

Tête A Tête



2005 Halliday Wine Companion

The newsletter of the Domaine A Vineyard

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By James Halliday

Some wine consumers and professionals decry the comparison between Australian and French wines. The French lead the way, suggesting it is at best an apples and oranges comparison. Our wines, they say, are the product of terroir (and climate) which is unique. Wines from the same terroir can be compared, but not others.

From the Australian or New World viewpoint, the same school says we are not trying to copy Bordeaux or Burgundy, but simply use the same varieties and make the best (Australian or regional) wine from the grapes.

These arguments neatly sidestep several major issues. Wine is a globally traded commodity, and in many parts of the world the customer in a bottle shop or restaurant has to make a choice between New World and Old World wines. This choice should be on the basis of quality and style within a given price range, and prior comparative tastings are one of the best aids to making the choice.

Second, unless you accept there are (or should be) benchmark wines for a given style or varietal, you get into the ludicrous situation of saying the great wines of Europe (and the best of the New World) are irrelevant when it comes to assessing quality. "This is the best cabernet from Oodnadatta, and that is the end of the matter, because there are no other cabernets from Oodnadatta", then becomes the answer.

Most major international wine shows happily put wines of different countries in the same class, albeit sorted by variety and (as in London's International Wine Challenge) sometimes by a retail price band.

So the July 19 tasting in Melbourne organised by **Domaine A** and putting its Cabernet Sauvignon in a blind comparative tasting with Bordeaux

wines was as interesting as it was valid. The **Domaine A** wines were from 2001 (Stoney Vineyard), 2000, 1999, 1998, 1997, 1995, 1993 and 1990. Interspersed between these were 1998 Chateau Cos d'Estournel, 1996 Chateau Sociando Mallet, 1996 Chateau Lynch Bages and 1995 Petit Village (the last seemingly the victim of poor storage at some point).

I am strongly of the view that in such tastings one should initially concentrate

points (a surprise packet); 1996 Chateau Lynch Bages 93 points; 1996 Chateau Sociando Mallet, 1995 Domaine A and 2000 Domaine A all on 92 points; 1998 Domaine A 91 points; 1999 Domaine A 90 points; 1998 Chateau Cos d'Estournel 87 points (some brettanomyces and dry, hard tannins on the finish); 1997 Domaine A 79 points (a wine I have never liked, seemingly affected by brett or other bacterial spoilage) and 1985 Petit Village 75 points (oxidised and rubbery).



James Halliday, Velten Tiemann and Peter Althaus

on the quality of the wine in the glass, and point it before one starts to identify the maker or region of each. Likewise, discussion should only start once the flight has been pointed and the points collated.

This was the procedure followed at the tasting, although in some instances it was impossible not to recognise the origin of a wine, but not others.

My rating of the wines ran thus: 1990 Domaine A 96 points; 1993 Domaine A 95 points; 2001 Stoney Vineyard 94

The overall conclusions were firstly that the style of **Domaine A** is close to and compatible with that of Bordeaux/Haut Medoc, and the comparison is entirely valid. Second, that the '93 and '90 **Domaine As**, quite apart from being my top wines, show the aging potential is as great as that of Bordeaux; neither wine is the least bit tired, and (corks permitting) should easily see out the next 10 to 20 years. **Third, Domaine A offers far better value for money.**

2004 Vintage Report – A year of fortunes and misfortunes

May. What a peculiar name that is for a month of the year. Yet for anyone working on a Tasmanian vineyard this past vintage, it would have not seemed anything unusual. After all, it was the word on everybody's lips as they waited for the season's huge crops to ripen in the cool autumn conditions: "We may pick tomorrow, or we may have to wait a few days more," vineyard managers would explain again and again to their idle picking crews.

May is usually a month for sighs of relief and happy faces as vintage comes to a close at Stoney Vineyard. This year it did not leave us with any such fond memories. Temperatures throughout the month were well below normal across Tasmania, with several places including Launceston in the north of the State reporting their lowest-ever mean daily maximum temperatures. The Coal River Valley followed patterns set everywhere else, making it a testing month for our workers as they struggled their way through the property's 11ha of vines in search of ripe and healthy fruit. It was a month in which they would always be conscious that the vast majority of the season's work would still be in front of them.

Harvest during April had resulted in an above average crop of Pinot Noir being brought to the winery almost a month later than normal, the longest delay we had experienced since 1996.

The season gave us many opportunities to draw unfavourable comparisons. Winter 2003 was wet but accompanied by a late warm spell as buds began swelling.

Budburst was delayed for several weeks as September was cold, wet and windy, but also, strangely enough, very sunny. October was dry and cold, and the dry conditions continued through November and into a warmer than usual December. It was the warmest December on the property since 1994.

Flowering was free from adverse weather conditions and resulted in a very large and unwelcomed fruit-set. The new year opened with January being slightly cool but very wet, ensuring vineyard staff were kept on their toes during the period's routine leaf-plucking and crop-thinning tasks.



