

# Tête A Tête

The newsletter of the Domaine A Vineyard

PO Box 137 Campania 7026

December 2007 | Volume 13

## VINTAGE 2007... a talking point

"Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it."

Mark Twain's witty observation may have been made more than a century ago, but sadly it appears to be even more relevant in the 21st century than it was in the 19th or the 20th centuries.

The past growing season in Tasmania in particular saw Mother Nature providing plenty of reasons for talking about the weather – the State's driest winter on record; record warm winter temperatures during the last few days of August; a wild and windy September; severe ground frosts and near record warm weather literally days apart in October; and an acute lack of worthwhile rainfall over the whole year, something that began in mid-2006 and went on and on and on.

Wine producers in all parts of the State say it was a challenging time.

This year showed that even those of us in the relatively warm and

dry Coal River Valley are not totally isolated from the effects of damaging frosts. The frosts of October 2006 did not wipe out our entire crop as they did in some vineyards in the north-east and far south of the state, but we were witnesses to significant shoot damage among our sauvignon blanc plantings, and to a lesser extent, among our property's merlot.

In fact, in early November, we were predicting a total loss of sauvignon blanc production. Gladly, Mother Nature and the weather gods were on our side in the ensuing weeks and months. Together, they provided near optimum conditions for us to set and harvest a miniscule crop of fruit that produced superb wine with clear cut varietal character at the ripe, almost tropical fruits end of the flavour spectrum.

The season's dry spring affected flowering among our pinot noir and red Bordeaux varieties, resulting in fewer bunches with smaller than average berry size. The subsequent warm weather of the new year

continued well into March and led us to yet another early vintage. Elsewhere in Tasmania, there were frequent reports of harvest occurring almost a month ahead of schedule, with fruit nevertheless displaying ripe aromas and flavours, as well as good levels of natural acidity.

The reds from our vineyards in 2007 show plenty of colour and ripe fruit tannins, and should produce balanced, long-living wines. Those in barrel at the moment look especially promising, with the pinot noir now settling back into its role as an attractive, fragrant and lively middleweight.

Only the lack of uniformity across our vineyard blocks prevented the year from being regarded as a truly outstanding one for wine quality at Domaine A Stoney Vineyard. In a sense, we got out of gaol in 2007, something that many of our friends in the industry were also able to achieve and thus create a talking point we were all able to do something about.

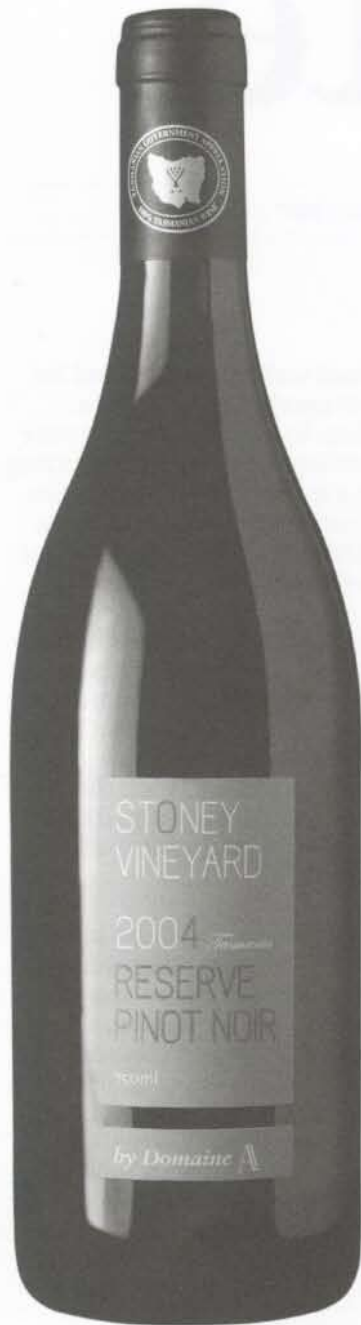


*H. Peter Jones*

I write to you sincerely firstly to thank the customers of Domaine A/ Stoney Vineyard who have grown and supported us over the past 18 vintages. Unbelievably we will in 2008 be working our 19th vintage! It seems like yesterday that Ruth and I came here with the outrageous idea of making our own wines on a site that we felt had truly something to say. We have weathered early storms of the notion that one cannot ripen Cabernet in Tasmania! We established a classic French variety vineyard with the unhindered freedom of no "appellation laws" something that the first growths of Europe might envy. This great southern land has been very generous to us. The wines now are truly beginning to speak. Those of you who have cellared your wines well, will be able to look at the first five years of the Domaine A

