

Tête A Tête



The newsletter of the Domaine A Vineyard

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Domaine makes A-list A cabernet that won't punish the connoisseur

*Mark Smith, Grapevine, The Examiner
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Cabernet sauvignon is "a wine for people who like to sleep on the ground, play rugby, climb mountains, eat brussel sprouts and do other things in which some form of punishment is part of the pleasure," an American writer once observed.

And it's true, in part. Young cabernet, with its mouth-puckering tannins, can be a pain in the gum when it's tasted straight from the barrel.

But try a perfectly ripened and lovingly matured example and the experience can be truly sublime for red wine lovers.

The trouble is many fail to identify that small proportion of wines that are ideally suited to cellaring.

Wouldn't it be useful to have an industry form guide to help sort the vinous from the vinegar?

It would. In fact, such a guide does exist. It's called Langton's Classification of Australian Wine. Included in its latest, most extensive listing of the country's top wines is Tasmania's super-premium Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon, from the Coal River Valley.

The classification dates back to 1991, and is the brainchild of Langton's Fine Wine Auctions, the country's leading marketplace for premium local and imported wines. Essentially, it's a ranking of Australia's best-performing wines, based on market demand and the quality of vintages made by the producer.

Revised assessments occur every five years. This past month saw the release of the fourth edition. That divides the country's 101 auction room favourites into four categories - exceptional, outstanding, excellent and distinguished. Each category represents a certain strength and market definition, and the brands listed require a significant track record on the auction market, and a minimum release of 10 vintages of wine.

According to the classification's creators, "these are Australia's top 101 wines, voted not by wine judges or wine critics, but by the ultra-fine wine consumer - the over 6000 wine enthusiasts who regularly participate in buying and selling fine Australian wine at Langton's".

Penfolds Grange heads the exceptional category. It's accompanied by 10 other wines renowned for their sheer quality and consistency. Twenty-two wines are listed as outstanding, with no less than 14 originating from single vineyards.

Thirty-four wines are listed as excellent, while a further 34 are classified as distinguished.

Winemaker Peter Althaus is chuffed by the inclusion of his superbly crafted Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon in Langton's latter category. His job is not simply a labour of love. It means battling the elements, along with critics that assert Tasmania is just too cool to grow and fully ripen cabernet sauvignon.

"Sure, we can't make Domaine A wines every year," he adds in defence.

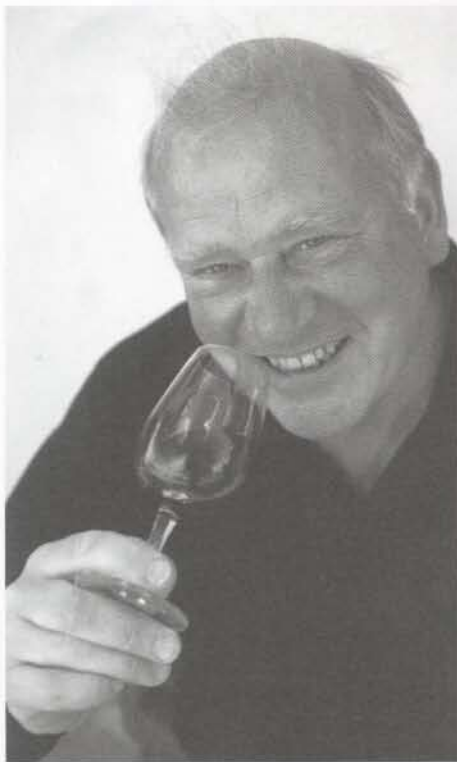
"We didn't make Domaine A in 1996 or 2002, but we still have people who believe that they the Stoney Vineyard wines in these years are world-class cabernets."

Citing an example of their form, he says award-winning UK columnist Matthew Jukes named the 1998 Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon as one of this country's icon cabernets in London in 2004. The amiable Brit selected his top Australian wines after tasting more than 3800 wines here on three separate trips in 2003.

In addition to that, Langton's auctioneer and Master of Wine Andrew Caillard presented the 2000 Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon at a tasting of his 100 best-ever Australian wines at a prestigious tasting at the Australian Wine Export Council at The Strand in London. There were only 10 Cabernet Sauvignons.

The Swiss-born maker is well known for jesting that his iconic 'A' labelling stands for 'Australia, Althaus, and Ambition'. Might he now add 'A-list' to that alliteration?

