



Picture: John Kruger

## FIRST PERSON

VITICULTURIST, BIOHAZARD EXPERT

### Inca Pearce

As CEO of Vinehealth Australia, "The Defender of the Vines", Pearce works to safeguard our vineyards and the \$5b wine industry from pests and disease, writes Deborah Bogle

**WE CAN BE HEROES** We would love the average wine drinker to consider the health of the vines that create the wines they enjoy. The fact is, wine tourists can be responsible for spreading pests and diseases such as phylloxera on their clothing and shoes. We need wine lovers to become biosecurity heroes, and respect the hygiene systems that keep the wine industry safe.

**SUITED FOR ACTION** It's not much of a superhero costume! We wear a biohazard suit – a white disposable jumpsuit over our clothes and head – when we're in a vineyard doing soil or vine testing. This is particularly important if we're sampling in a vineyard that's infested with phylloxera, a devastating bug that can live in particles of soil in shoes or clothes for days, and could be spread to a non-infested vineyard visited subsequently.

**DOWN AND DIRTY** The biggest challenge is getting growers to invest in very small vineyard hygiene practices, such as no-entry signs and foot-wash facilities, that can make a huge difference to their business. The pendulum hasn't even started to swing in the direction we need to go with biosecurity yet. And I think as an industry we need to ask ourselves a tough question – how serious are we about biosecurity?

**SHINING EXAMPLE** My dad, Terry Lee, has influenced me hugely. He urged me to consider a career in the wine industry (he was head of the Australian Wine Research Institute at the time). I've been inspired by dad's incredible work ethic, his attention to detail and his analytical ability. The Lee family has always had great debates around the dinner table. We've always been encouraged to say what we think while showing respect for others' opinions. Dad has never provided me with solutions for

various problems I have faced over the years, but has taught me to analyse the situation, and pursue my chosen option with conviction.

**FROM LITTLE THINGS** I was a lucky kid. I got to travel quite a bit around Australia and the world because of dad's work in the wine industry and my mum's family living in the Netherlands, France and Switzerland. I also have many fond memories of spending time with my cousins on their farm in Tamworth while I was growing up.

**THE GREAT OUTDOORS** I've always loved the outdoors and anything sporty, including rowing, volleyball and netball, and now my husband, Greg, and I spend many chilly mornings watching our kids, Claudia and Imogen, playing sport in the Adelaide Hills. We love the community up here. We recently sold our farm in Eden Valley but we maintain our family's connection to agriculture through involvement in Greg's family's farm in Far North Queensland.

**A WOMAN'S PLACE** At Pernod Ricard Winemakers I had roles in viticulture, research and development, and communications over the years, and did four vintages in the US. There were definitely more men than women, but that's typical of the wine industry, and there's great work being done now to give women the same opportunities as men. Through my role with Chiefs for Gender Equity in SA I hope to influence the debate on achieving gender balance. Current statistics are sobering: on ASX boards, women represent just 25.2 per cent. And only 26.4 per cent of the workforce in SA's agriculture, food and forestry industries is female. Yet these stats inspire me to keep chipping away in my own style to make a difference for my daughters.