

Tête A Tête

The newsletter of the Domaine A Vineyard

PO Box 137 Campania 7026

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Introduction

Since the last Tête à Tête appeared, two trips to China have provided Peter with a couple of satisfying and surprising diversions from his usual activities here at Stoney.

The primary reason has been to provide viticultural advice to the owners of a large (100ha) vineyard currently being established at Mijung, a town to the northwest of Beijing, on the road to the old Emperor's Summer Residence.

The second has been to help oversee the setting up of an amazing new wine education centre on the same site.

This centre will be the first of its kind anywhere in the world, and will consist of a number of large and impressive buildings intended to showcase the wines and culture of the most important viticultural regions of the world.

Astonishingly, one of the first buildings to be completed will be a replica of Government House in Tasmania. Erected to house a centre for Tasmanian wines, it will ultimately serve as a sales outlet for the wines produced from the owners, Nocton Park development.

The construction of this facility is quite a story in itself. The visitors from Beijing that came to Tasmania to see our vineyard two years ago were so taken with the grandeur of Hobart's Government House that they wanted to replicate it for use in their wine education centre.

There is an enormous amount of interest in wine currently being generated in China. Historical records refer to the growing of grapes for winemaking near Beijing as long ago as 100 BC. Ancient wine jars dating back 18 centuries to the Han Dynasty testify to its widespread enjoyment across the country, yet two decades ago virtually the only beverages consumed here were tea, beer, and rice wine.

Political reform and the opening up of China to Western tourists have brought significant changes to the tastes of today's vast mainland population.

Although beer and spirits continue to dominate the alcoholic beverage market, Chinese Premier Li Peng has become personally involved in directing recent movements away from the consumption of grain spirits and towards wine, because of its associated health benefits. As a result, wine sales have been experiencing sustained growth since the early 1990s.

The Chinese beverage market was initially geared toward white wines, but tastes have moved toward red wines in recent years, and these now account for 80 percent of overall wine consumption.

Traditionally, red has been regarded as a lucky colour by Chinese citizens. Perhaps these days, its popularity is largely due to the dictates of fashion.

Whatever the reason, Government figures show that the consumption of red wine has far exceeded that of white wine since 1996. To cash in on the growing demand, some wine manufacturers even brought in imported grape juice to overcome a shortfall in local production.

When less scrupulous operators dumped poor quality and out-of-date juice onto the market, many consumers lost confidence in foreign red wine and turned once again to wines produced from domestic sources.

Even so, wine remains a beverage for the nightclub rather than for the dinner table.



Many people, out for an evening's enjoyment, continue to add mixers like Sprite or Coca Cola to compensate for its lack of sweetness. And while experimenting with drinks is especially popular with younger Chinese, the drinking habits of older consumers can also be less orthodox, by Western standards. It is not uncommon to find berries being added to wine, for example, largely for medicinal purposes.

Yet there is no doubt that further cultural adjustment, including changes in taste and wine appreciation, is destined to arrive within the next few years. It is widely accepted that Hong Kong sets the trends for other Chinese cities to emulate.

In the former English colony, the consumption of wine has doubled in the last five years. Around 77 per cent of that is red wine, and most of it, wine bought for home consumption, a practice unimaginable just a few years ago.

Meeting these increasing demands for wine will be a great challenge for those of us engaged in Chinese viticulture. Producers across the country will need to work hard to ensure that vineyards can harvest premium quality grapes suitable for winemaking.

Grapes are often picked too early by farmers, in order to allay fears of rot and other climatic and environmental risks. This leads to musts that require a great deal of sugar being added to them to produce palatable table wines.

Old habits die hard. Many Chinese farmers attempt to produce as many grapes as possible from their vineyards, and this can lead to over-cropping and poor ripening, ultimately giving rise to inferior wines.

Some farmers also grow peanuts or other crops between their vines. Apple trees are occasionally intermixed with vines, while cows and pigs are allowed to wander freely through vineyard sites.

In the future, China's best vineyards will be those that have been purpose-built, and professionally operated. All good reasons for us then to continue to build on the sound business associations we have established there during our visits of the past two years. For more on China, go to <http://www.winechina.com/english/index.html>

Ruth's Reflections

After 12 full and exciting years of helping Peter set up his dream, I am retiring from the day to day running of Dornaine A Stoney Vineyard. Actually I was never going to be involved in this vineyard, it was always Peter's baby, but somehow as all good wives know you must "never say never"!

