

# Tête À Tête

The newsletter of the Domaine A Vineyard

PO Box 137 Campania 7026

October 2002 | Volume 8

## Out with the Old, in with the New

Vintage 2000 A Time of Celebration

*"It is not often that one can predict a long and auspicious life for wines that are yet to be taken from barrel, but if ever there was a season from which one could expect keeping qualities of 20, 30 or 40 years and beyond, then the past vintage will have more chance of fulfilling those hopes than any other that has been experienced on the property during its quarter-century of wine production."*

With those grand pronouncements on the new wines of the old millennium, we welcomed our mailing list customers to the Tête à Tête newsletter of Spring 2000.

Has it been two years already? Perhaps we have been enjoying ourselves a little too much in the intervening period?

Like the parents of any newborn child, we have spent much of the last two years quietly contemplating the growth and development of our special creations from that wonderful Tasmanian vintage of 2000. And we have breathed long sighs (of relief?) as many of our vineyard's white wines have found new homes among our customers during the past 12 months.



Now the waiting period for the first of our red wines is also over. With this newsletter we offer our customers an opportunity to take their first glimpse – and taste – of wines that not only mark the passing of a notable millennium. They may become truly memorable wines for their own special qualities.

Take a look inside and you will see that we proudly offer for sale the first stocks of our 2000 Domaine A Pinot Noir. We also signal the delayed release of our unique Reserve du Patron wine under an 'en primeur' system of purchasing. A wine that represents the high point of our thirteen years of viticulture in Australia, and a new means of enjoying its ownership.

Notwithstanding the disappointments of vintage 2002, Stoney Vineyard has become a source of exceptional wines since our first vintage here in 1990. The wines that mark our tenth anniversary are as much a celebration of the wonderment of Mother Nature as they are of the aspirations and endeavours of the Althaus family and their friends, here in the Coal River Valley of Tasmania.

We hope that you will enjoy them. Santé.

## Balancing Science with Art

Good winemaking is neither an exact science nor a purely artistic pursuit. In many ways, it is a combination of both – a matter of balancing 'left brain' and 'right brain'; of accommodating new advances in technology with the traditional methods of the past; of matching chemical analyses in the lab with subjective tasting and spitting in the cellar.

No single approach works well on its own. At Stoney Vineyard, we believe that the best wines are produced by minimal intervention in the winery. We do just enough to ensure our wines are free of faults, without robbing each one of their individual personalities. The less we do in the cellar, the more we retain in our wines to enjoy.

Keep this in mind on the few occasions you might encounter a small build up of tartrate crystals at the bottom of wine corks or deposited as 'wine diamonds' in the bottom of your glass. Such crystallisation is an entirely natural and harmless bi-product of the winemaking process. Here are the reasons.

There are two key acids in wine grapes – tartaric acid and malic acid. These acids are in abundance in the juice of grapes that are picked at harvest, but they are much less soluble when the juice is made into wine. The higher the alcohol, the less soluble the acids. So, too, when the new wine's temperature falls.

Typically, potassium and calcium components in new wines readily combine with tartaric acids to produce a white crystalline substance called potassium bitartrate – what every cook knows as 'cream of tartar.'

This can be removed easily before bottling by cold-stabilization. Essentially, the wine is chilled to near freezing-point for a period of a week or so to accelerate the formation of the crystals. Filtration removes them from the finished wine.

But what else is removed by such treatment?

Remember – the less we do in the cellar, the more we retain in our wines to enjoy.

The problem sometimes can be avoided by correct wine storage. Keep white wines away from the refrigerator until just an hour or so before serving. Ensure red wines are not cellared below 10 degrees Celsius.

The proper way to serve a wine that has tartrate crystals, or any other natural sediment, is to allow the bottle to stand upright, and leave undisturbed until the particles settle to the bottom. This may take some hours. Then gently pour the wine into a decanter, leaving behind the sediment.

In Europe, this is often done ceremoniously over a candle to observe when the sediment reaches the neck of the bottle... a matter of balancing science with art.



## Domaine A Goes 'en primeur'

Pity anyone at the moment choosing to establish a new vineyard in Australia.

Beside the dilemmas of deciding on a suitable site and the grape varieties to plant there, one of the biggest challenges is ensuring sufficient funds will be available to finance the business into the future.

Surprisingly, that's a perennial problem that doesn't only apply to newcomers. Growing and making wine is an expensive affair, one not being made any easier by Federal tax laws that result in producers receiving an annual bill for unsold wine stocks held in cellars and warehouses across the country.