Cabernets and Pinot Noir and have some very interesting conversations. We will leave this up to you. We have not moved the release prices of the Domaine A Cabernet and Pinot for 17 years as we have tried to keep the integrity of keeping these wines back until they are at least "out of the cradle". We hope you forgive us for lifting the price of these wines slightly now. We are at full allocation with our customers in our own state, nationally and internationally and know that the wines still represent incredible value for quality and integrity. Ruth and I want to thank you so much for your support of our wines and inevitably our belief in what we are achieving from this incredible little site in Tasmania. We raise our glasses to you in the hope that it is worth sharing! Salut.

## 2004 Pinot – We 'Reserve' Judgement



Every harvest at every vineyard anywhere in the world represents a different story in the book of wine. Media reports for individual appellations use sweeping generalisations which give no support to individual vineyards and their winemakers who use nature's challenges and gifts in the best way possible through hard work and measured responses to make the best wines.

2004 was a challenging year which gave us an opportunity to produce something unique. The last grapes were picked on the 6th June and wines released from this vintage to date have sold very quickly because of their unique qualities. Wines that are slowly maturing in our cellars are developing into some of the best wines which will ever come from this vineyard.

And while we now celebrate the release of our limited production 2004 Stoney Vineyard Reserve Pinot Noir, our pleasure is tempered by recollections of the extraordinary efforts that went into its growing and making.

Three vintages ago, Mother Nature seemed intent to deliver us the bumper crops we try so hard to avoid here at Domaine A. Not only did conditions favour an unusually large fruit-set on the property, summers cooler than normal weather patterns resulted in a long slow ripening season, and a month's delay in picking. In addition to January's routine attention to leaf-plucking

and bunch exposure, we discarded at least a quarter of our potential pinot harvest, in the hope that the vineyard's lighter crop load would help speed up ripening. We green-harvested yet another quarter in early March.

The remaining portion was left to hang until late April. The resulting harvest provided us with good quantities of estate-grown fruit from our two pinot noir vineyards: fruit with excellent aromatics ripe flavours.

In 2004 a small portion of the fruit was destined to be our Domaine A label. The remaining portion of fruit contributed to a Stoney Vineyard Pinot Noir.

We watched this wine with interest during these past couple of years, and while we found plenty to enjoy in its complex palate. However, when we came to the final release tasting it did not make a Domaine A Pinot Noir.

As a result we have decided to offer for sale this 2004 Stoney vineyard reserve Pinot Noir. This is the first time in our 18 vintages on the property that we have chosen to release such a wine.

It represents the challenges, the tears and hard work of a difficult year but as always with our wines they are of the highest quality but are made without compromise.

## Distance was never an enemy – Peter Atlhaus and Domaine A team up with Jereme Leung and Whampoa Club.

Tasmania always seems a long way from everywhere in the world when we look to our export partners. So it is always incredibly heartwarming when, with a little help from the Department of Economic Development, someone as talented and humble as Jereme travels to the other end of the earth in search of fine wine and produce. Chef Jereme Leung explores the rich culinary heritage of Shanghai and

re-interprets it, offering unique and contemporary presentations of some of Shanghai's classic recipes. His respect for tradition and understanding of the fundamentals behind each dish as he recreates these recipes have won him praise from some of the world's most respected culinary figures. Jereme Leung and Peter Atlhaus have come together to launch a co-brand for the Whampoa club restaurants in

Shanghai and Beijing. The **Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon 2003** is the wine which has been chosen. We look forward to launching this wine in December in China and hope that if you are travelling to china will take the opportunity to discover the dedication and talent Jereme has committed to his art. He is a pioneer not too dissimilar to Peter in his dedication to elegance and finesse!



## A Table Tale

One of the most exciting aspects of selling Domaine A for the likes of Maria Lurighi and I is the opportunity to see how good these wines really are benchmarked against some of the very best wines in the world. Two tastings this year reminded me of how special the wines that Peter and Ruth Althaus make truly are. Not that I should need reminding.