It has been an enormous amount of fun, hard work; tears and laughter which make all those vintages taste extra special. But now, I have reached a time in my life that I would like to not necessarily slow-down but focus more on my pastimes. One major joy in my life this year has been the arrival of our first grandson, Benjamin Ryan Althaus, the first "real" Australian in our family. Will he be a winemaker? Only time will tell. They say it skips a generation. I would like to thank all our customers, many of whom have become great friends for their support. Without you buying and drinking our wines we wouldn't be here today! I am sure our new team, (Kitt Hayers in Accounts and Maria Lurighi our Sales Manager) will continue to take great care of our customers Old and New! I will continue to write of my travels and activities and I hope that I will have more time to personally catch up with you all.

Salut

Ruth Althaus.

The Secret is Out

With its mild temperate climate, dry and sunny autumns, and low fertility soils, the Coal River Valley is ideally suited to grape-growing and winemaking.

Nearby Hobart offers us advantages of a different kind: close proximity to our island's centre for commerce and government.

Yet despite all that, our valley's viticultural potential has been barely realised. Up until a year ago, just two vineyards — Tolpuddle and Stoney Vineyard — could boast more than 10ha of plantings.

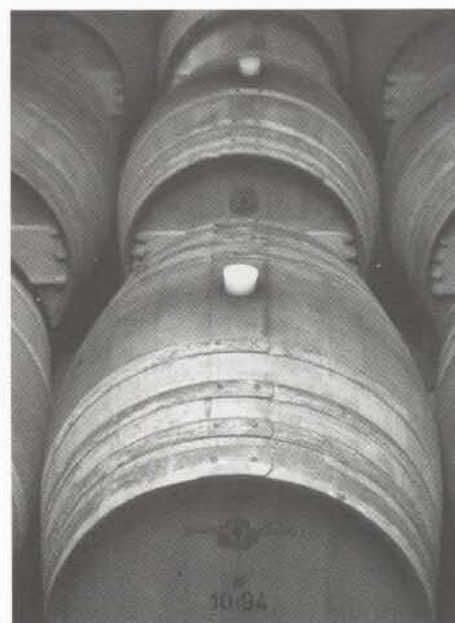
Today, the 30 or so licensed wine producers to be found hereabouts still account for scarcely 15% of Tasmania's total vine plantings.

Many visitors to Stoney Vineyard tell us our valley is one of the State's best-kept secrets.

Now all that looks set to change. With four new developments in the valley under way, our secret soon will be out. By 2005, the large-scale plantings currently going on here will have quadrupled the area under vine, lifting our valley's profile as the third largest wine region in the State to that of the largest.

Within those same four years, vineyard plantings in the Coal River Valley will account for around 350ha of vines. The total area of the whole Tasmanian industry at present measures roughly twice that amount.

We are very pleased to say that we enjoy very good working relations with all involved in the four biggest developments. More importantly, the two largest have contracted Peter Althaus to act on their behalf as consultant viticulturist:



* Nocton Park is a 100ha vineyard just north of Richmond, backed by investors from mainland China. It is our closest neighbour and the site of the valley's largest plantings at the moment. Set up to produce cool climate wines for export in bulk to markets in and around Beijing, it should see its first vintage in about three years, time.

It has a sister vineyard in the Miyun Province of China, also being set up with Peter's advice and supervision. A state-of-the-art on-site winery and an education centre are soon to follow there. Curiously, the education centre will be housed in a building that is a full-scale replica of Hobart's Government House, overlooking the River Derwent.

* Coal Valley Premium Vineyards is a 45ha project established at Roslyn Estate, the

Campania property of investment consultant Gordon Allen, founder of one of Australia's best-known investment companies, the Advisor Group.

Entirely funded by \$4m of venture capital — that took Gordon Allen just three weeks to raise during January of this year — Roslyn Estate comprises some 45ha of vineyard infrastructure. Eight different sites on virgin bushland were prepared for planting during the past summer and autumn, providing employment for up to 100 workers over an 11-week gestation period. By this December, the project will be home for a quarter of a million rootlings, its future in the hands of Mother Nature.

Much of the viticulture there is closely modelled on practices that have served us so well here at Stoney Vineyard. On the more elevated slopes of the property, pinot noir vines will hold sway. Lower areas will be planted to merlot and sauvignon blanc, at a rate of 5000 vines per hectare. Riesling and additional red Bordeaux varieties in the form of cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and petit verdot complete the picture.

