France.

A few days later the mortgage was approved. The project was funded. The fun was just beginning.

The next few weeks quickly disappeared and very soon we were organising tickets to get ourselves back to France to pick up the keys and bring the purchase phase to a conclusion. To make the journey time effective but also have our car with us, we chose to travel down overnight from Holland to Brive on the car train, and then travel 3 hours west to Bordeaux, pick up a hire van and hopefully arrive at 11am at the offices of NSM, our new French mortgage bank, to settle all matters. We would then be able to move on to purchase furniture for the house and be in Cadillac for the handover of keys by 2.30pm.

There have been many extremely over-optimistic projects in the history of the Cardan house but this plan set a precedent, without parallel.

To be fair, the plan worked reasonably well. The bank was really only a handshake as all the transactions and monies had already been dealt with. Being a smallish property with reasonable light inside and given that we had no furniture at all, we elected to take the IKEA strategy and buy light coloured smaller pieces. And with having a couple of similar shops in Holland, this had provided the opportunity to pre-decide on what we wanted before arriving in Bordeaux.

We had arranged to take a good quantity of cash with us, having of course pre-calculated how much we needed with some leftover for living expenses across the few days of the initial visit. As one might have expected, not every item of furniture was available at that time and we left the store with a van full of flat packs and a surplus six and half thousand French francs but no dining table and chairs.

The plan would have been perfect if it were not for an accident on Bordeaux's notoriously busy ring road. Several efforts over twenty plus years to improve the flow of traffic on this busy hub have all delivered the same result – a car park! We did eventually arrive into Cadillac about thirty minutes late. In that corner of France, everyone is granted a traditional Bordeaux *quart d'heure* (quarter of an hour) leeway for any meeting. So although we thought we had pushed the relationship to the limit, in reality the vendors' patience won through. They must have been concerned though that we had done a runner at the last moment.

In the haste of rushing around, Lauren was looking progressively more tired and unhappy. Her resilient never give up attitude was clearly being tested to the limit as she followed her parents through this fast pace process of trying to build a second home in a day in a foreign land! By the time we arrived at the *Office Notairale* (Lawyers' Office), she could barely keep her eyes open and was doubtless wishing that this long tiring day would just go away. Her skin was now going blotchy and the first signs of chicken pox were emerging. This must have all made a dramatic impression as we walked in half an hour late.

We sat around the table as the Notaire started his work of formally passing the Acte and hit us with this bombshell: "Monsieur, we do not have enough money to complete the transaction!"

Fantastic – where do we go from here? Evidently in the transfer of the deposit from England, the exchange rate had been slightly miscalculated and not enough Francs had arrived.

"Monsieur Stannard, we need an extra 6,500 Francs in order to pass the Acte!"

By that stage, we had organised a bank account locally but it was practically empty and therefore of no use. I thought it unlikely that the French legal system would take a credit card or IOU note so I thought I would ask if Monsieur Notaire would take cash! With a dining suite and a couple of other items not being available at IKEA, that extra cash in my wallet looked like coming in real handy.

Indeed the Notaire was only too happy to take my cash, calmly wrote us a receipt and completed all the legal paperwork. We left the *Office Notairale* and followed the happy and somewhat relieved vendors back to our new home in Cardan. The humid cloudy morning had given way to rain which was getting heavier as we reached the house. The vendors kindly stayed behind to show us all the keys, locks, meters and help unload the van of its complete house stock of flat packed furniture. Lauren's bed was the first item to be constructed and she could hardly wait for the new sheets to go on before she climbed in fully clothed and fell asleep instantly.

There was one remaining issue to be transacted, which because of the delay in proceedings, was now pressing for time. And that was to sign over the electricity account to us, the new owners. The former owners had decided that the best way to do this was together on the day and save any other difficult argumentative international arrangement. So while the rest of the furniture was being built by sign language and the multi lingual jigsaw puzzle, the vendor and I set off for the *Electricité de France* Customer Service centre at Langoiran, which was due to close at 5.30pm. We had about 15 minutes to get there before closing time and it was now raining fairly hard. Monsieur Champarnaud agreed to drive as he knew where we had to go.

