

# Tête à Tête

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## NOW WE ARE TEN

*"The best birthdays of all are those that haven't arrived yet."*

*Robert Orben*

It seems only yesterday that we arrived for the first time in Tasmania.

Yet a quick glance across our 20ha property, with its row upon row of vines, and its state-of-the-art winery, soon tells us that the calendar never lies. It is indeed 10 years since we took up ownership of George and Priscilla Park's Stoney Vineyard.

Happy birthday to us!

And what a decade it has been - sometimes exciting and elevating; sometimes triumphant. At other times, disappointing. Even near-disastrous.

There are many adjectives which can be used to describe the 10 years we have lived in Tasmania. 'Boring' is not one of them.

When we think over the train of circumstances which led us across the world, towards our new home and new way of life, there are many reasons for

us to agree with Australians, that 'luck's a fortune.'

Had it not been for a chance meeting with our old friend Walter Eggenberger in New Zealand during 1988 - or with Stan and Trudi Majewski here in Tasmania the same year - who knows where we might have ended up today?

In Chile? Argentina? Or maybe South Africa, or New Zealand's, South Island?

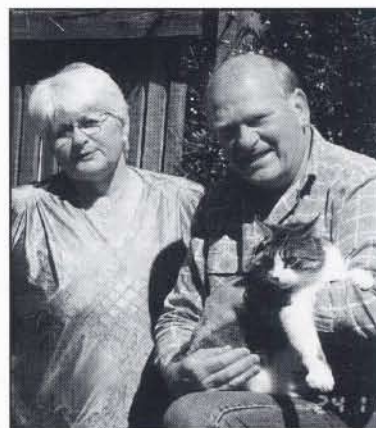
All had been on our shopping list when we first set out to look for a special place in the world where we could grow vines and make wine in a cool climate.

Our celebration of ten years of Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon in Hobart, in June, reminded us of the whirlwind of events that led to the making of our first vintage in Tasmania - the 1990 - while Peter possessed only a tourist's visa,

and all of our belongings remained back at our home in Zurich.

Were we mad? Some would say we must have been.

But when we think of our present lifestyle - with all of our good friends and



all of the beauty of Tasmania - we have other ideas.

Certainly, there are things we would do differently if we had our time again. Still, we feel comfortable and secure in the knowledge that Stoney Vineyard is now our home. And of all the places in the world where we could be, it is the one place where we feel we belong.

Our past 10 years have provided us with many opportunities to enjoy our successes in our new venture.

We have received many favourable reviews for our wines, both in Australia and overseas.

And we have been able to clearly demonstrate the potential that Tasmania - and the Coal River Valley in particular - has for producing world class wines.

We have been able to appreciate the kind words and encouragement from our long-established friends in Europe, and enjoy the praise of wine critics in Australia like Robin Bradley, James Halliday, Huon Hooke, Jeremy Oliver and Max Allen.

But most of all, as we look to the year 2000 and the new millennium beyond that, we know that there are many challenges ahead.

We also know that our greatest achievements still lie beyond us. When the wines we have made - and the wines we are yet to make - at some time in the future speak for us, when we ourselves no longer have voices, or need to hear of success.

*"Patience is bitter, but the fruit is sweet."*

*Jean-Jacques Rousseau*

**WHY NOT COME AND ENJOY  
THE QUALITY OF OUR WINES?  
OUR TASTING ROOM IS OPEN  
EACH WEEKDAY, FROM  
9.00AM TO 5.00PM.**

**A GRAND OPENING**

*"... getting to the wine is the important thing. But the voyage to the wine is much smoother sailing with a good corkscrew."*

*Wine For Dummies*

We've probably all made dummies of ourselves when we've tried - and

failed - to draw the cork properly on a special bottle of wine.

Stubborn corks, crumbly corks, broken corkscrews ... they're all pitfalls likely to have been experienced at some time or other by wine lovers while sharing a good bottle.