Two other professional Coal River Valley developments are waiting in the wings:

* Frogmore Creek is a 60ha vineyard site east of Richmond, set up by Californian Tony Scherer, a long-term practitioner of organic fruit and vegetable production, and for a short period, a resident of the property



next to ours on the Middle Tea Tree Road. Tony's development now boasts 20ha of vines, and 2002 will see its first vintage. Contract winemaker Andrew Hood will make the wines in a facility that is a far cry from the small area of our cellar he occupied from 1991 to 1994.

* A yet-to-be-named vineyard of some 50ha is soon to commence on land formerly owned by local farmer Chris Long, located between Tea Tree and Richmond. Now owned by the company which runs Taltarni and Clover Hill vineyards, it will be set up to develop a range of Coal River Valley still table wines, including riesling, sauvignon

blanc, pinot noir and merlot. These are all varieties that have served Stoney Vineyard well over its 12 vintages of wine production.

Company founder John Goelet, a US citizen with business interests in Europe, has been an occasional visitor to our property over the past decade, and we look forward to developing productive working relations with him during the next decade.

It will be a decade in which the Coal River Valley will become known for riches of a kind vastly different to those that gave the region its name almost two centuries ago.

Vintage 2001

Too cool for viticulture. That's what the so-called experts used to say about Tasmania and its potential for making world-class wines.

These days, there are few people who doubt our island's capacity for producing elegant, European-styled wines. Yet Mother Nature rarely lets us have a trouble-free growing season, even in this special valley of ours, and we are often kept in suspense until the last grape is picked.

This year was no exception. Our roller-coaster ride through its peaks and troughs began with a superb, clear and mild September 2000, enabling a good even budburst in our Pinot Noir on the property.

The cold morning air of October 8th, and its resulting frost damage, tore the heart out of several major vineyards in and around Tea Tree in the valley nearby. With temperatures near four and five degrees below zero wreaking havoc all around us, we were very

fortunate to escape with only slight damage to our merlot vines. Thereafter, flowering proceeded smoothly during the warm and sunny weather that led up to Christmas. It provided us with a good fruit set.

Summer was long and dry, and ripened our fruit beautifully. Around Easter, easterly weather patterns cooled things down markedly, and delivered a small amount of rainfall to delay optimum ripening in our red grape varieties. We picked the first grapes, our Pinot Noir, in the last week of March. With all of our plantings now very well-established, the amount of grapes we were able to pick was the highest so far.

The Sauvignon Blanc, perfectly ripened, was next to be picked. Despite having only 3/4 of a hectare of the variety, we dedicated 4 barrels again to making the "Lady A" Fume Blanc.

During the month of April, we picked the Cabernet Sauvignon, the Merlot and the

Petit Verdot under marvellous weather conditions. All the wines are in barrels, now quietly maturing. They are very promising indeed.

These young wines show good structure and possess very deep, dark colours. This is a vintage that will match, I think, the wines of 1995. They will end up being wines of 12.5% to 13% volume of alcohol. Fragrant wines that will live from their aromas.

During this vintage we had the pleasure of two young vigneronns from Switzerland: Iris Schelbert, who studied at Wadenswiel, and Nicholas Ruedin, whose family own and run a vineyard in Crissier near Neuchatel.

For us here at the vineyard, it's a refreshing experience. These young visiting vigneronns get very excited about the quality of wines being made here in Tasmania.

All who worked on vintage 2001 mark it as a year with superb results in quality and quantity.

The New Team at Domaine A Stoney Vineyard

The sequence of events, which led to the arrival of our new Vineyard Manager Velten Tiemann, reads like a boys own adventure journal. We were sorry to see Fred de Martin return to Switzerland. He is now working for a wine negotiant in Ticino. Still it was great to have him here for nearly 12 months and he certainly enriched the Tasmanian Wine industry for the short time he was here. Many of the winemakers here in the South grew very fond of Fred. We are still very much in touch and we certainly hope to see him back here on a visit sometime in the near future.

Now back to Velten. 3 days after Fred handed in his notice we had an inquisitive visitor to our cellar door. As usual Ruth got chatting during the tasting and found that he was a trained Winemaker / vineyard manager. Here the story turns into a world travel log. He was currently working for one of the best vineyards in South Africa, La Couronne Winery, Franschoek, Cape Town. This vineyard was primarily Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Velten had worked one vintage here as the winemaker. Prior to South Africa he was the winemaker, manager at Weingut August Kessler in Assmannshausen, Germany. Velten made the Top Red Wine in Germany in 1998 at Kessler and he was voted Rising Winemaker of the year 2000. Numerous awards received for Pinot Noir and Riesling sweet/dry wines. He was here for 6 years in total with a short break in 1997 to complete vintage in New Zealand at Seifried Estate in Nelson. He was also at Weingut Schloss Reinhartshausen, Ettville, Germany where he was assistant winemaker. Velten has been here for 8 months now and we know he is making great strides forward here at the vineyard. He has really settled in, and has taken to the waters around Southern Tasmania. Velten has been seen kayaking at Kettering and flying kites in secret gardens.