These days, many of the world's premium wine producers face a similar problem. The solution often being found is one that has operated in Bordeaux for over a hundred years – selling wine 'en primeur.'

Selling wine 'en primeur' is something akin to companies selling futures on the stock exchange. Essentially, customers buy stock now to receive a significant benefit in the future.

In the wine world, it means buyers get an opportunity to purchase wines one or more years before they are released to the market. Wines purchased this way are usually still in oak when they are bought. In other cases, they have been bottled, but remain stored in the cellars of the producer because they are considered not yet ready for release.

For the wine producer, the key advantage is that it secures an early cash flow.

For the serious wine buyer, it means that even though wines are paid for well in advance of their consumption, they are usually guaranteed of their purchases being made at the lowest possible price. And depending upon the number of bottles

or cases being bought, consumers buying wines 'en primeur' can reap huge savings.

Those that buy wines from small, high-profile wine producers can have an additional advantage: it may be the only possible way to purchase a wine before it is sold-out and unobtainable on the open market.

Less appealing for true wine lovers, it can also be a source of investment stock for wine speculators.

For the first time in our short history of wine production in the Coal River Valley, this year we intend to dip our toes into the uncharted waters of selling 'en primeur.'

The wine? Our superb – and truly unique – 2000 Domaine A Pinot Noir 'Reserve du Patron.' The product of an exceptional vintage, the wine being offered comprises four barrels of pinot noir from the original, quarter-century-old plantings established on our property by George Park.



**Stoney Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 1999**

WINPAC 2000 Hong Kong 2000  
Bronze Medal

**Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1994**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 1996  
Bronze Award

**Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1994**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 1997  
Bronze Award

**Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1995**

WINPAC 2000 Hong Kong, 2000  
Silver Medal

**Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1995**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 1997  
Gold Award

**Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1998**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 2000  
Bronze Award

**Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1993**

Weltcabernetprobe Köln, 1998  
Bronze Medal

**Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1993**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 1996  
Silver Award

**Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1994**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 1997  
Silver Award

**Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1994**

Expovina Zürich, 1997  
Silver Medal

**Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1997**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 2000  
Silver Award\*

**Domaine A Pinot Noir 1994**

Welt Pinot Noir Festival Zürich, 1996  
Gold Medal

**Domaine A Pinot Noir 1995**

Mondial du Pinot Noir Vinea Sierre, 1999  
Silver Medal

**Domaine A Pinot Noir 1997**

CH-2000 Concours international des vins  
Switzerland, 2000  
Silver Medal

**Domaine A Pinot Noir 1998**

WINPAC 2000 Hong Kong, 2000  
Gold Medal

**Domaine A Pinot Noir 1998**

International Wine & Spirit Competition  
London, 2000  
Bronze Award

**Domaine A Pinot Noir 1999\***

International wine and spirit Competition  
London, 2001  
Bronze Award

\* The only Australian pinot to win an award at the  
WSC 2001

**Domaine A Pinot Noir 2000**

International wine and spirit Competition  
London, 2002  
Bronze Award

**Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1998**

International Wine and Spirit Competition  
London, 2001 and 2002  
Silver and bronze Award

**Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 1999**

International Wine and spirit Competition  
London, 2001  
Bronze Award

**Great wines of the world**

Five Gold Stars in Robin Bradley Guide  
Millennium Edition

De Bortoli, "Noble one" Botrytis Semillon

Domaine A, Pinot Noir

Henschke Hill of Grace, Shiraz

Hunt Away, Merlot Cabernet

Jim Barry, Armagah Shiraz

Lakes Folly, Cabernet Sauvignon

Leeuwin Estate, Chardonnay

Mount Mary Quintet, Cabernet Sauvignon

Mount Mary, Pinot Noir

Mount Pleasant Maurice O, Stuc, Shiraz

Mount Pleasant Rosehill, Shiraz

Mount Pleasant Lovedale, Semillon

Nicholson River, Chardonnay

Parker Estate Terra Rossa, First Growth

Penfolds, Grange

Petaluma, Chardonnay

Wynns Coonawarra Estate, John Riddoch

Cabernet Sauvignon

Wynns Coonawarra Estate, Michael, Shiraz

## Vintage Report

Was there ever a vintage in Tasmania with so many highs and lows like the season of 2001-2002?

Perhaps, but not since we first came to live here almost thirteen vintages ago. Those who are superstitious may see significance in that number, but for our part in the season, there is nothing more to be said than this – viticulture is always a risky business in marginal climates like Tasmania's.