And in today's world - where the range of colour, size, shape and volume of wine bottles seems to be limitless, and the quality of stoppers is falling - the possibility of having problems when removing corks is increasing.

We pride ourselves on the quality of the product that leaves our cellars here at Stoney Vineyard - and that extends from the wine itself, to the materials that hold it ready for a customer's consumption.

Great care is taken to source the best possible bottles and corks for the job that we want.

Our use of traditionally-shaped glass bottles may leave us out in the cold in the fashion stakes, but we believe that in all matters of good design, form should closely match function. Customers who choose to cellar our wines can be assured that racking or stacking them will be a simple chore, not an exercise in defying Newton's Laws of Gravitation. A matter of bin there - done that, you might say.

Our wine corks are no less functional. In the case of all of our Domaine A wines, we use the longest available (49mm) premium quality corks. Our

Stoney Vineyard wines, with their 42mm corks, also receive close attention to detail.

Sometimes, though, it seems that quality control is beyond the care of even the best manufacturers, and we find corks which crack and crumble, or are difficult to dislodge from their bottle.

Owning a good corkscrew - and knowing how to use it - are key factors for achieving a grand opening.

The best for the job should be made of a good quality steel, and will have a long augur - the curly part that bores into the cork - to enable it to travel the full length of the stopper, and more.

In diameter, the augur should be large enough to get a strong grip on a substantial volume of cork, not just its center. (You should at least be able to pass a matchstick through the middle of the corkscrew's spiral.)

In use, the corkscrew - particularly 'waiter's friends' - should be carefully inserted into the middle of the cork, and be turned all the way through.

Care should be taken in the case of older wines, so that any sediment adhering to the end of the cork is not dislodged by being too exuberant.

No one corkscrew will be perfect for every occasion. Good quality costs money, but an investment in the right tool is money well spent.

*"The key to everything is patience. You get the chicken by hatching the egg, not by smashing it."*

## SEGUIN MOREAU...

## SUPER COOPER

*"Fashions fade; style is eternal."*

*Yves Saint-Laurent*

Like all of the great wine estates of Europe, we spend a considerable time choosing and using top quality oak. And not just any oak. We select only the best that can be sourced from the finest forests of France.

Some of our customers ask us why it is that we have tied ourselves to using French oak.

The answer is simple. We believe that its contribution to our winemaking is critical, and nothing that we do in the cellar will do more harm to the quality of well-made wines than the use of wood which is unsympathetic to their subtle characteristics.

Historically, coopers have always drawn their supplies of oak from many different regions of Europe, with choices often dictated by fashion or political circumstances.

Perhaps surprisingly, during the 1800s, the leading Bordeaux chateaux matured all of their cru wines in Russian oak. Not only was it deemed necessary for producing the finest quality wines, much of France's depleted forest oak was being used for furniture making.

In 1824, a program of replanting began throughout many *departments* in the country.

Since it takes 150 - 200 years for an oak tree to attain the desired maturity, it was not until the 1930s that French oak began to replace Russian oak in the best cellars of Europe.

From our first vintage in 1990, we have used exclusively the oak of French coopers Seguin Moreau. This year, we purchased 70 brand new 225 litre barrels from the company, each one to be used for the two-year maturation of our 1999 Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon wine.

Skillfully prepared at their cooperage in Bordeaux - and assembled by those who've known each barrel intimately during its process of construction - the barrels arrive at our property as complete units.

Despite its long-held traditions in barrel making, Seguin Moreau is literally at the cutting edge of work being done to improve wine quality.

Since 1987 - and in partnership with the Faculte d'Oenologie at the University of Bordeaux - Seguin Moreau have employed two researchers to work on themes critical to winemaking.

Foremost among them is the attempt to establish what components of oak actually influence the chemical composition of wine, and which affect aroma and flavour characteristics.

The second focuses on studying the relative effects certain barrel production techniques play in releasing those components into a wine.

The third attempts to analyse the interactions that take place between wood and wine during vinification and barrel ageing.