February was cool and relatively dry in the Coal River Valley, and witnessed unprecedented fruit development across much of the vineyard. Vines not long stripped of their surplus crops soon needed additional work in order to speed up ripening in the cooling weather conditions.

Strong winds on April 1st and again on April 23rd and 24th April caused considerable damage to vineyard netting. Gladly, the absence of large flocks of

marauding birds in the valley this year meant that we could leave off any nets that were displaced in the hope of a quick start to picking.

Given all of the misfortunes of the season, we are pleased with the wines that have resulted from 2004. Our Sauvignon Blanc is not nearly as ripe and as tropical as it was after the warm season of 2003, but it has made an unwooded table wine that has good varietal aromas and flavours, and sits well at the table. As in the past, we will eventually be able to offer a small amount of barrel-fermented sauvignon blanc for sale under the Lady A label.

Our Pinot Noir vines performed admirably this year. We have produced a small quantity of wine to be marketed under the **Domaine A** label, with the remaining portion of fruit from the vineyard being blended to produce a very satisfying Merlot Pinot Noir Rosé (sold exclusively through Hill Street Grocer).

The star of the season unexpectedly is likely to be Cabernet Sauvignon. Our oldest vines produced very small berries this year, so the new wine from them is dark and tannic, and has a very good structure. It has only about 12.5 per cent in alcohol, with good aromas and flavours. In sugar ripeness, it is better than in 1996, and suggests that we have the possibility of making a release under the **Domaine A** label in about three years. Similarly, our Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon is also likely to be one of the successes of 2004.

Best Press

"Tassie's premier estate yields one of the icon Cabernets in Australia – the 1998 **Domaine A** is nothing short of life-changing wine"
Matthew Jukes

1998 **Domaine A** Cabernet Sauvignon – TOP 100 Australian Wines, Matthew Jukes, expertwine.com

"... a wine earnestly and honestly made from a vineyard rather than a confected/blend from a recipe." Jancis Robinson

"...my highest-scoring wine (93 points - 2000 **Domaine A** Cabernet Sauvignon)." Andrew Jefford, Gourmet Traveller WINE Spring 2004

"...the wine that beat them all was the rouge 2000 **Domaine A** Cabernet Sauvignon." Graeme Phillips, The Mercury May 26 2004

From Robin Bradley's 2005 'Little Gold Book'

- ★★★★★ 5 GOLD STARS **Domaine A** Pinot Noir "The Pinot is superb"
- ★★★★★ **Domaine A** Cabernet Sauvignon
- ★★★★ Stoney Vineyard Pinot Noir
- ★★★★ Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon

2001 Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon – 91 pts, Jeremy Oliver

2003 Stoney Vineyard Pinot Noir – 90 pts, Jeremy Oliver

2003 Stoney Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc – 90 pts, Jeremy Oliver

2000 **Domaine A** Cabernet Sauvignon – 96 pts, Jeremy Oliver

2001 **Domaine A** Pinot Noir – 92 pts, Jeremy Oliver

By Giles Cooke MW – Alliance Wine, United Kingdom

" If I'm really honest, I hadn't heard much about **Domaine A** before Paul Henry, chief of the Australian Wine Bureau in London, mentioned it as one of the most exciting discoveries he had made in a long time. As I was heading off to Australia soon after, he suggested that I really ought to take a detour and seek out the wines of **Domaine A**. So, encouraged by some recent, glowing reviews from the likes of James Halliday and Matthew Jukes, I re-arranged my flights to enable a whistle-stop visit to Hobart and the chance to meet up with Peter & Ruth Althaus.

If I have any buying policy then it is to seek out wines with a real "sense of place" and thus I thought that wines produced in such a marginal climate are sure to have the stamp of both the place and the winemaker upon them. At the back of my mind though there was a concern that perhaps, at best, these wines would be leafy, elegant and an acquired taste and, at worst, under ripe, lean and mean. As it turns out, I needn't have worried...

The visit to **Domaine A** was a revelation and I left totally converted that not only can Cabernet Sauvignon be ripened in Tasmania but that it can produce a

Cabernet of world class balance, finesse and style. It was an added bonus that I also discovered that Peter produces possibly the most heavenly Sauvignon Blanc in the world in the form of Lady A Fume Blanc! The dedication, precision and belief that the Althaus' have is an inspiration in a world that is all too easily being flooded with anonymous, homogenised wine styles.

The wines arrived in the U.K in late May, having been launched at London Wine Trade Fair, held at Excel in London's docklands and although it's early days for **Domaine A** in the U.K we're working hard to convince the U.K that Tasmania is not just about Pinot Noir when it comes to reds. We've been helped by Matthew Jukes rating the 1998 **Domaine A** Cabernet Sauvignon in his Top 100[™] Australian Wines and the same wine was also shown at the recent Langtons tasting held in conjunction with the Australian Wine Bureau. An invitation to attend the Decanter Fine Wine Encounter in London on 20th & 21st November and the associated visit of Peter Althaus to the U.K will further enhance the reputation of the **Domaine** in the U.K.



We've been delighted to be able to get some wine in front of consumers and the lucky few are now able to buy **Domaine A**[™] wines through **Oddbins Fine Wine** stores and some **Selfridges**. Top end restaurants such as **Bibendum** and the **Great Eastern Hotel** in London now list the wines whilst those heading a little further north can find them at such esteemed restaurants as the **Champany Inn** outside of Edinburgh and the ultra plush **Glenapp Castle** a little further into the wilderness. We're positive that many more listings will follow in the near future and are delighted to be working with a passionate producer of world class, cool climate wines!"

Cellar Guide

Domaine A

Vintage	Pinot Noir	Cabernet Sauvignon
1990	1997-1999	1998-2008
1991	1998-2004	2000-2005
1992	2000-2005	2002-2012
1993	1999-2004	2001-2010
1994	2002-2006	2004-2014
1995	2000-2004	2003-2009
1996	not made	not made
1997	2002-2006	2002-2008
1998	2006-2012	2008-2018
1999	2005-2010	2008-2018
2000	2008-2012	2010-2020
2001	2006-2010	unreleased

Stoney Vineyard

Vintage	Pinot Noir	Cabernet Sauvignon
1990	not made	not made
1991	not made	not made
1992	not made	not made
1993	not made	1995-2004
1994	not made	1998-2010
1995	1998-2002	1998-2003
1996	2000-2005	1998-2000
1997	not made	not made
1998	not made	2000-2005
1999	not made	2002-2006
2000	not made	2006-2008
2001	2005-2010	2008-2012
2002	not made	unreleased
2003	2004-2010	unreleased

First Steps of the Coal River Valley Wine Industry – Part 1 by George Park

When we decided to grow grapes, we lived on the outskirts of Campania, next to and on the southern side of the original Campania school site. We were sufficiently aware of agriculture to know that viticulture in Tasmania in 1970 was considered to be marginal, however there were some enlightened people and encouragement.

Having made the decision we obtained cuttings in winter of 1970. What to grow? Of course we selected varieties grown in Bordeaux, Burgundy, Alsace, Loire and Germany; including the Australian standbys, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Rhine Riesling.

But of course the next decision to be made – how to establish a vineyard in this

climate. We knew of one other established vineyard. So, how to make the right decisions in a region with no established industry? We read many reports and papers, asked many questions and opinions. Whether the trellis in the vineyard should be high and wide, low and close or in between became an urgent decision as the winter of 1971 approached. We chose the French tradition, close spacing and close to the ground; that couldn't be wrong in this climate? What about frosts? Our vineyard site, although marginal would have to do.

During the winter of 1971 the cuttings were planted in the vineyard, and grew well enough.

The more I learned about viticulture, the more I realised that our site was really marginal; flat to easterly facing, and generally deep sand.

I was employed by the Hydro Electric Commission and drove to Hobart each day. Because viticulture was often in my thoughts I was conscious of the slopes and sites along the various roads to Hobart relating them to grape growing; not with any idea of purchase [that was out of the question] but purely of interest and wonder. A number of the sites that I looked at with curiosity now contain vineyards.

Eventually the dramatic decision was made to seek a better site.

The property next to Stoney Vineyard, -now owned by Plummers - was the first possible consideration. It had good northerly slopes, nice trees and good ambience. It was not for sale.

The present Stoney Vineyard site also looked to have potential and was readily available at a reasonable price. Perfect sheltered northerly slope for the first plantings and good potential thereafter. After a lot of soul-searching, we visited the site with two horticulturist's from the Department of Agriculture, one of whom said "where apricots can be grown, grapes will grow." There were apricot orchards on the southern and western boundaries of the original site. The time had come for a decision. With a deep breath we decided to take the next step.

And so in the winter of 1973, Stoney Vineyard had started to grow, so named because of the stony ground.



George Park on his little red Ferrari

Domaine A around the world

United Kingdom

The Great Eastern Hotel
Bibendum
Glenapp Castle
The Tate
Champany Inn
Linlithgow

Switzerland

Hotel Krone
The Wine Loft
Wein & Dein

France

Jardin Des Vins
Caves Gambetta

Germany

D'Or (Johan Laffer)

Melbourne

The Botanical
Pure South
Grossi Florentino
Vue De Monde
Bacash
Donovan's

Sydney

Quay
Flying Fish
Forty One
Marque
Aria
Bilsons
Establishment

Adelaide

The Lion
The Grange
The Melting Pot
Maximillians

Tasmania

Lebrina
Lickerish
Amulet
Stillwater
Franklin Manor