The first tasting was at a private dinner that we had with some Chinese guests; Peter bought along several bottles including our favourite Tasmanian Sparkling wine Lake Barrington's Alexandra and two older bottles from his private cellar. One invariably was a Domaine A, the 1990 vintage in fact and a Chateau Latour from the same vintage. For those of you who are unaware of the reputation of Chateau Latour and the 1990 vintage in Bordeaux, it really is a case of one of the great vintages being represented by one of the truly great wines of the world.

The dinner was held at Lebrina in Hobart in one of the private dining rooms and naturally given Scott Minervois' cooking the wines were well accompanied with some great food. Both wines were 17 years old, the Latour was showing spicy briary notes with hints of meat and red

berry fruits, the tannins were soft and oh so fine. The surprise, and I really don't know why I would be surprised, was the Domaine A. Whilst it was also showing some age, its acidity was much fresher, its fruit more intense, its tannins firmer. Why was I surprised, well this of course was Peter's first ever vintage and to be quite honest a wine that he absolutely nailed on his first attempt as a solo winemaker. Both wines were great and given the choice I wanted both of them, they were just different.

Six months later and I managed to orchestrate another similar tasting for three groups of people in the UK. Two tastings were held for some of the leading sommeliers in London and Edinburgh and one was held for our distributor Alliance Wine just outside Glasgow. What fascinates me about these comparisons is the expectation of people's faces and curiosity of their palates to understand how these wines perform so well. This time it wasn't Latour it was another first growth Bordeaux, the 1997 Mouton Rothschild as well as one of my personal favourites the 1999 Cos d'Estournel.

Given that both of these wineries produce wine in every vintage regardless of the vintage conditions,

something that Domaine A doesn't do. A comparison of different vintages between these wines and Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon is both fair and a valid comparison.

How did they stack up, well working for Domaine A, you would expect me to tell you that the Domaine A wine was the better wine, well I won't? What I will say is, that in all three locations it was the consensus of all the groups that Domaine A outperformed in terms of quality and taste that of the Cos d'Estournel as well as being generally considered equal in quality to that of the Mouton (the truth is in fact more people preferred the Domaine A but in my pursuit of fairness I will say it was equal).

Only equal you say, what kind of recommendation is that? Well if I was to tell you that for every bottle of the Mouton I can buy almost a dozen bottles of the Domaine A Cabernet, I think you would agree that the Domaine A really did come out top. Just for the record, my favourites, well of course I would say the Domaine A but if you have a case of Mouton you want to share with me, I'm more than happy to help you out.

Paul Hopkins



## Where in the World

### Melbourne restaurants & wine merchants

Araliya  
Asiana  
Attica  
Bacash  
Bamboo  
Botanical  
Bistro D'Orsay  
Bouzy Rouge  
Brass Razou  
Brassiere-Phillip Mouchel  
Caffe Latte  
Cavallero  
Cicciolina  
Circa  
City Grill Room  
Cloudwine  
Collins Quarter  
Cosi  
Crown  
Dan Murphy's Fine Wine  
Decanters by the Bay  
Donburn Cellars  
Donovans  
Estivo  
Europa Cellars  
Ezard  
Fifteen  
Grand Hotel  
Ginger Boy  
Golden Dragon Restaurant  
Grossi Florentino  
Harvey's  
Il Bacaro  
Interlude Restaurant  
Italy I  
Japanese Teppan-yaki Inn  
JJ's at Crown  
Koko's at Crown  
Kooyong Cellars  
Lau's Family Kitchen  
Royal George Hotel  
Maisonette  
Mecca  
Melbourne Club  
Melbourne Wine Room  
Mediterraneo Charcoal Grill  
Middle Brighton Baths  
Miss Libertine at Max Hotel  
Mirka at Tolarno  
Momo  
Montalto Mornington Penninsula  
Movida Bar & Tapas  
Number 8  
O'Connells Hotel  
Orange  
Oyster Little Bourke  
Panama Dining Room  
Pelican  
Ping  
Plumes Chinese  
Prince Wine Store  
Pur Pearl 8  
Pure South  
Randalls  
Remvi by the Sea  
Rockpool  
Sails on the Bay  
Sarti