Absolutely.



Vintage Report 2005

2005 was a really enjoyable vintage. A big contrast to 2004. It went smoothly and we had excellent weather conditions. Let us start at the beginning of the wine year in September. Good winter rains led to a very good start of the vines. Bud burst was even and just at the right time. Flowering went well in December, despite the fact that we really didn't have a real summer with lots of sunshine and warmth. After flowering we could see that we had just the right amount of bunches and berries in our Bordeaux varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Merlot.

The Pinot as usual had fruit in abundance and we knew that we would have to green harvest some of the grapes. By the 22nd of December, 2004 a hail storm went through the valley and our vineyard has been slightly affected by it. Fortunately the berries were only pea size at this time in their growth and the berries which were damaged dried out in days.

As I have said the summer didn't favor us with a lot of sunshine but the Autumn weather made up for it. The extended period of ripening produced fruit with good aroma, good flavours, thick skins, and good acidity.

The usual northerly winds which here are dry and warm came up in March and ripened our fruit to perfection. We started picking with Pinot the last day of March. The excellent quality of the fruit made me decide to use the 30 year old vines in the vineyard to make another "Reserve du Patron"

After Pinot came Sauvignon Blanc on the 4th April and it went smoothly to Cabernet Cabernet Franc merlot and Petit Verdot. On the first of May our harvest was over, the wines were fermenting and we could start to prepare the vineyard for the winter by applying some manure.

Whilst I sit here and write this vintage report the wines are in the barrels, maturing slowly. To be released in 3 years. These will be wines with a long cellaring potential, and I know that they will survive me.

Peter

In Praise of the Magnum

Magnum bottles which hold 1.5 litre are the ideal containers to bottle wine with a good cellaring potential. Because of the higher volume of the wine compared to the air space and the same size of cork mouth. The wine in a Magnum is maturing slower. But it's not only slower, it is some how more graceful and I don't have an explanation for that. But this is the reason why Magnums are such a collectable item, and fetch higher prices than two bottles of the same wine.

I have made in every vintage a few Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon and Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon Magnums and we have kept them in the cellar to mature. We can now sell 1994 Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon and 1997 & '98 Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon. Unfortunately the older vintages are already gone, but hopefully not already drunk!

In vino veritas.

In wine is truth. Plato

*Good wine ruins the purse,
bad wine ruins the stomach.* Anon

A thought

from a wonderful book called "The New France" by Andrew Jefford.

New World competition has been very good for France, as all the most intelligent French wine-growers readily acknowledge. A spell in South Africa, Chile, or Australia is now an essential part of the education of many young French wine-growers. What they tend to learn, I have been happy to discover, are the best lessons of New World winemaking. Rethink every action: do nothing for precedent's sake alone: understand as much as possible: and practice your vocation with absolute commitment. What has not been brought back to France so far is the worst lesson of New World winemaking: that it can be a brand-driven industry like any other. That vineyards are just a home for venture capital: that winemaking is no more than applied chemistry: that the purpose of wine production is shareholder value: and that marketing strategies are more important than scent and flavour in selling wine."

Domaine A Merlot

Did you know that Peter has been making a Domaine A Merlot since 1994? Produced in minute quantities in only the very best years for that variety (1994, 1995, 1997, 1998 & 2003, 2004, 2005), it is a wine with incredible structure, balance and intensity and is inspired by the great eastates of Le Pin and Petrus in Pomerol. The wine demands time in the cellar to soften the fine grained tannins and drinks beautifully after 8-10 years.

Unfortunately the wine is not for sale but in the tradition of supporting the customers who purchase our wines, has always been given to cellar door and mail order customers purchasing over a \$1000 worth of wine in one order.

Limited Release

To celebrate the inclusion of the Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon into the Langtons Classification IV we have put together a very special pack of wine for you. Each wooden case consists of six bottles of the Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon from three separate vintages. Each wine reflects the characteristics and differences of 1998, 1999 and 2000 vintage and all carry the hallmark of quality that is Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon. These packs are limited and are priced at \$ 400 each.

Export Review

This has been yet another successful year for our exports, consolidating older markets as well as entering some new and exciting ones. In November last year Peter and I travelled over to the United Kingdom to present our wines at one of the most exciting tastings held in London each year. The Decanter Wine Encounter attracts wines from 25 countries and some 200 exhibitors including some of the very top estates from Bordeaux and Burgundy. It was a fascinating two days of pouring wines and explaining that Tasmania wasn't off the coast of Africa!

