

Food

Carolyn Beasley

Think of the word 'ranching', and images of Texas longhorn cattle stampeding through plumes of dust, cowboys in hot pursuit, are likely to come to mind. But down on Australia's south-western tip, Brad Adams' ranch is home to far more docile beasts – underwater snails called greenlip abalone.

Adams grew up in the West Australian town of Augusta, his childhood years filled with diving and fishing. He's got the long hair and broad shoulders of a surfer, and possibly saltwater in his veins.

Now executive director of corporate development for Rare Foods Australia (RFA), a business he founded, Adams and his team have developed abalone ranching, whereby hatchery-bred *Haliotis laevis* are released into the ocean on concrete pyramid-structures called 'abitats'.

Natural seaweed provides the abalone's only food, and it's delivered by ocean swells. In this region, where the Southern and Indian Oceans collide, the conditions provide a smorgasbord of the stuff – "swell for us is like rain for farmers," says Adams.

More than just an innovator, Adams has spent his adult life as a champion of sustainable fishing. When I ask him what it's like to be an official 'Sustainable Food Hero', he laughs sheepishly. "Embarrassing!" he responds.

In reality, Adams' award from the Marine Stewardship Council, bestowed in March, is richly deserved. His journey to this point is somewhat surprising. Like his father, Adams used to be a professional diver, harvesting prized greenlip abalone. But declining stocks (which have since collapsed further) were impossible to ignore.

He points out to sea from Augusta's harbour to explain the day the penny dropped. "I was swimming around out the back here all day, and got a stupidly small amount of abalone," he says. "I went home and told the missus, 'Right that's it, we're going to make [finding an alternative to abalone fishing] my full-time job'."

He'd already been tinkering with growing abalone, and had studied biological sciences and aquaculture. And he'd already almost gone broke several times. But rather than giving up, Adams dived in deeper.

"I packed up and moved the family to Perth [for a short period] to do an MBA," he says. Until this point, Adams had understood abalone science, but admits he knew little about business. "I knew I had to understand the land sharks," he quips. "They're 100 per cent more dangerous than



Mission possible

Two innovators with a common cause.



Top: An abalone diver brings up a wild-harvested catch off Augusta, WA. Above: green abalone produced by Rare Foods Australia founder Brad Adams, right. PHOTOS: RUSSELL ORD, CAROLYN BEASLEY



the ocean sharks. They'll tell you, 'You're a good bloke' then rob your grandmother!"

Adams says RFA's team of 14 divers harvests abalone every day, weather permitting, which is about 180 days a year.

"Up on top of the dive boats, you've got the panic room," he says, pointing to the steel-mesh cage atop each of his four dive vessels. Divers can request the shark cage if any unwanted visitors are spotted.

RFA has 10,000 abitats on its lease,

equating to a 20 kilometre-long artificial reef. It's home to 1.8 million abalone, and attracts hundreds of other fish species. "There are even green turtles living there year round. They'll put up with the cold just so they can eat abalone every day," Adams says.

Importantly, RFA's abalone ranch is sustainable, with certification from the Marine Stewardship Council to prove it. Many other commercial fisheries in WA are certified too – due in large part to Adams'

advocacy during his four-year tenure as director and then chairman of the state's Fishing Industry Council.

Inside his processing facility next to the harbour, Adams says RFA harvests 85-90 tons of greenlip abalone a year, supplying almost 25 per cent of the world's wild catch. He says they are highly prized, "like Penfolds Grange".

Hoisting up a crate from a seawater tank, he reaches in to grab a large squirming, creature. The fact they are wild-harvested "makes these the Grange of the Grange".

The wine analogy is appropriate, given RFA's latest venture is "ocean-cellarling". Adams has partnered with West Australian wineries Glenarty Road and Edwards Wines, and is also developing his own label.

He shows me bottles of sparkling and chardonnay that are encrusted with the bleached remnants of marine life. They've spent 12 months sharing the ranch with abalone, rocked back and forth as they mature on the ocean floor.

Other recent additions at the premises include tours and a café and shop, called Ocean Pantry. Here, visitors can buy ready-to-cook abalone, but I settle for a great coffee before hitting the road north.

Pulling into at a factory on the outskirts of Perth, I'm meeting another unlikely hero of sustainable food – American-born Jay Albany, a former Wall Street hedge-fund analyst. He proffers a high-vis vest in one hand, and a can of regeneratively farmed, coffee-flavoured oat milk in the other.

