

Bridge People

RINGING THE CHANGES

SOME people are quite happy to carry on doing the same job throughout their life, but Phil Cooke of Bath is not one of them!

Originally an electronics graduate, Phil worked with the top experts in the field. A career in high tech led to becoming Chairman of the Research and Development Society, as well as lecturing at Sussex University. The latter led to developing three hobbies – rambling, cooking and bridge – which helped change Phil's life – twice!

He first combined cooking and bridge by playing with friends after a meal, where good wine enhanced the ambience. However when, late in life, he met Sally, now his partner, they decided to move to Bath and Phil's bridge, honed by lessons with the late Freddie North, together with his university career and dinner parties, all came to an end. Phil had to start afresh.

His first step, on Sally's advice, was to transform his appreciation of wine from a hobby into a qualification. Phil obtained the Wine and Spirit Educational Trust (WSET) Diploma in two years. This led to giving evening courses at the University of Bath, which were an instant success. He then became a member of the Association of Wine Educators (after passing another exam). This membership leads to invites from wine producers, so Phil has had trade wine trips to Portugal, Spain, Italy, Champagne, Burgundy, Loire, Beaujolais, and Bordeaux (this last led to another

exam, to become an International Bordeaux Educator). 'These trips,' says Phil, are strenuous (very long days), but always memorable.'

Phil also receives many invites to wine tastings and seminars (100 wines per session is not exceptional), which all led to him founding a Wine Appreciation Circle and giving courses and talks, as well as tastings, to various charities, clubs and societies. His new career as a Wine Expert is thriving and his talks are very popular, as they include guidance on how to taste, insights into the history of wine as well as how it is produced, the grape varieties, the wine regions, and many other such topics. And they are often accompanied by tastings of quality bread



and cheeses!

What about the bridge? 'A lifetime of going up learning curves had proved addictive,' says Phil, 'and after I started playing again I took up duplicate. If I get interested in something, I like to have a level of knowledge to be able to have a sensible discussion with an expert, so lots of reading. Sadly, it was too late in life to become an expert player!'

Helping partner Sally to learn bridge led to the idea of teaching it, so after sitting more exams, Phil qualified as an EBUTA teacher and opened his own bridge school. All this does not leave much time for rambling, but Phil likes to keep something in reserve for the next stage in his life... □

First published in English Bridge, October 2010

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