Seagrass  
Sharkfin Inn  
Society  
Souk  
Southyarra Steakhouse  
Star City Liquor  
Swiss Club of Victoria  
Taxi  
Tea House on China town  
The Botanical  
The Grill Room  
The Palace  
The Press club  
Unifour  
Verge  
Vue de Monde  
Vintage Cellars  
Walter's Wine Bar  
Waterfront

### Sydney Restaurants and Wine Merchants

Aria  
Australian Wine Centre  
Azumá  
Bathers Pavillion  
Bayswater Brasserie  
Becasse  
Bentley Restaurant & Bar  
Bilson's Boathouse on Black Wattle Bay  
Bistro Moncur  
Buon Ricardo  
Catalina  
CBD Cellars  
China Doll  
Claude's  
Cruise Restaurant  
Est  
Flying Fish  
Forty One Restaurant  
GPO Cellars  
Guillaume @ Bennelong  
Lotus  
Icebergs Dining Room  
Manta  
Marque  
North Sydney Cellars  
Observatory Hotel  
Otto Ristorante  
Pier  
Pilu at Freshwater  
Prime/GPO Cellars  
Quay Restaurant  
Restaurant Balzac  
Rockpool  
Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron  
Sean's Panorama  
Shangri-La  
Star City/Astral Room  
Tetsuya's  
Three clicks West  
Ultimo  
Wildfire  
Woolhara Hotel  
Yoshi

### Brisbane & QLD

Anise  
Ecco

Crappino Trattoria  
Michaels  
Montrachet  
Restaurant Two  
Isis Brasserie  
Two Small Rooms  
Absynthe  
Berado's  
Spirit House  
Palazzo Versace

### South Australia

Cheong Liew @ The Grange  
The Lion Hotel  
Maximillians

### Tasmania

Hill Street Single Vignerion Collection  
Lebrina  
Marque IV  
Prossers on the Beach  
Restaurant 373  
Picallily  
Luck's  
Me Wah- Launceston & Hobart  
Mud Bar & Restaurant  
Freycinet Lodge  
Cradle Mountain Lodge  
Blue Bell Inn  
Barilla Bay  
Cornelian Bay Boathouse  
Pecora  
Bruny Island Smokehouse  
Racecourse Inn  
Peppermint Bay  
Stillwater  
The Terrace  
T42  
Steam Packet at Henry Jones Hotel  
The Pinot Shop  
Nine Eleven  
The Grape  
Monty's  
Saffron  
Fee and Me

### Western Australia

Balthazar  
Lamonts East Perth  
Must wine Bar

### Internationally we have restaurant lists in:

London and across the UK  
Edinburgh and Scotland  
Paris and France  
Germany  
Zurich and Switzerland  
Singapore  
Belgium  
Shanghai, Beijing, Hangzhou  
and nine other provinces in China  
Canada  
Japan  
New Zealand

For listings please contact  
[Maria:lurighi@domaine-a.com.au](mailto:Maria.lurighi@domaine-a.com.au)  
We can send our wines to you and your friends anywhere in the world!



## Andrew Caillard MW Looks at a decade of Domaine A

The Coal River Valley is protected from humid northerlies and westerlies by Mount Lomond and ranges of hills which slope down into a patch-worked landscape of parched meadows and iridescent green vineyards trellised in many curious ways. Georgian houses set in parklands reminiscent of England are dotted along the road from the old convict and colonial settlement of Richmond to Campania offering tourists a bed and breakfast.

The moan of cattle, lethargic echoes of crows and the drone of a tractor pulling nets over vines permeate a still, hazy air. Early morning sunrays poke through the metal grey sky creating slivers of bright white light and dappling the shadowed land. Against the backdrop of Richmond Tier lies the small vineyard estate and landmark winery of Domaine A established by Swiss couple and former IBM executive Peter and Ruth Althaus in 1989 after an extensive worldwide search for a suitable site.

The Althaus ambition in Australia (hence the name Domaine A) was to make elegant wines of definition, character and difference. "I felt that everyone was doing the same thing in Europe. I had this idea that the Occident had become over exploited and decadent. The relative isolation, pure environment and climate of the Coal River Valley seemed ideal for us."