Wine production is simply a value-added form of farming. And as any farmer knows, Mother Nature holds the whip hand when it comes to bringing in a successful harvest.

Our growing season at Stoney Vineyard was unusual from the start. Our records show spring rainfall very much above average. Early spring's consistently cool day-time temperatures took a turn for the worse during a cold snap in November, when even lower temperatures, strong winds, flooding and minor snowfalls became commonplace in many parts of Tasmania.

In the vineyard, abundant surface moisture enabled our vines to get off to a flying start, but as time passed our vigour increased markedly. Our vineyard workers really earned their keep, bringing order to the chaos among our vines. By the time flowering commenced in November, we were on the verge of building an ark.

The drizzly weather and low temperatures of the following month meant that instead of experiencing their usual seven to 10-day flowering period, our vines were to endure a wait of almost four weeks. The result? Erratic capfall and sporadic berry fertilisation.

The vineyard's high proportion of 'hens and chickens' – small, seedless berries nestling alongside seeded ones in their grape bunches – foretold the likelihood of a vintage with much reduced yields, regardless of the summer and autumn weather patterns that would ensue.

By January, the higher than average rainfall – almost double the same time last year – prompted us to fear the worst for vintage 2002. We remembered the highly-rated vintage of 1994 had begun in much the same fashion, and almost lamented that it had corrected itself by first weeks of the New Year.

February finally managed a few warm days, but the entire summer was cool right across Tasmania, typically by around two degrees. Low levels of sunshine intensity and a high rate of cloud cover in the south made the season seem even worse. The scene was being set for a dismal harvest, and predictions were being made of crop yields somewhere between 30 percent and 50 percent of normal. The arrival of March and the following harvest months brought weather we had been looking for all season – days with endless sunshine, warm temperatures, and zero rainfall. An Indian summer. But fine spell or not, it would have taken a spell of magical proportions to reset the mould already cast for the vintage.

By the time picking finished mid-May, 30 tonnes of fruit had passed through our airbag crusher. Sauvignon blanc proved our best performing variety, with a yield close to average, and excellent fruit quality. Our pinot noir looks promising, but it is still too early to predict its quality. From our 1.5ha of the variety, we produced just 2 tonnes of fruit, a yield that would be considered extremely low even in Burgundy.

Our biggest disappointment came from our red Bordeaux varieties. All suffered the double jeopardies of interrupted flowering and reduced yields, and inadequate summer heat and sunshine. It is what one expects three or four times a decade in Bordeaux; what hot climate regions like the Hunter Valley crow about when they get reduced yields with genuine fruit flavour and tremendous natural acidities for winemaking!

Thankfully, it is only the second vintage of its kind we have experienced at Stoney Vineyard since 1990. A record-breaking season, but for all of the wrong reasons.



## Marc Tabar

Was it my love of rugby and wine that led me to take a counterfoot-ball-like approach in importing and distributing new-world wines in France? I don't know. There must be some truth in it as for some mysterious reasons I seem to concentrate on Australian South-African and New-Zealand wines, people get affectionate... I found Domaine A one bleak winter day (when it's warm and sunny down-under) after looking for those very good winemakers that are still unknown to us in France. A few emails later, there we were, facing two cases of Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon and Pinot Noir (God it feels nice to speak French at

times!) and other bottles from other wineries. At the very first swirl and sip of Domaine A wines I knew that I was dealing with someone who knew what winemaking was all about. We could feel that Peter Althaus had extensively visited the Pauillac and Pomerol areas. However, what was more interesting was to see that they were by no means a cut and paste of the very best wines of these terroirs, but on an equal level, wines with a strong and distinctive personality. It was the same impression you get when after having followed a recipe on a cookbook you think you've achieved something great... and then you have this good friend

of yours who takes you to Pierre Gagnaire's restaurant in Paris to eat the very same dish and you wonder if he (Pierre Gagnaire) and yourself are on the same planet. Peter Althaus and his wines are of that sort of people: extremely talented, discrete and elegant.

The smile of cynicism that some of my compatriots have on their face, when they speak of new-world wines, vanishes at once when Domaine A sits on the table. My only recommendation would be to open up your bottles 24 hours prior to drinking... Parole de Français, faites-ça, vous verrez...

Marc Tabar from «up above to down-under»

Befitting the power and intensity of the fruit we were able to harvest during 2000, the wine was barrel-fermented in oak barrels supplied by coopers Seguin Moreau, then underwent extended bâtonnage (time on lees) for a period of four months. A total of 18 months' oak maturation was given to the wine before bottling prior to vintage 2002.

