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A man of many talents

Young Gun: Louis Fuller

Professional golfer, barista, musician, foodie and winemaker, Louis Fuller has walked a path of many passions. After a brief hiccup in time, the 30 year old has his eyes on success, with a budding wine brand and the tools needed to shape his future in the wine industry and beyond. **Chloe Szentpeteri** has the story.



Louis Fuller enjoying the hands-on aspect of making his own wine.

If there's one thing Louis Fuller is good at, it's seeing the best in everyone and everything the world has to offer. Ambitious and open to opportunity, the young gun has been through a battle that almost broke him, until one day he woke up and accepted it was ok to be 'Just Loui'.

Just Loui is one of Fuller's recent achievements, having branded his wine label under the title to symbolise simplicity and acceptance with his place in life.

His latest achievements in the wine world include two releases of Shiraz from the 2016 and 2017 vintages, with a 2018 vintage currently in barrel awaiting bottling.

But despite his developing portfolio of wine, his heart was once set on a different calling.

Fuller grew up training to be a professional golfer, playing for 15 years and pursuing a professional career for 10.

He almost made it as a high ranked junior in Australia, just behind the nation's top-ranked golfer and former world number one Jason Day.

From the age of 18 to 28, he believed he was going to make it and, with the support of friends, family and sponsors, he was close, until he realised it wasn't meant to be.

“I thought, I’ll be happy when I make that million dollars or when I make the US tour or Australian tour and just got to a really, really low point and that’s when I had to make the decision that golf wasn’t the journey for me,” Fuller explained.

Fuller struggled with the choice and spiralled into a dark patch of drugs and alcohol for three months.

Finding inspiration from a novel, a few words completely altered his look on life and from that moment, he embraced a change, and began anew.

“After that three months I read a book and it was Tony Robbins’ *Awaken the Giant Within* and he said, ‘change doesn’t happen over 10 years, change happens in an instant’ and I was reading this book and drinking and was like, you know what, I’m going to try this. I’m going to wake up tomorrow and just change.”

After he accepted a change of career, Fuller informed his wife and closest peers, and felt the burden lift from his shoulders.

“Everyone was exactly the same, saying we want you to be happy, whether that’s a musician, or being a barrister or driving an uber, whatever you do as long as you’re happy; it’s much better than you trying to pursue this dream that you keep pushing yourself into,” Fuller said.

Once he said his goodbyes to professional golf, he set two goals: to get comfortable with being uncomfortable and to say yes to every opportunity, and that’s where wine plays a part.

He started a job as a barista, working three to four days a week at a café local to his seaside suburb in Adelaide’s west. On weekends he supported his lifestyle through local gigs as a musician but it was a connection through golf that welcomed him into the wine industry.

Aaron Southern is the owner of Epsilon Wines in the Barossa Valley, and he’s also Fuller’s mentor. In late February 2016, Southern invited Fuller to work through vintage and, of course, he said yes.

“And then halfway through vintage, paying me \$20 an hour, we did his [Aaron’s] first ferment over about 12 to 14 days, and then we did a second picking with all his grapes that he’s planted.

“And he said, ‘why don’t I pay you in half a tonne of grapes, that’s a \$1000 worth of grapes. Use everything and then I’ll teach you everything and how to go about it and if it’s good you can drink it and if it’s no good you can turn it into balsamic vinegar,’” Fuller laughed as he recalled the moment.

That wine became Fuller’s baby as he was mentored every day, always asking questions like when tartaric acid should be put in, if tannins should be added, and so on.

Fuller said Southern’s entry into winemaking was similar to his own. Initially a grapegrower, he was having trouble with buyers when he turned to winemaking friends, Dan Standish and Jason Collins, who mentored Southern

over two years. During the course of 14 years, Southern created his wine business, Epsilon, and after seeing the same characteristics in Fuller that he saw in himself, passed on the tricks of the trade.

“And so we created this relationship to get mentored under him and use his equipment and facilities,” Fuller said.

Fuller produced his 2016 vintage Shiraz under his label, Just Loui, and named it ‘The Love Juice’.

“That’s how it was named because I was giving it so much love, it was this little half a tonne, open fermenter, and [Southern] was just like ‘mate, you’re picking all the little twigs out and stuff, and I was like yeah I want to make it taste good!” Louis laughed.