Look out for him!

Kitt Hayers came to us via an incredibly interesting business which had been set up by two Australians who had invented a commercial fish feeding system which is now selling all over the world. She is an office whiz! and handles all our account enquiries, accounting, and every IT situation which can pop-up in a vineyard. Kitt has also taken to Cellar-door tastings like a fish to water. We have had great feed back

from our visiting customers who have complimented her on her wine knowledge. This is one of the wonderful advantages of working for Ruth and Peter Althaus as they are wonderful teachers of Wine tasting and world food and wine knowledge. She is an ex-dancer and model. We certainly are lucky to have Kitt on board because she is also a local girl and when you need something fixed in a jiffy most of the tradesmen are somehow connected either by blood or duty to Miss Hayers!

Finally, We come to me. My name is Maria Lurighi. I too have come here on the long and winding road of life. For the two years prior to starting here at Domaine A Stoney Vineyard I was commuting to Tasmania every fortnight to teach contemporary Voice at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music. In my third year I decided to take the plunge and move to Tasmania. So here I am. During my time here this year we have completely renovated the Cellar door area. Our emphasis is far more on the education of wine-drinkers at cellar door. We have also set up a "Wine-education room" We are currently offering our services to train our wholesale clients floor-staff in their restaurant and liquor outlets to talk about our wines with greater knowledge. The Domaine A wines are wines, which have to be hand-sold, and we offer this service to help promote the cool-climate wines of our area. We have also hosted some very successful wine-dinners on the mainland. Our most recent dinner was held to open our new market front with Peter Huddart of Rutherglen in Brisbane. Our wines have never been this far North before and were very well received. Also we have had great injection of faith from our distribution team at Rutherglen Wine merchants in Melbourne and Sydney. They are working tirelessly for us and we certainly hope the next year continues with the successes of this year! We also have new distributors here in Tasmania in ALM who helped us bring together all the major restauranteurs in Tasmania for a wonderful luncheon just recently. We have redecorated our dining room out here at Stoney and we are concentrating on dinners, which will be focusing on the matching of Wine and Food with a lot of fun and success. We recently had a wonderful group of visitors "Amici del Vino" from Ticino in Switzerland. A fabulous group of visiting Chinese business men and a very memorable dinner in the company of World Master of Wine John Avery and Ray Healy with their beautiful wives and Christine Carlotta of British Columbia. We have also had another

wonderful stroke of magic here at Stoney. Peter Tanfield has just taken over the Kitchen here at Domaine A. Not many of will be familiar with Peter in the Kitchen however many of you who live rich lives will be familiar with Peter as a violinist. He was a student of Yehudi Menuhin. Peter has had a love affair with Tasmania since he first came here in 1997. And in the words of his mentor in the final years of his life, he would "like to keep the light burning". He will also continue to play in Europe and we hope we get to hear him here in Hobart soon.

Basically some days I wonder if this is really work because really it is so much fun. There is always more to do and we are working hard altogether to try to fill the enormous gap, which Ruth is leaving here.

Both Kitt and I would like to extend an invitation to all our customers to place you orders with us for Christmas and we will send them off to you as swiftly as possible. We have an express DHL transport available to our vineyard.

Finally, on behalf of Ruth and Peter, and all of us here at Domaine A/Stoney Vineyard we would like to extend to you all our very best wishes for the coming festive season. May you all have a very Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year. We would like to thank you for your custom over the past twelve months and promise to keep in touch far more regularly with Newsletters seasonally.

Salut and cheers,

From Maria!

PS Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1997 and Domaine A Pinot Noir 1998 will be increasing from January 1st 2002 so please place you orders before then.

PSS There will be a pre-Christmas open day here at the winery for all your Domaine A or Stoney Vineyard Christmas presents. Also your festive season tables will need a few great bottles of wine to open so come out to the vineyard and get our cellar door prices! There will be a free gift-wrapping service and we will also deliver free of charge to anywhere in Hobart. That's the 16th December 2001. 9.00am till 5.00pm. Why not have a bite to eat while you're shopping, Peter will be matching the Stoney Cabernet Sauvignon 1999 and the Stoney Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2000 with some Christmas treats to get you in the mood for Christmas!

See you soon!

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