Peter Althaus is not your normal Australian winemaker. With his Swiss accent and correct manner he appears slightly uptight and distant. However those close to him know him to be warm and generous. When he purchased George Park's Stoney Vineyard in Tasmania in 1988 the local wine industry saw him as a rich interloper "without a clue of viticulture or winemaking". In fact Peter had some small-winemaking experience, a practical, curious mind and a phenomenal interest and knowledge of the wines of Bordeaux.

The vineyard is planted on alluvial sandy loams over black cracking clays and hard Jurassic dolomite - ancient protrusions of solidified magma. These cracking clays act as pruning shears, which regulate the root zone. The vines - all vertically shoot positioned - run in a north east direction and catch the whole sweep of the sun as it arcs across the sky.

The Coal River Valley lies in a rain shadow and is curiously one of Australia's driest wine regions. "We never get bunch rot here. And that extra three hours a day of sunshine we get makes us far less marginal than you would think. I have never needed to add acid to our wines. We are cradled from the northerly winds which dump their load of moisture over the Tamar River. The fruit ripens very well with balanced natural acidities." This is a perfect example of Australian terroir - where the wine speaks loudly of place and the idiosyncratic character of its creators. In recent years Domaine A Stoney Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon has emerged as Tasmania's finest Cabernet. The wine is singularly unique and resonates the poetry and mystery of the landscape.

Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon is a convincing perfumed style. Violets, roses and blackcurrants pervade through the wine like an English country garden. The tannins are especially fine grained and there is a freshness and mineral quality on the palate. Matured for between 24 months and 36 months in new oak, the wine picks up some savoury notes, but essentially the wine is compact and elegant.

The 2001 vintage is fresh and perfumed with camomile chocolate vanilla aromas and some herb garden nuances. The palate is elegant and classically Cabernet with pure cassis/ herb garden flavours, fine looseknit grainy tannins, vanilla/mocha notes and long mineral finish. A wine with lovely personality and medium term cellaring potential.

The 2000, with its intense blackcurrant pastille, slight herb garden/violet aromas and mocha notes is a beautifully structured wine with fine plentiful slinky tannins and underlying spicy oak. This is a very strong vintage for Domaine A. It's lesser cuvee Stoney Vineyard Cabernet is also an extremely fine wine.

The 1999 is a more complex and flighty wine with aromatic plummy/mocha/chocolate aromas and sage/cedar nuances. The palate is very rich with coffee/plummy/herb flavours and supple tannins which build up firm and tight at the finish. This is the type of wine which changes character with temperature and humidity. It does sit on a knife's

edge but I like this wine because it's different and interesting.

Smelling of roses/brambly hedge rows and aniseed notes, the 1998 is a well concentrated wine with underlying sweet fruit power and fine tannins. It kicks up a twist of acidity at the finish. The 1997 is a rich concentrated wine with spicy chocolate rose garden aromas and some herbal/violet notes. The palate is well balanced and concentrated with fine slinky tannins and excellent flavour length. The 1996 Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon was not made.

I found the 1995 was underpowered and leafy but the 1994 is quite evolved with dark chocolate/cassis/mint, some plum/mocha notes and fine grainy tannins on the palate. It finishes firm and chalky. The elegantly structured 1993 showed pure blackcurrant pastille aromas, slightly leafy minty/eucalypt nuances and gritty tannins.

This was followed by the aromatic 1992 which showed intense blackcurrant/violet mint aromas, and firm chocolaty tannins. The 1991 was also quite impressive with spicy cherry/sappy/violet aromas, slinky tannins and underlying savoury oak. Interestingly the 1990 - first vintage - was made in a garage with the help of a backpacker. It is quite restrained with dark cherry/leafy aromas and some chocolaty/mint/cedar aromas and flavours. This is a muscular but well concentrated wine with prominent firm chalky tannins. With only 300 bottles made presumably most bottles have been consumed already.

Clearly Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon is a style in evolution. More recent vintages comprise elements of Petit Verdot (around 1%), Cabernet Franc (5-6%) and Merlot (6-7%). These are the type of wines that do not perform well in wine shows. However many top-end wines would be crucified in this forum. Wendouree Shiraz - with its angular tannins is just one example. While at times perilously sailing close to the wind, Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon is ultimately a conversation wine to be enjoyed over dinner rather than tasted on a bench. The most recent vintages show a lovely and distinct perfume and freshness adding further diversity to the Australian Cabernet experience.