“And when we barrelled it he’s like, ‘obviously you can’t polish a s**t at the end of the day, you’ve got to have really good produce, good grapes’, and he’s got really good topography where he’s planted his grapes and the grapes are really good.”

The wine received the tick of approval from Southern and was placed in barrel as LLJ, ‘Loui’s Love Juice’.

While the wine was ageing, Fuller registered his wine brand as ‘Just Loui’, removing the ‘S’ from his first name to reduce ambiguity on its pronunciation.

After 15 months in French oak, Fuller bottled his first wine in June 2016. During that time he poured his efforts into the

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With his third vintage Shiraz currently maturing in barrel, Louis Fuller's heart was once set on a different calling as a professional golfer.

2017 Shiraz which, in his opinion, tasted better than the first and also performed so well it sold out in four weeks.

“The '16 is better with food, it's big, bold and quite rich. The '17 you can just crack and it can be enjoyed by itself or with food, it's quite versatile. And then the 2018, which is sitting in barrel now, I've done two barrels, one 475L and one 300L so I should have close to 1000 bottles of the 2018,” Fuller explained.

“I bought my own tub, fermenter and barrels so in 2019 I have the potential to do 1–2.5 tonnes which will give us 2500 bottles.”

Of the many components of winemaking that he's learned in a few short years, Fuller said he is constantly amazed by the process.

“Just watching the yeast, this living organism, throbbing, eating the sugar, turning it into alcohol and tasting it and watching the Baume level go down and working out little things you can do to change the taste and keep it at different temperatures and things like that.

“And then once you barrel it for the red wine make sure it goes through malo to give it that lactic acid and make it creamier. And it's just amazing over

thousands of years of wine it's come to the last few hundred years, it's just stepped up and it's doing so well now.

“There's so much to learn and I can't believe the opportunity I've had through Aaron,” Fuller smiled.

What's next for Louis Fuller?

With creativity running through his veins, Fuller has always enjoyed sharing his talents with the world. As a musician, he said he connects with people through his music to reach them on an emotive level, producing two albums called 'Living the dream' and 'Around the next corner'.

While he is still performing on the side, Fuller now connects and creates experiences with people — ultimately consumers — through his wine.

“I like to stick to my passions and [wife] Kristin and I love drinking Grenache, love drinking Chardonnay, love drinking sparkling red, so next on the cards is going to be a sparkling red and even for 2019 I do have two fermenters there so I might source some Grenache grapes,” he said.

And it certainly is easy to be enthusiastic about the future when making a product he enjoys.

After spending money to make money, Fuller is just breaking even but is

expecting to see returns in the near future.

He recently spent a few thousand dollars on a new website, business cards, professional photos, a liquor licence and equipment to make the wine.

Besides a sparkling Shiraz and maybe a Grenache, he also hopes to source some Chardonnay grapes further down the track. There's even been talking of him buying a vineyard.

In addition to his wine ventures, Fuller and wife Kristin are also creating a food and health business with the ultimate goal of making bone broth — a liquid known for its healing properties for gut and internal health — and educating the public on how to be your best self.

“This is definitely something I can still do and then slowly progress instead of stressing out and lashing out hundreds of thousands of dollars and buying a vineyard, because it's not until two years later you get a return.

“With the wine I think I'll keep plodding along like I am and with the bone broth if I get capital and make a lot of money, I'll definitely be buying a vineyard down the track and setting something up later. But it's just living in the now and focussing on my core values.”

With no formal education in wine science or viticulture, Fuller said he is happy to stick to the traditional, hands-on style of winemaking where he can oversee the process from start to finish.

“That's what I'm super excited about, doing a Shiraz every year but later down the track having a wine come out each year, going a little bit diverse and looking at other varieties as well to improve my learning capacity.

“It's exciting, one day I might be passing it down to my children and it might turn into something really big and down the track I might have a 100-acre vineyard and doing several different wines. But we'll see what happens in the future.

“I've got dreams and goals for the future, but Kristin and I, and Wally [his dog], are just living in the present and that's what they say: 'yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, right now is a gift and that's why they call it the present', and that's a nice one.”

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