The rest of the week in London was spent visiting customers and sommeliers in one of the most difficult and progressive markets in the world. We visited many new restaurants and obtained some fantastic listings including the sublime Gordon Ramseys and the award winning Tom Aitkens Restaurant both in South Kensington.

Peter also travelled to France to meet up with our newly appointed agent Claude Gilios of Vins du Monde.

We are extremely happy to welcome Claude and his team to our family and Peter will return to France later this year to help promote our wines in this parochial market.

One of the key points in looking after exports is understanding that each country that we export to have their own laws that govern the sale of wine. Canada is a state regulated market and all wines imported and sold in the different states are purchased by each of the state run liquor boards. The Liquor Board of Ontario is the largest purchaser of liquor in the world and to enter these kinds of markets are extremely difficult and long winded. After nine months of paperwork we finally received our first order and when the wine was put on for sale in Canada it sold out immediately. Sales are now at an all time high in Canada with the next shipment leaving in time for a massive portfolio tasting being held in October, an event that both Peter and I are attending. It seems that the export year has gone around in a full circle.

by Paul Hopkins

New Distributor in Queensland

One of the philosophies that we have when we appoint a new distributor to a market is that they must have the same passion about our wines as we do and sometimes finding the right distributor is just about luck. We had been looking for a distributor in Queensland for over six months when we came across a portfolio of wine that included many of the great wines of Italy and France as well as some of the newest and most respected producers in Australia.

Greg of Bouchon Wines also knew a close friend of ours in Melbourne, talk about coincidence!! Greg already knew our wines and had drunk them on several occasions but had never realised that we were looking for representation in his home market.

On a visit to the winery Greg's knowledge of classic wines and his enthusiasm and passions for our wines persuaded us pretty quickly that we had found a new brand champion. Bouchon Wines can be contacted on 07 3800 9744. Welcome aboard Greg.



Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter, Sermons and soda-water the day after.

Lord Byron

One of the most wonderful things about the wines made here at Domaine A / Stoney Vineyard is the almost silent contribution that is made by Ruth Althaus. One of my favorite times here at the vineyard is actually the blending which usually takes place soon after vintage. For thirty-five years Ruth and Peter have shared a wonderful passion for food, wine, and good company and have spent many, many hours travelling to the most wonderful wine regions of the world. During blending, up to 75 glasses can be laid before us and it is in the narrowing down that Ruth plays a fantastic part. Ruth claims she has a memory for things which she does not like rather than the things she loves so invariably her comments are not always well received by Peter. However he absolutely listens to

her comments and it is this "thumbprint" within the partnership of life that give the final blend its unique characteristics of each vintage. Would it surprise you to know that women buy 64% of wine sold today? Did you know that 10% of winemakers are women? Were you aware that women have a better sense of smell than men, and that they make better wine tasters as a result?

Women are serious about buying, serving, and drinking wines that satisfy their appetites, no matter what the occasion. Enjoyment of wine still falls into the big three category. Buying a wine, pairing wine with food and sharing wine with friends and family. Now that I have totally alienated all of the men here at the vineyard the one real message behind this little paragraph is just to encourage all of our female wine lovers out there to take heart and confidence in acknowledging their instincts and palates and really getting down to some serious wine loving fun. Viva Wine for Women!

While we are on the subject of the marvels of the female form we are launching the new Stoney Vineyard label which has been

designed for us by Justy Phillips head of graphic design at the University of Tasmania. Peter and Ruth sweated long and hard on the feedback from around the world and it seems that we have finally reached a happy compromise of "simple classic" design. It expresses the philosophy here at the vineyard along with the marketing messages of connecting Domaine A to the Stoney Vineyard brand itself as many people out there had not made the connection. The design is modern, fresh and yet we believe it will become a "classic string on the bow of Peter Althaus and the hand made wines here at the vineyard.

The wines in the Stoney Vineyard range are made for earlier drinking, however are still incredibly rewarding to cellar as we saw recently at the Crown Casino dinner with the serving of Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1994. Keep your eye out for Justy's spacer book on "101 reasons to drink Cabernet Sauvignon..." Do we really need any?

by Maria Lurighi

A dinner here and there.....

