



WAFEX

Australia's Leading Flower Exporter

Adrian Parsons commenced work in the horticulture industry as a part-time employee with Peter McGain in 1981. At the ripe old age of 17 he discovered that Peter's considerable faith in him meant that a lot of work and a great deal of responsibility was heaped on his shoulders.

Adrian loved it.

Working the weekend shift at Peter's Chadstone store, and in charge by the time he was 18, were valuable formative experiences that continue to prove beneficial even to this day.

Adrian completed his Burnley degree in 1986 and then went to work for cut flower wholesaler Impulse Flowers. After a stint overseas – two years working in the flower markets of Holland, the U.S., the U.K. and Israel, Adrian came back to Australia convinced his skills would find an employer ready to make use of him, but no such luck. The obvious solution was to go into business for himself. That was in 1990 – and he has been in business ever since!

Wafex is the leading exporter of cut flowers (fresh and dried) in Australia with warehouse, packing and coolroom facilities in both Melbourne and Perth. They complement this with an impressive cut flower import business as well. One of the advantages of this is that movements in the Australian dollar tend to be easier to absorb. If the dollar climbs, as it's doing now that makes exports more expensive, but the trade off is that their imports become cheaper – Adrian admits this can be a pretty rough science, but you can see it does reduce exposure to currency fluctuations.

As a business, Wafex is marked by several features that make it unusual, not just its amazing product range, but also how it goes about its work. For one thing, it tries to minimise its exposure to the banks. Where possible, the business is financed internally – and if it doesn't have the cash, it doesn't spend it.

Simple really!

That doesn't mean Wafex is risk-averse; far from it. Risk is its daily bread and butter, speculating on large volumes of cut flowers for its clients around the world. Wafex buyers are encouraged to take a punt, it's the only way they can operate given time spend analysing their market means the product will have disappeared into another market.

So Wafex is essentially a risk-taker on the stock side because it has to be, and a risk avoider on the finance side because it can afford to be.

Employing over 50 people Wafex is both the country's biggest exporter of flowers and the largest importer too.

Generational change is already having an impact on the supply of flowers into Adrian's business and this trend is only going to accelerate. The issue is a common one among family firms in Australia, the Baby Boomers are retiring and no-one is stepping into their shoes. The coming decade may well see a transformation of small business in this country, among others, and this is something that Adrian and his team now see a real and urgent need to address.



And Now For Something Different – Helix, the future in waxflower

Seeing an opportunity to become the world's leading source of new Waxflower varieties, Adrian and his Perth-based business partner Craig Musson have recently established their new company Helix Australia. Having secured a range of new and improved Waxflower varieties, Helix Australia is currently developing networks of licensed growers locally and overseas in both the cut flower and nursery industries.

Helix Australia is a relatively new member of NGIV and among the licensed propagators of their new PBR Waxflower lines are some notable industry heavyweights including Greenhills Propagation Nursery in Victoria, Benara Nurseries in Western Australia and Native Plant Wholesalers in South Australia.

Helix Australia has identified the nursery and landscape industries as having been starved for new and improved Waxflower hybrids and will invest over the coming years to raise the profile and application of this stunning and under utilised Australian native genus.

In March 2009, Wafex acquired Perth based flower exporter, Total Flowers Australia, which has further strengthened the group's presence in a range of niche markets in Australia, Canada, South East Asia and Europe. This strategic acquisition has also added to Wafex's grower base of Australian native flowers and foliage