The French roads around Cardan are fairly rural. Despite being allocated Departmental or D route numbers, they were often only one and a half lanes wide so that whenever you meet a vehicle coming the other way, one has to slow down and pass each other with the passenger side wheels on the grass verge. M. Champarnaud boasted fairly fast French driving skills and with the countdown to closing time at the Service Centre now on, we set off at a fast pace. He was on a mission – to reach Langoiran at no later than 4.59pm, no matter what. Dead or alive!

As the roads got narrower towards Paillet, the speed got faster. It was scary to watch vehicles coming from the other direction as my side of the car went perilously close to the standard ditch at 100km/h. Between Paillet and Langoiran, it became a competition to see how many vehicles we could overtake before reaching our destination.

We did successfully reached our destination alive and almost at the exact moment that the EDF service personnel were getting up to close. The transaction and transfer of responsibility was quickly completed. However I still enjoy today watching French faces look at you when you give an Australian foreign address as the point of billing for something! "*Vous habitez où, Monsieur?*" Where do you live, sir?

The journey back to the house was only marginally less rushed; M. Champarnaud was obviously just a very fast driver, for which France was renowned in those days. We arrived safely, the former owners said farewell and we all wished each other every success. The house was ours.

I have no idea where or how we organised food that night. All I remember was that there was a lot of furniture construction happening whilst a large emergency meal of Spaghetti Bolognese was being prepared in new IKEA saucepans...everything was brand new! About 8.30 pm as the rain continued to pour down outside, we sat down to eat squashed around the kitchen table in the middle of the kitchen back then, uncorked some wine and started to eat. After about five minutes later, a tired little face appeared round the corridor door. Lauren quickly saw and smelt food and without saying a word, she knelt on a stool, put Doodoo her soft rabbit toy, onto the middle of the table, pulled over her mother's bowl of food and finished it all off.

When she was done, she picked up her faithful rabbit, left the table without saying a word and went off back to bed.

She looked worse with the spots the next morning but her energy level was back up as she started to explore her new home. Working out the French words for Chicken Pox and Calamine lotion at the local pharmacy shop proved to be a fun challenge later in the day.

Two weeks later, I was offered a next assignment in Melbourne. Umm!

Personal Development Life message:

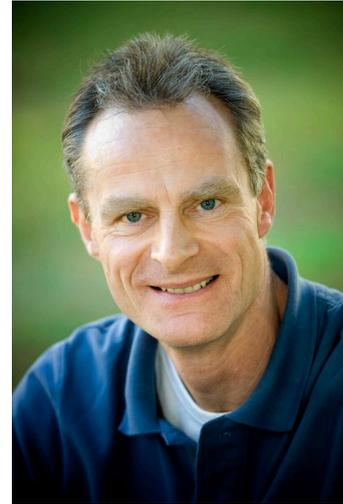
You have to cross the bridge if you want to take your life to the other side.

## About David Stannard

David Stannard is the Founder and Owner Director of Paradise Rescued.

David was born and educated in England, qualifying as a Chemical Engineer from Birmingham University in 1980. He has had a successful leadership career in the petrochemical industry in the UK, Netherlands and Australia covering more than 30 years.

Rescued.



Together with his family, he purchased a small holiday villa property in Cardan, Bordeaux in 1992 which served as a family “home away from home” for many years before changes in land rezoning and a resultant avalanche of property development in the village placed a consequent potential threat to the family property and ongoing heritage of the village. The time for action had arrived and working closely with the community and neighbours, the family purchased the surrounding vineyard land in order to sustain it as an organically managed high quality vineyard.

Vineyard management operations commenced in January 2010.

SAS Paradise Rescued was formed in 2011 as the operational company to manage the vineyards, produce and market the wines to high quality international markets. Today a dedicated and passionate team take care of each section of the operation from vine to wine and onto market and brand. Paradise Rescued is increasingly recognised as a niche ultra premium micro wine brand and was the Silver Stevie International Business Award for best New Company 2013.

David is a passionate speaker on Leadership, the power of Mission Vision and Passion, Social Media as well as the future of Bordeaux wine.

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