Our 'en primeur' offer will be limited to just a thousand 750 ml bottles, all of which are to be held in our temperature-controlled cellars until the release date of June 2003.

The price 'en primeur' will be \$120 per bottle. For those lucky enough to be able to secure stocks on release – should it not be sold-out during this offer – the anticipated purchase price in 2003 will be \$150 per bottle.

With the best wines of Martinborough, Central Otago and Oregon already priced around \$140 on current listings, who knows what our competitors will be asking in a year's time? Today's purchase of a \$120 Domaine A Pinot Noir 'Reserve du Patron' might just turn out to be one of tomorrow's special bargains.

The second wine on offer is the Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1999. The wine spends 2 years in this barrel, being disgorged 8 times to remove sediment from the barrel (Our wines are not filtered). Then it spends up to another year bottled before we even allow the wine for public release. This is the classic Bordeaux method, made through hundreds of years of experience. This wine will not be released until October 2003.

This is an enormous undertaking by the Althaus' and makes the process very expensive. Particularly with the tax ruling on storing the wine for this amount of time (A subject you might avoid with Peter, unless you would like to see the blood vessels rise on the side of his neck!). To this end The Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1999 (95 points from Andrew Caillard MW) is on offer for \$45.00 per bottle. We are only releasing these to our mailing list customers. This wine will not be

released to the public until next October, 2003 at the traditional price of \$55. There were 1,500 dozen produced, 750 dozen will be exported, 350 dozen cellar door, 100 dozen offered en primeur, and the rest for the wine bank.

This is a marvellous way to purchase what is already feted as a wonderful vintage.



## Hill Street Wines!

Looking for bottle of Domaine A or Stoney Vineyard wine and you're nowhere near the cellar door?

Don't try searching at just any liquor store. Distribution in Tasmania and the eastern States is fairly limited. Our wine production is small and we can't be found everywhere.

Hobart customers will be pleased to know that help is now closer to home. Our friends Marco and Nick Nikitaras gained their liquor licence in February and have begun selling Tasmanian wines from their recently-renovated premises in West Hobart called the Hill Street Grocer.

Drop by any time during trading hours – 7.30am to 9.00pm each day – and you will see this is no ordinary corner store. Stocked with an extensive range of fresh fruit and vegetables, gourmet and grocery items, Hill Street Grocer is now also home to around 40 or so Tasmanian wine labels. You'll find them right next to the deli counter, right where they belong. After all, good food and good wine make a perfect match.

We take pride in having excellent connections with customers in the restaurant trade and with small liquor outlets like Hill Street Grocer. We work hard to ensure their staff members fully understand our wines and appreciate how to store and serve them appropriately. Our Stoney Vineyard wines are promoted to them as wines for current enjoyment; our Domaine A labels as wines for the future, or for a special occasion.

An excellent wine really deserves first-rate care, and recommendation by a staff that recognizes and values its qualities, and can provide first-rate cuisine to accompany it. Indeed, the best restaurants and liquor outlets will be able to take a quality wine and offer a selection of food recommendations to enhance its individual and unique characteristics. The lucky consumer then has a dining experience to remember, paying dividends for both wine seller and wine producer... something to consider when looking for that special bottle.

## And so.....

Well it really has been a busy year. We had lots of great feedback from our last newsletter. With many of our customers sending some great stories.

Velten our vineyard manager has well and truly settled in after his first year here at Stoney. In the Vineyard it really has been a tough one. One of those years in a dozen which has not been rewarding for the viticulturist or the vigner, I think it has been most difficult for our team in the vineyard. Ann, Lizzie, Michael and Nathan, did their best to shape the Stoney Crop, but Nature has a heavy hand and wasn't quite in the mood this year to produce a bountiful harvest. Some of you may have heard by now that we will not be making Domaine A here at Stoney this year. The last time this happened was 1996 "The year of the Wet".

We have seen a marked increase in wine-tasting groups coming out for a tutored tasting by either Peter or Ruth. Some Interstate groups, some Historical groups, some Hysterical groups & Lots of Taswegians venturing out in the depths of Campania with much glee and surprise! We have really enjoyed these tastings and look forward to the summer season of meeting new faces. Don't forget to ring and ask about our wine & food dinners.

This year Ruth and I headed off to London for 20 days of pretty hard slog. What a great experience.