## Press

Perhaps the single most distinctive Tasmanian wine however is an oaked Sauvignon Blanc made at Domaine A, Swiss-born Peter Althaus's obsessively run estate in the Coal River Valley in the south of the island which is, counter-intuitively, Tasmania's warmest area. The mountains presumably shelter this subregion from the prevailing winds. It is even warm enough here to ripen the late ripening Cabernet Sauvignon pretty consistently, even if in vintages as cool as 2004 it has to be picked as late as June.

Jancis Robinson March 2007

### *Domaine a cabernet sauvignon 2000*

Very classy cabernet of opulence and balance. Its meaty, briary aromas of exceptionally concentrated dark plums, cassis and cranberries are backed by cedary oak and earthy undertones. Powerfully structured and richly textured, it's assertive and astringent, but measured and harmoniously crafted, revealing layers of deep, dark and fruits integrated with creamy, cedary and vanilla oak. Iron-fisted elegance and style (95 points).

Jeremy Oliver, OnWine

### *Domaine a cabernet sauvignon 2001*

Slightly meaty aromas of dark, briary plums, blackcurrants and cranberries combine with cedary vanilla oak. Assertive and powerfully structured, this deeply flavoured wine reveals layer after layer of depth and richness, steadily revealing dark berry, plum, cassis and briary fruit and well-integrated creamy oak, plus nuances of dried herbs. Despite its almost opulent power, it's finely balanced and elegant, ultimately delivering sweetness of fruit and softness of tannin. (95 points).

Jeremy Oliver, OnWine

The overall conclusions were firstly that the style of Domaine A is close to and compatible with that of Bordeaux/Haut Medoc, and the comparison is entirely valid. Second, that the '93 and '90 Domaine A's, quite apart from being my top wines, show the aging potential is as great as that of Bordeaux; neither wine is the least bit tired, and (corks permitting) should easily see out the next 10 to 20 years. Third, Domaine A offers far better value for money".

James Halliday

"Awesome Cabernet and Merlot - just to prove you can do anything if you select the correct site and work like a demon!"

Matthew Jukes

"Tassie's premier estate yields one of the icon Cabernets in Australia - the 1998 Domaine A is nothing short of life-changing wine" Jukes writes. But Jukes says Australia can make wonderful merlot. "The two Australian merlots worth drinking are Jim Irvine's Grand Merlot and the Domaine A Merlot from Tasmania" he says.

### *Cold island cabernet impresses critics*

A boutique Tasmanian winemaker has defied critics and landed its award-winning Cabernet Sauvignon into the minds and memories of some of Britain's top wine experts and tasters. At an event at Australia House last month, Domaine A/Stoney Vineyard wowed international critics with the 1998 Cabernet Sauvignon in a strategic wine promotion organised by the Australian Wine Bureau to counter European image issues surrounding the range and depth of Australian wines.

For the first time in a long time 100 of Australia's finest wines were shown to 50 of the great and the good of wine in Britain. The case for diversity was the key message, and out of the 12 Cabernets chosen from across Australia, the Cabernet Sauvignon from Domaine A/Stoney Vineyard was selected by Australian wine auction experts, Langtons, who mounted the event, because of its high level of quality, finesse and subtlety. Master of Wine, Jancis Robinson said on her tasting of the Domaine A Cabernet Sauvignon 2000 that she enjoyed the subtlety of a wine earnestly and honestly made from a vineyard rather than a concocted/blend from a recipe.

"What the tasting proved was that Australia is much more than big brands. There are devoted operators in less famous locations well capable of making truly fascinating wines", Robinson said.

## HPA Chardonnay 2005

This is a wine made on a whim in the tradition of the great white burgundies. Made from a small parcel of fruit from the hillsides of Campania this wine has been barrel fermented and matured for 12 months in new French oak. Notes of ripe apricots, vanilla oak aromas, Fabulous with fresh crustaceans. Only 4 barrels were made.

## Merlot 2004

A complex, rich, classic Merlot! Rich and textured; deep dark fruit, fine ripe tannins and beautifully integrated oak. Certainly can compare to the grand old world Merlots. Offered for the first time at Domaine A.