Albany is now chief executive of regenerative food company Wide Open Agriculture, and the oat milk I'm swigging is branded under WOA's food distribution



From left: Food scientists at Wide Open Australia; founder Jay Albany; lupin farmer Stuart McAlpine; protein powder made from lupin seeds. PHOTOS: WOA, CAROLYN BEASLEY, SALTY DAVENPORT

company, Dirty Clean Food. WOA sells non-perishable food interstate and internationally but also delivers fresh produce throughout Perth and the south-west.

Graduating from university straight into the dot.com boom, Albany worked with various start-ups before his 10 years on Wall Street. It's surely a long way from glamorous New York to Perth's industrial suburb of Kewdale?

"My wife and I were doing very 'New York' things," he explains. "Eventually, we looked up, and we're like, what happened to our souls? We were both really active in the communities where we grew up, and wanted to get that back."

A decision to visit Australia was based on a magazine image of WA's Bungle Bungles. The pair made it to those bizarre Kimberley formations, and fell in love with the entire country. Returning a few years later with their family in tow, Albany had a job interview with WOA for a post in Williams, a tiny town in the WA wheat belt.

It was a hot summer's day, he recalls. "After changing shirts at a gas station, and getting laughed at for arriving at Williams in a suit, I got the job!"

Showing me around WOA's premises, Albany ducks into a cool room where sustainably produced vegetables, fruit, meat and honey are being boxed up for delivery.

"Many people think regenerative farming is a trendy, white hipster kind of thing, right?" Albany says. "But we think it's the way farming and interacting with nature has been done for hundreds of thousands of years."

This year, WOA secured a government grant to build a commercial-scale oat-milk plant next door to its present factory. Soon there'll be a new ingredient added to the business.

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Jay Albany

With demand for plant-based protein surging, WOA's food scientists have developed a vegan protein powder called Buntine Protein. Following Albany up a flight of stairs, I enter a mezzanine laboratory, complete with a lab-coated scientist and array of mind-boggling equipment.

While most plant-based proteins feature soy, pea or fava, this new product is the first to use Australian sweet lupins. In WA's wheat belt, lupins are already grown as a 'break' between other crops. But until now, the only market for lupins was in animal feed.

Together with Curtin University, WOA worked out how to unlock the lupin protein. Its team of food scientists then developed the resulting beige powder, which binds well with water and other ingredients. The lupin derivative has a neutral flavour, so prospective food company clients won't need to mask it with additives. (While it is not yet on the market, Albany has signed contracts with several food manufacturers.)

One of the first commercial applications of Buntine Protein will be in Dirty Clean Food's oat milk, and I taste-test the mocha version with added protein. Albany proudly claims it's the first plant-based milk to have a protein content equivalent to dairy. True to his promise, it's creamy and chocolatey, with no hint of the lupins within.

The protein is a win for vegans, but also for the environment. Albany lights up as he explains that unlike soybeans, lupins don't require irrigation, nor are they genetically modified. Lupins absorb nitrogen from the air and, where farmers plant them as a break crop, they reduce the need for fertilisers by more than 50 per cent.

For Albany, the difference between working at WOA and his previous Wall Street life is the ability to make a difference.

"I don't think the climate crisis gets solved by regulation or big businesses; it's solved by global consumers everywhere, making conscious choices, and I'm excited to have a business that helps do that." **L&L**



The Orbis team, from left: Andrew MacKenzie, Carrie Moyes, Lauren Langfield, Kendall Grey and Bradley Moyes.

Greener grapes

In hot pursuit of a future.

Drinks

Max Allen



Orbis Wines. Remember the name. The McLaren Vale brand has been around for a couple of years, but it's already establishing itself as a leader in that region's push towards a more sustainable, more diverse wine future.

The Orbis story starts in 2018 when Adelaide couple Brad Moyes and Kendall Grey bought a mature, 32-hectare vineyard in the elevated eastern edge of the McLaren Vale region. The vineyard was first planted back in the 1960s, and for many years sold grapes to wineries such as Treasury Wine Estates and Wirra Wirra.

For most of its life the vineyard was home to mostly conventional grape varieties such as shiraz, riesling, semillon and cabernet – commercially popular back in the 1980s and '90s, but not necessarily the varieties now best suited climatically to this warm region.

To address this, the new owners introduced a whole bunch of new, mostly Mediterranean grapes such as the white albarino, fiano and garganega varieties and the red nero d'avola, montepulciano and trousseau, as well as new plantings of existing warm-climate grapes such as grenache, tempranillo and cinsault.