We were at the Decanter Australian Fine Wine exhibition at the Landmark Hotel and then on to the 4-day London Wine Fair. Talk about being a "Speck of dust!" 46 countries, hundreds of thousands of wines on offer.

To be honest I spent most of my time telling people where Tasmania was. But the feedback was marvelous! We have now listed our wines at 5 top London Restaurants.

The Avenue, West ST, The Atlantic Bar & Grill, The Greenhouse, Terence Conran's "Pont de la Tour".

We then went on to Switzerland where Ruth showed me all the wonderful places that they speak of back in Tassie.

We have also sent our first shipment to France. The wonderful Marc Tabar of Marseilles, who I have kept from his sleep by making him, write us a few lines.

Our customers in Switzerland are growing and growing and we had a wonderful 'Wein & Dein' at our distributor Zweifel's new restaurant at his headquarters.

What a night with some great pairing of wines and food. DA CS'97 with Chateau Les Carmes Haut-Brion 1996. Chateau Lacour Jacquet 99 with the Stoney CS '99. DA Pinot Noir '98 with the Corton-Renardes AC Grand cru 1998.

The Aurora '98 with the Chateau du Cros Bordeaux Rose 1999 and lastly the Stoney Sauvignon Blanc with Le M.D. de Boureois 2000.

It was really wonderful and our evening was the first in the new restaurant of Walter Zweifel and his family. Next to their wine store in a wonderful restored Barn, with beautiful high 400 year old wooden beams. A night I won't forget.

So ... I came back to Terra Australis to face Wine Australia. The Tasmanian stand was a huge success! And for the first time in 10 years Peter started to feel the Cabernet Sauvignon was really starting to get some recognition. Robert Joseph came and had a full dissection of the wines and was really impressed by the quality and elegance of our wines. Andrew Caillard from Langton's has given the Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1999(95 points) the 1998 (94 points) and the 1997( 88 points) we are absolutely thrilled with this. For us this is a real breakthrough in Australia.

We've also had a great deal of support from Phillip Rich who gave our Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1998 a great rap in the May Financial Review Magazine. It takes courage to support a Cabernet Sauvignon from Tasmania (or as Andrew Caillard MW put it "you have to be a complete nutter firstly to own a vineyard and secondly to grow cabernet sauvignon in Tasmania!"). But the wines are very real and they stand-alone.

We had another great year at the International Wine and Spirit Competition and have kept Peter's record intact of having entered 20 wines over the past 4 years and won 18 medals with 2 commendations. That's 100% accolade for his Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon both Stoney and Domaine A. For those of you who don't know this competition is the toughest in the world. The wines are analyzed on entry for soundness. If anything is found they are immediately disqualified! Then the judges only award one Gold, One Silver, and One Bronze per category. (Any medal is A gold in a normal competition). So the IWSC gives us a great barometer for the calibre of our wines. And most importantly for you, our customers, to know that the wines you are purchasing will truly deliver over the next 20 years...

### More news!

I would like to mention the set-up of our Wine Bank. The difficulty of really recognizing the wines of Domaine A partly stands in Peter's commitment to making wines of longevity by preserving natural acidity and using the least possible additives. So he has decided to hold back some cases of his wines and release them over the next 5 years. Within this time the wine will emerge and mature naturally and offer additional complexity and flavours on the palate. This newsletter will have an extra order form for the Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1995 - There are only 30 cases of 12 of this wine. It will be \$85.00 a bottle. The Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 1997 has risen to \$75 a bottle. The other reason for the wine bank is, as always Peter Althaus' attention to detail. Peter has real concern about how wines are stored and this is the only way he can guarantee the quality of Domaine A wines to his customers.

So that's it. The news as reported in downtown Campania!

I really would like to thank all of our customers who have made the trek to our door. We love meeting you all and hope those of you who as yet have not come to the vineyard might wander along soon. I am still wondering if this really is work and I am reminded the more I travel how really lucky I am to live and work on this marvelous Island with all it's bounty.

On behalf of Ruth and Peter and the small band here at Stoney we would like extend to you all our very best wishes for the coming festive season. We would like to thank you for your custom and support over the past twelve months.

Salut and Cheers.

From Maria.

### PS

It is now the right time to get ready for Christmas. Check out the Magnums on Offer from the Wine Bank.

Don't forget we can organize wine to be sent as a gift throughout Europe with within the week delivery in England, France, Switzerland, Japan & China. Special rates from Fed Ex.

### PSS

Once again we are having a pre-Christmas open day here at the winery. First of December. Put together a seasonal dozen for Christmas.

See you soon!