

Three minutes with

As Flinders Gin founder and distiller Alby Trotta says, if making gin in the outback was easy, everyone would do it.

As told to Ben Kelly

BEN Tell me a bit about yourself, Alby.

ALBY Well, I'm a baker by trade, born and bred in Kapunda but of strong Italian heritage. I've found my way to all parts of the world through business and through a love for travel. Beyond baking I've always been fascinated by the things that you can do with yeast and, so far, making alcohol to distil into gin is my favourite. I owned and operated large commercial bakeries before finding my life in a place where I needed a change. Leah and I have been married since 1997 and have a beautiful family, who are all studying and making their way in Adelaide. Oh, and I have Ernie, my dog – my actual name is Albert, so my wife and kids think the Bert and Ernie reference is endlessly funny, since we are always together.

BEN How did you get into gin and become a distiller?

ALBY My family worked in harmony with the land in Italy before migrating to the Barossa and then the Mid North. I've been fortunate to spend time in the south of Italy and understand how my ancestors used seasonal local herbs and aromatics to infuse flavour. I got to know about and how to make amaro, which is like gin in process and draws on native botanicals from each of Italy's regions. The Flinders Ranges are home to some unique native foods and that inspired me to incorporate those flavour profiles into a local product.

BEN Are there challenges of running a distillery in the outback?

ALBY To just say yes would be an understatement, but I am frequently reminded that if it was easy, everyone would do it. I guess that's what makes Flinders Gin a bit extra-special. This region is well known for its pioneering spirit and that's certainly needed to run a distillery here. We only use rainwater for production as the town water is awful; we've had calcium forming in funny places because of it! I keep a spare of everything as there isn't an around-the-corner solution. We frequently lose power supply in this town, and usually the

internet and phone service follow, so we just work with it and that's a bit of the joy of it all.

BEN Describe Quorn for those who've never been.

ALBY Quorn is quirky. Everything in the community happens with a bit of outback spirit. It has so many people with talents, knowledge, and connections, you just have to ask, and you can find it in this town. Leah and I both feel at home here. She remembers her childhood with grandparents in Broken Hill, and I was raised in Kapunda – we were married there. We joke that if Broken Hill and Kapunda had a baby, Quorn would be it. It's the accessible outback.

BEN What's your favourite thing to listen to when making long car trips?

ALBY Ernie and I travel together most of the time and I get no complaints from him when I switch between '80s hits, tropical house, and my all-time favourite Gregorian Monks chanting covers of pop songs. I do like a podcast, and its usually conversational recordings with ordinary people.

BEN Describe an experience that changed your life.

ALBY On Valentine's Day of 2017 Leah was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 42. This happened just after we all arrived back from a long break and a white Christmas with family in Italy. That moment changed everything, and for three years I cared for her while she had so many operations, chemotherapy, radiotherapy and so forth. She has come

through the other side of that, but none of us are left untouched by it – me, the kids and everyone who knows us. We look at life quite differently now and Leah wanted me to find something I love and enjoy doing it. That's kind of where Flinders Gin started.

BEN Other than distilling, do you have a hidden talent?

ALBY Blacksmithing. I love it. Our home and distillery are based in a 1880s livery stables. I've restored the farrier's shop and use it for what it was intended for – a forge and a hammer. I also enjoy travelling the outback and cooking. I like the simple things.