The plan is to end up with at least half of the vineyard planted to less-mainstream, more climate-adapted varieties, alongside the more conventional blocks. It's all part of Brad Moyes and Kendall Grey's desire to make Orbis as sustainable as possible.

They've been guided by Richard Leask, a leader in the field of regenerative agriculture, and whose family were co-owners of the vineyard before 2018. The vineyard is now run using organic and regenerative principles and practices, including extensive composting, powering the winery off-grid using solar, and running a flock of babydoll sheep through the vines

to keep the grass and weeds down and provide manure.

Once the vineyard transition was in place, in 2021 Moyes and Grey hired rising star Lauren Langfield as winemaker and general manager at Orbis. Langfield came from the Adelaide Hills, where she'd been working for one of that region's leading minimal intervention producers, BK Wines, and establishing her eponymous label (which she still runs).

Before the Hills, she worked in Gippsland at Bill Downie's vineyard, and had lots of experience in organic, biodynamic and regenerative viticulture dating back to her early career in her homeland of New Zealand.

In just two vintages, she has brought all this experience to bear at Orbis.

Her new wines – a pet-nat, a piquette, a textural albarino and crunchy light trousseau – are excellent examples of the modern, fresher, earlier-picked, lo-fi style. They are also sold in lightweight glass, sealed with cork (which Langfield says is better in terms of CO₂ emissions than aluminium screwcaps), and labelled with paper made from sugarcane waste.

It's all part of the winery's goal to become carbon-neutral, and people are already beginning to notice.

Orbis was a finalist for Vineyard of the Year in the Young Gun of Wine Awards in 2021 and 2022, and Langfield has won two Young Gun gongs: Best New Act in 2022 (for her own label wines) and Winemaker of the Year this year for the wines she's making at Orbis.

McLaren Vale has long been a progressive region when it comes to planting new, alternative, climate-change grape varieties, and converting to regenerative, organic and biodynamic viticulture. Even by the region's own standards, though, Orbis stands out.

As I say: a name to watch. **L&L**

orbiswines.com.au

A taste of Orbis



2022 Orbis Albarino [McLaren Vale]

The Spanish grape albarino can produce super-crisp, refreshing, seafood-craving whites if picked early in the season, and rich, golden, textural whites if picked a little riper. This is a lovely example of the latter style: glowing yellow, aromas of honeyed melon, seductive, mouth-filling, full of flavour and interest. **\$38**



2023 Orbis Trousseau [McLaren Vale]

Made from some established plantings of trousseau vines, blended with fruit from the Chalk Hill vineyard, this is a terrific example of the kind of crunchy, lighter-bodied red that is so typical of this variety. Slightly cloudy and rustic in a really good way, full of life and verve; wild raspberry and hedgerow bramble fruit, some earthy, gamey notes, spicy, nervy, full of character. **\$40**



2023 Orbis Piquette [McLaren Vale]

Piquette is made by taking grape skins left over after winemaking (in this case the skins of grenache used to make the Orbis rosé), adding water and fermenting the lightly sweet liquid for a few days and then bottling, like a pet-nat, before fermentation has finished. The result is a light-red, fizzy, super-fun drink, just 3 per cent alcohol, and bursting with fresh fruit flavours, like freshly crushed grape juice. **\$24**

Vale David Bruer

One of Australia's pioneers of organic viticulture and preservative-free winemaking, David Bruer, has died, aged 77.

Bruer and his wife, Barbara, first planted vines in Langhorne Creek in 1973, establishing their Temple Bruer winery a decade later. Bruer converted the vineyard to certified organics in the mid-1990s, and in the early 2000s established a new label, Organic Vignerons Australia, working with growers in the



Farewell to a visionary.

Riverland to produce popular, affordable organic wines.

In this, as in so many other aspects of his life, Bruer was ahead of his time. He was making preservative-free and vegan friendly wines long before they became trendy; he was also involved in revegetation of his land; establishing carbon-neutral status for his wine business and was using lightweight bottles to reduce emissions.

I interviewed him and visited

him several times and always came away challenged, inspired – and entertained. The one-time Roseworthy wine lecturer always had an air of exasperated academic about him: dressed in trademark khaki workwear, looking out over his spectacles, wondering why the solutions he was proposing – for carbon sequestration, for sustainable viticulture, for a viable wine industry – weren't as clear to everyone else as they were to him. **L&L**