Some research conclusions are already finding their way into conventional cooperage practices.

Seguin Moreau also has created the distinctive Haute Futaie range of barrels, a move away from the practice of crafting barrels from a specific forest of trees - say, Tronçais - in favour of using a blend of woods.

Its goal is to offer a product which has authentic origins, and a guaranteed standard of quality. A certain style or *grandeur*, you might say.

It is this kind of commitment which helps us to maintain the rigid standards we apply to all of our wooded Domaine A and Stoney Vineyard wines.

*"The quality of a man's life is in direct proportion to his commitment to excellence, regardless of his chosen field of endeavour."*

*Vince Lombardi*

## VINTAGE REPORT

*"Wine is a book written by a season."*

*Andrew Jefford*

With around 9ha of our 11ha vineyard now bearing fruit, we are at last beginning to experience the levels of wine production we need to sustain

good continuity of supply to our loyal but growing band of local, national and international customers.

So, for the second year in a row, vintage at Stoney Vineyard meant plenty of hard work for all concerned during the picking and processing of a harvest of 79 tonnes.

The story of vintage '99 really began during the growing season of 1997/1998, when Mother Nature first determined the likely fruitfulness of this season's buds.

Back then, with conditions almost ideal for viticulture, we were able to predict that 1999 would have the potential to offer us good quantities of superb quality fruit.

Ultimately, the year unfolded almost according to plan. Our 1999 wines are universally excellent in quality, and the vintage in general will do much to enhance the reputation of our Stoney Vineyard and Domaine A labels.

The season certainly started with a bang. Budburst - in early September - occurred two weeks ahead of schedule, and by the beginning of October, young shoots throughout the vineyard were quite large and healthy-looking.

Then came our frost of October 26th.

In the lower levels of our Cabernet Sauvignon vines, 10% of the plants there received significant frost damage. For the remainder, we were able to breathe a sigh of relief.

By late December, our vineyard bore all the signs of a very successful flow-

ering and fruit-set, helped no end by the unexpectedly warm, dry weather that concluded 1998.

January opened with several days of searing heat. But what followed for the remainder of that month - and for much of February - disturbed us more. High humidity.

Our near-tropical weather was surely unusual, considering our latitude. It was only by meticulously monitoring our vines that we avoided the problems of powdery and downy mildew that plagued other sites.

Normally a warm and dry month, March began with several weeks of drizzly weather. Now laden with ripening fruit, our vines received regular unwanted watering.

The cooler daytime temperatures also began to take their toll, and by the end of the month the prospect of an early harvest had disappeared.

Vintage finally commenced on April 9th, somewhere around two weeks later than usual here for Pinot Noir.

Our mix of Pinot clones performed exceptionally well. Harvested at 24.5 Brix, they have produced several excellent young wines, with the vast proportion to be released under our super-premium Domaine A label.

Picking progressed steadily from late April until mid-May. The days brightened, and our workers even began to enjoy their days outdoors, harvesting

superb crops of Sauvignon Blanc and red Bordeaux varieties.

In the case of our property's only white grape variety, we managed to isolate a small quantity of perfectly ripened fruit (25 Brix) which we felt warranted special barrel fermentation.

The end result - 900 litres - will spend a year in new French oak before it again sees the light of day.

We are very pleased with the quality of the Cabernet Sauvignon-based wines we have produced in 1999.

Our Stoney Vineyard wine - made for early consumption - is certainly tighter and more muscular than normal. It can be expected to have a very long life in the cellar, once it is released in a year's time.

The Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon, even now, looks to have all of the hallmarks of greatness. It is very ripe and full-bodied, and shows characters which justify the careful nurturing it will receive over the next two years.

Vintage '99 also provided a small amount of Merlot. Only the fifth barrel ever produced by us, its rarity will be matched by its marvellous quality ... further proof of the riches which can be mined from Tasmania's Coal River Valley.

*"When you aim for perfection, you soon discover it's a moving target."*

*George Fisher*