
Tête à Tête

News from Stoney Vineyard

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PRUNING.....GAINING CONTROL

We humans have come a long way from our hunter-gather beginnings.

And as we've moved towards more carefully organized patterns of life and agriculture, we've rarely stopped to think about the civilizing or domesticating processes we've brought to bear in our world.

We've come to take for granted the processes of domestication that have brought in from the wild our dogs and our cats, and a myriad other forms of animal life.

It's taken a long time, but the same processes that have worked to bring our pets indoors have also allowed us to domesticate certain plants, including the noble vine.

How many of us feel civilized if we could not see ourselves with a glass of wine occasioning our lives?

Very few of us ever get to see a grapevine in its wild state these days. If we'd lived 5000 years ago, we'd have seen it growing haphazardly through Europe's countryside - sprawling across the ground, climbing rocks and trees, and choking off the lives of competing vegetation.

As we've learnt to domesticate the animals in our environment,



so we've learnt to domesticate the vine. We've gained control, by pruning it and shaping it into practical forms that enable us to nurture it and prolong its life, to make it produce reliable fruit yields, and to improve the quality of the bunches it bears.

If great wine is indeed made in the vineyard, then pruning plays a large part in not only shaping the vine but in shaping the quality of wine it produces.

This was known as long ago as Ancient Egyptian times. Throughout Roman civilization, pruning was a well-established practice.

At Stoney Vineyard, we adhere to the traditions of European viticulture as well. Our 60 000 vines are cane-pruned, after the manner promoted by the 1860 studies of Frenchman, Dr Guyot.

A grapevine has two parts - one above the ground, and one below the ground.

The root system of a vine is usually very extensive, reaching deep into the earth, providing support and nutrients for the vine and its fruit.

A fully-bearing vine puts a lot of weight onto its trunk as well as its trellis. A vine's basic structure must be strong.

The canes, the shoots, and the leaves are the vine's powerplant. As leaves are responsible for photosynthesis, transpiration, and respiration, they particularly are critical parts of the engine which drives the vine machine. A vine with few leaves will not ripen its fruit.

The art of pruning is to control the growth of the vine, to bring into balance the development of

its roots and leaf canopy, its vigor, and its crop. It requires the skills of a tight-rope walker to equip the vine with the ability to produce premium quality fruit at an acceptable price.

Pruning is no-one's favorite job, but only now that it's done can we look forward to enjoying a glass from our next vintage.

No meal is ever dull when there is wine to drink and talk about!

Andre Simon

VINTAGE REPORT

Like all vigneronns, we are very much at the mercy of a capricious and fickle Mother Nature.

For us, nothing highlights that more than the appalling sequence of cloud, wind and rain which masqueraded as summer and autumn during our ripening season. Vintage '96 certainly helped us to set some new records, many of which we'd prefer to quickly forget.

After a good harvest in 1995, and a fairly normal winter, spring and budburst began with relatively mild and calm conditions. A dry September gave us hopes for a good year.

What we were yet to realize, however, was that this month would prove to be the driest month of the whole growing season - far, far drier, even, than our eventual harvest month of May '96.

As in 1993, we experienced particularly poor weather during the last two months of the year. The cool, windy days of December combined with times of heavy rain to produce a long, very protracted period of flowering in the vineyard.

All our vines experienced poor fruit-set, but mostly especially

Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. Merlot itself is a variety very much at the mercy of the elements. It can be badly-affected by even moderate wind strengths, and ultimately our '96 crop of Merlot would be reduced to a tiny fraction of its normal quantity. There would be no highly-prized single barrel of Merlot wine this year.

In general, where bunches were able to form, all varieties in the vineyard showed plenty of 'hens and chickens' characters - bunches consisting of normal sized berries accompanied by many smaller sized unfertilized berries.

Fruit of this kind enables good concentrations of colour and flavour to be manifested in the wine made from them. The downside, of course, is that we can make much less wine from them.

In 1996, our 7ha of bearing vines produced a total of just 10 000 litres of wine. We picked barely one tonne of Pinot Noir, and we made no Aurora wine at all. (The large number of small berries in our red varieties, with their high skin juice ratio, would have made it impossible to make a quality white wine from them.)

To a certain extent, our problems with poor fruit-set and 'hens and chickens' proved to be a blessing in disguise. Along with the rest of the State, the autumn months provided us with some nervous moments. Continually wet and cool, cloudy weather resulted in our harvest being delayed by roughly three weeks, but at least we managed to ripen and pick a very small crop of fruit.

Overall, the quality looks to be good. Already, the young wines have excellent aromas. With their good natural acidity, they have great balance and elegance

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too. Physiologically ripe and flavoursome, they are low in alcohol, something you would expect anyhow from a cool climate region.

The realization of one vintage prompts for another. Our wettest season since we arrived in the Coal River Valley, vintage 1996 provided ideal growing conditions for our new plants in the young vineyards. Plenty of wood has been created in their young canes, and already provides the foundations for vintages to come. Let's hope that the seasons return to their usual cycles, and that we can expect a bright vintage '97. Touch Wood.

Travel light in life. Take only what you need; a loving family, good friends, simple pleasures, someone to love and someone to love you; enough to eat, enough to wear and a little more than enough to drink - for thirst is a dangerous thing.

WINE AUSTRALIA

With around 30 000 visitors to the Tasmanian stand during four frantic days of June at Darling Harbour, we really found ourselves taxed to the limit at times, coping with the interest shown in our wines during Wine Australia 96.

Being a part of such a large-scale event was very important to us. Not only did it make us a part of the largest wine event ever held in the Southern Hemisphere, it gave us the opportunity to do some very simple things that we rarely get the chance to do.

For instance, we were able to convince a lot of people that there really is a wine industry underway down here in Tasmania. And a quality-based industry at that.

Many people were amazed to find that Tasmania is a place where you can grow good Cabernet Sauvignon as well as good Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Our 1994 Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon and 1993 Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon especially were very well received.

Our presence in Sydney was low-key to begin with, but after a few days it became clear to us that some visitors were beginning to actively search out our wines. The rumor went around that there was a very good Cabernet from Tasmania to be tasted among the 2000 wines on show.

During the Monday and Tuesday sessions, we found many of our colleagues from the mainland wanted to try our wines, even the 'big boys' from Penfolds and Mildara Blass.

Among our white wines, our '95 Stoney Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc proved to be very popular, especially with consumers who, like European wines and those which make a feature of good quality ripe fruit. We look forward to the day when our vineyard will be able to meet the demand we can create for our Sauvignon Blanc wines.

We are now following up some of the contacts we made with the trade, especially those from Sydney and Melbourne.

Getting together with the rest of Wine Australia gave us the chance to try many of our competitors' products, too. We found some good wines, but we were very surprised by their prices, especially from makers and areas which have far greater crop yields and economies of scale than we have at Stoney Vineyard.

Of the Pinot Noirs, we really enjoyed the 1994 Bass Phillip Re-

serve. It's a very good wine, a top quality product in the mould of our Domaine A Pinot Noir, and one which sells for around \$65 a bottle. It was an interesting discovery.

We are now looking forward very much to the prospect of Wine Australia 98 in Melbourne, and hope that Mother Nature can be very kind to us and enable us to have even greater presence there than we had this year at Darling Harbour.

WORLD PINOT NOIR FESTIVAL

The world is a big place.

And though we love the home we've made here in Tasmania, we're often aware just how remote we are from our family and our friends in Switzerland.

There are times, too, when we feel our isolation from the mainstream world of wine, when we see ourselves as simply little fish in a very big pond.

We have great faith in what we are doing in the Coal River Valley, but every now and then it's good to have our beliefs and our achievements acknowledged by the words and deeds of others. It makes the years of hope and hard work seem all the more worthwhile.

Imagine our great pleasure then when we collected a fax from our machine back in February of this year and found that our 1994 Domaine A Pinot Noir had been named among the best wines presented at a tasting held by the Swiss 'Academie du Vin'. Described as the World Pinot Noir Festival, the event in fact was an exhibition of different wines made from Burgundy's classic red grape.

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Two hundred and fifty people - mostly 'wine buffs' and members of the trade - paid to participate in a blind tasting of 30 Pinot Noir wines drawn from all parts of the world.

Of his own volition, our Swiss agent exhibited our wine along with a handful of others he held in his portfolio.

A panel of 8 judges - many of them merchants - scored the wines and gave a 'jury verdict' on their quality.

Members of the public assessed the wines, too, and gave a 'public verdict'.

Along with the Pinot Noir of Yarra Yering, in Victoria, our wine was nominated as the public's top selection. The 'jury' ranked it highly, too, making it their fifth choice.

Some very famous names - Domaine Dujac, Robert Mondavi and Domaine Drouhin among them - were included in the exhibition. We felt honored to have been so well regarded among such distinguished (and highly priced) company by each of the panels.

Our success will make little difference to our overseas trade. We never have enough wine to satisfy the demand as it is. But, at least for a brief moment in time, we felt our move to far-distant Tasmania had been worth the risk.

WINES FOR SALE

1995 STONEY VINEYARD AURORA

Aurora is the mythological Roman Goddess of the Dawn. Our Stoney Vineyard Aurora is a dry white wine made by the whole-bunch pressing of red and white grapes varieties, mainly Cabernet

Franc, but with the addition of a little Cabernet Sauvignon, Sylvaner, and Gewurztraminer.

Entirely estate-grown, it is a pale, stylish wine, with delightful aromas and flavours. Lighter in body and lower in alcohol than our first vintage in 1994, it is still in its youth, and offers up suggestions of pears and tropical fruits. Rich and dry, and with good acidity, it has been very popular over the past twelve months. A year in the bottle has given it mouth-filling flavours that are well suited to main courses. It also makes a fine accompaniment to seafood and Asian cuisine.

1995 STONEY VINEYARD CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Matured for a year in the French barrels of the previous vintage's Domaine A, this wine is the one with the softest touch so far. Elegant in appearance and well balanced in structure, it has delightful aromas so typical of the variety.

Small percentages of Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Petit Verdot fill the mid-palate, and smooth the flavours. Already a delicious drop to flatter your taste buds, it is a wine which demands an encore. It can be cellared with confidence for up to 5 years.

1994 STONEY VINEYARD CABERNET SAUVIGNON

A triumph of the great '94 vintage, this wine enjoys many of the characteristics of its bigger brother to be released later in the year, the 1994 Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon.

Reflecting the season, it is a wine of immense concentration and shows the typical blackberry and currant characteristics of the variety. It is living proof that in

well-selected sites, Tasmania can produce world-class Cabernet Sauvignon.

The vibrant colour, the intense aromas and flavours, and the rich body of the wine make it a real 'trouvaille'.....something you have to stumble upon. Aged in French oak for one year, it shows the benefits of small amounts of Merlot and Petit Verdot which accompany the cabernet pair. The wine bargain of our release, it has tremendous potential, and will mature in the bottle for the next 10 years.

Vintage Chart

CABERNET SAUVIGNON DOMAINE A

1990
This wine is drinking very well now. Can be cellared up to year 2000

1991
A very elegant wine, still too young with good future. 2010

1992
Full bodied, rich with interesting aromas developing. 2020

1993
Aromatic fruity and young, should be left for 5 to 10 years. 2025

CABERNET SAUVIGNON STONEY

1993
Developing well, good to drink now but can be kept for 5 years. There are some Magnums for sale.

PINOT NOIR DOMAINE A 1990

Developed tertiary bouquet and flavours. Well balanced, good structure, drink now.

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1991
Elegant, aromatic well balanced
Keep some for future enjoyment..
2000

1992
Full bodied rich fruit, a wine to be kept. 2005

1993
Starting to open up. Well integrated wood good structure. 2005

1994
Rich in flavours, superb structure a big wine, make cautious use of it, it will improve for a long time. 2010

PINOT NOIR STONEY 1995

Excellent drinking now, can be kept for 5 years. 2000

SAUVIGNON BLANC STONEY 1994

Rich in aromas, well balanced, drink now and up to 1999

1995
Elegant harmonious wine, enjoy now and up to 2000.

INVITATION

Please visit our vineyard and the new winery. Taste our wines and collect your orders.

October 12 and 13 1996
from 10.30 am to 5.00 PM

Domaine A / Stoney Vineyard
H.Peter and Ruth ALTHAUS
CAMPANIA TAS 7026
New Telephone Number
03 6260 4174