We have had the opportunity in the last couple of months to work with some incredible people in the hospitality industry. Just recently we were part of a great evening hosted by Walter Wagner the Chief Executive Food and Beverage of Crown Casino. The evening was called "A Sense of Place" and brought together the synergies of Art, Food and Wine. It was Walter's idea. "I want to present the very best which Tasmania has to offer in an evening which also is full of warmth and colour of a great occasion. Luke Wagner was the featured artist. He created a wonderful series of paintings which expressed his emotions about the landscape of Tasmania. His wife Ainstie Wagner was the invited chef. Ainstie has been the chef at Government House for a number of years now. The food mirrored the expression in Luke's paintings beautifully. The team at Crown headed by Marcus Moore were an incredible support and worked with Ainstie to produce a magnificent dinner. The wines were matched meticulously by Peter Althaus. He featured a back vintage of Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1994 poured from Magnums. All of wines shone wonderfully with the food. A wonderful evening not to be forgotten.

We also had a wonderful evening in Sydney at Tetsuya's. A remarkable degustation was prepared and shared by some of the top sommeliers of Sydney chosen by Tim Stock.

Check out our list of restaurants in Sydney and Melbourne where our wines are served.

The People

Paul Hopkins - Paul's interests outside of Domaine A lie in his thriving wine distribution company and educational courses he hosts in Tasmania. Paul is originally from the UK and developed his passion for wine as a logistic manager importing wines from throughout Europe and is currently studying for the prestigious Master of Wine qualification.

Velten Tiemann - Velten has extensively travelled the world and produced wine in countries as diverse as Germany, New Zealand, Switzerland and South Africa. Velten enjoys kite surfing and catching fish with the local vet as well as being a active member of the local St Vincent de Paul's.

Very late picked Botrytis Riesling by Velten Tiemann

Late picked it certainly was, not late in the afternoon but very late in the year. We finally picked the grapes on the 17th June, the grapes were shrivelled, intensely sweet raisins and were so black, even the birds didn't want them - they couldn't have looked any worse. It wasn't our goal to leave the fruit so long on the vine but it was after all, a very difficult and long vintage.

These tiny shrivelled raisins produced a miserly 600 litres of clear juice and caused a great deal of excitement with Velten, Peter wasn't quite so excited given his love for Riesling in the first place. The must took an eternity to ferment taking a total of 4 months to complete and the alcohol, sugar and acidity balance was found at 8% volume of alcohol and 100g per litre of residual sugar.

After nearly a year in bottle we have a wine that is beautifully balanced with intense grapefruit and citrus flavours with low alcohol and balanced sweetness and fresh acidity lingering on the middle palate. We waited so long for the grapes to be picked but now that we have the result of our patience in the bottle, we finally believe that the wait was well worth it. This wine is exclusive to Hill Street Grocer along with the Rosé and Chardonnay 2004.



Yes you can ripen Cabernet in Tasmania

Where...

At Domaine A Stoney Vineyard!

Melbourne restaurants & wine merchants

- Asiana
- Bacash
- Brassiere – Phillipe Mouchel
- Cicciolina
- Circa
- Così
- Donovans
- Estivo
- Ezard
- George Wine Room
- Il Bacaro
- Il Solito Posto
- Interlude Restaurant
- Japanese Teppan-yaki Inn
- JJ's at Crown
- Koko's at Crown
- Langton's Restaurant & Wine Bar
- Maisonette
- Mecca
- Melbourne Wine Room
- Middle Brighton Baths
- Momo
- Number 8
- O'Connells Hotel
- Orange
- Ping
- Prince Wine Store
- Pure South
- Sails On The Bay
- Syracuse Restaurant And Bar
- Tea House On Chinatown
- The Botanical
- Vue de Monde
- Walter's Wine Bar
- Dan Murphy's Fine Wine

Sydney restaurants & wine merchants

- Aria Restaurant
- Bathers Pavilion
- Billson's
- Boathouse on Black wattle Bay
- Cruise Restaurant
- Est
- Flying Fish
- Forty One Restaurant
- GPO Cellars
- Guillaume @ Bennelong
- Icebergs Dining Room
- Manta
- Marque
- Observatory Hotel
- Otto Ristorante
- Pier
- Prime/GPO Cellars
- Quay Restaurant
- Rockpool
- Shangri-La
- Star City/Astral Room
- Tetsuya's
- Ultimo
- Wildfire
- Woolahra Hotel
- Australian Wine Centre
- CBD Cellars Shop
- North Sydney Cellars
- Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron