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VIGNERONS

Greenock Creek WINES

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Hi Folks,

It seems that another year has slipped through our fingers and we are on the brink of another vintage release. We love presenting new wines to our loyal customers, and the wines that we are offering from the 2007 vintage have their own special qualities - and reminders, especially of the severe drought conditions that we experienced leading up to the 2007 vintage.

In February this year we had a vivid reminder of last year's ripening season, when we were faced with a week of extreme temperatures. Of course this proved not to be as severe as the 16 or so day heatwave we experienced last year with its disastrous consequences for some local growers, but it did give us some heart-stopping moments and we were all on the verge of a panic attack.



Greenock Creek Wines Cellar Door

Fortunately the weather settled down and 2009 could almost be called a "normal" vintage in the Barossa. We have also had some quite good rains, so perhaps the cycle is turning and we might be moving away from these extremes of weather.

However, as most of you will be aware the 2007 vintage in the Barossa suffered badly from the previous year's drought, reducing the yield from most local vineyards by anything up to 70%. We certainly weren't spared this wrath of Mother Nature, and our offerings this year from the 2007 vintage are severely restricted. To compensate for this to some extent we did hold back a small quantity of wine from both the 2005 and 2006 vintages. This will ensure that there is wine available for you to replenish your cellars, but will also provide the unique opportunity to try three vintages of the same wine – something that has never before been possible from Greenock Creek Wines. Unfortunately quantities are very limited, but we will leave the mixing and matching to your imagination – and personal preference.

This year our **Cellar Door** is opening on **12 September**, so do come and visit us either on that weekend or in the weeks following, and we can help you with your "mixing and matching"!

This year Alicia has been handling the bookings and all the work associated with **Miriam's Cottage**, and would like to send a very special "thank you" to all those lovely people who have stayed at the cottage. If you are looking for accommodation in the heart of Tanunda in the future, please give her a call (same phone number as the winery) as she would be happy to assist you.

Once again we thank Philip White for his time in reviewing our new wines and writing those fabulously descriptive and colourful notes. This year his work was done under pressure as his original notes were stolen, along with his briefcase, and a new set needed to be made. However he has once again produced an interesting set of notes that we are sure you will all enjoy.

Our thanks to you all for your continued support, and we look forward to seeing some of you over the coming months at our cellar door, or being in touch by telephone, fax or email.

Kindest regards and best wishes,
Michael & Annabelle

The 2009 Releases

Tasting notes and comments by Philip White

The last newsletter included a summary of recent geological discoveries that begin to make sense of the distinct differences in the flavours of these wildly beautiful Greenock Creek wines. Since then, with the incredible input of great geologists like WA Fairburn, Jeff Olliver and Wolfgang Preiss, a little team of former and current Geological Survey rock stars, has almost completed the official PIRSA/Geological Survey map of McLaren Vale. This has been an astounding experience. While Greenock is, of course, in a different district, the deep underlying geology of bits of both places has much in common, and learning about McLaren Vale is teaching me much about the older bits of Barossa geology.

It looks like we may be able to barge straight into a more formal map of the Barossa once the McLaren Vale map is published, as the Barossa field work is almost complete. This will assist to unveil some of these confounding mysteries, and the great age of the formations underlying the Greenock Creek suite of vineyards – by far the oldest geology on the Barossa floor - will become much more apparent to those interested in the intricate but vital and immediate relationship between rocks and flavour.

But geology, of course, is not the only player. I couldn't hide my delight at the news that this year the shiraz and cabernet wines (Roennfeldt's excluded) will be available in three consecutive vintages of each wine available at once. This offers everybody a rare chance to see that while these vineyards produce wines of consistent base flavours, they are of course tweaked and influenced to a great degree by uncontrollable vintage variations. This will make possible endless discussions about the effect of drought and heat on things like alcohol levels, and what these mean to the enthusiastic taster.

Having worked my way through all these releases, new and old, over a week, and then revisiting a fresh set of samples several weeks later, I can assure you that there are many gastronomic wonders here to entertain and delight you, and heartily encourage you to make the best of this rare opportunity.

Of course these new wines come mainly from 2007. This was the first of the real drought vintages, and while it didn't bring us a heatwave like the vicious destructive bursts of 08 and 09, it ensured that the Greenock Creek yields were the lowest on record. There is very little wine, compared to a normal year. But this has given wines of breathtaking intensity and potential, and lower alcohols than some of the previous years. This will make your three vintage comparisons more interesting.

What really astounds me is that the wines of higher alcohol, from previous years, in spite of their power and breathtaking ethanol, are actually more approachable when young than these, which are more modest in the strength of spirit, but much, much more intense and stonewalling in their reluctance to look like vinous drinks. These 07s are mighty wines indeed.

A word about Roennfeldt's. A month or two back, I sat with Michael and Annabelle and landlord par excellence, Douglas Govan, at his Victory Hotel on Sellick's Hill. We drank the 1995 Roennfeldt's reds. Thanks to the lowlife cutpurse who stole my bag and notebooks later in the city, I have no precise tasting notes to present, but let me assure you both these wines were only vaguely beginning to show signs of life. They could both do with another decade of cellar, at the minimum. So have no fear about the potential lifespan of the wines from this incredible, precious little vineyard. They are mighty, accomplished wines which show no regard whatsoever to those who dare question their provenance.

But first, the baby of the Roennfeldt Vineyard team, from the first of the vintages with record-breaking heatwaves:

Greenock Creek Cornerstone Grenache 2008 (16% alcohol; 94+++)

As grenache generally enjoys a new wave of interest and attention in Australia, and the inevitable accompanying price hike, the general quality of this variety, across the board, is taking a turn for the better: the top end of the South Australian grenache cabinet now contains some very smart wines. And this staunch beauty from the merciless mica, siltstone and quartz of Roennfeldt's, is foremost among them. One percent stronger than the magnificent 2007, this wine also seems more feminine, and although its form is sinewy and its acidity about as supple and pliable as fifty metres of trainline, it's more triple-X adults-only lollyshop than the blood, meat, and old steamtrains that marked the 07. This smells immediately like panforte and nougat, with perfectly subtle oak hovering quietly in the background. Its persistent tannins and acidity draw the mouth to dribbling point, as does a shot of Cherry Heering liqueur. But this is sublimely finer, with incredible

composure and determined direction. Over a day or two, the fruity bits of this bouquet – raspberry, maraschino cherry, and prune – seem to grow fresher and more dominant, until the blanched almond and cooked fruits of the nougat and panforte return on day three. So while you can wait years for it to mellow, like ten, if you must get it into your blood now, it's best after a good slosh in the decanter and an hour or two of fresh air.

Greenock Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 (13.5% alcohol; 94+)

A full three per cent lower in alcohol than the 2006, which was nevertheless reminiscent of a Bordeaux from the record heat of 03, this tight and elegant wine looks set to become one of the Barossa's best pure cabernets since perhaps one or two of the great Seppelts' Dorrien wines of the 70s and 80s, or the incredible Roennfeldt's of 2001, which weighed in at 12.5%. Interestingly, the recent alluvium of this Creek vineyard immediately opposite Michael and Annabelle's front veranda is similar to the Dorrien stuff. The wine has a classic cabernet bouquet: beneath the mischievous frivolity of its top notes (musk, nougat and confectioner's sugar), there's a textbook lesson in the aromas of the dark green leaves of the hemp family, with hints of tomato leaf, deadly nightshade, capsicum, and fresh jute. (These plants are all stacked, of course, with preserving tannins, and methoxypyrazine, the natural anti-insecticide of hemp, sauvignon blanc, and the cabernet family.) The berries are mainly the tannic juniper, with just the slightest insinuation of blueberry. I think we'll see the fresh fruits truck arrive in a few years, while the staunch natural preservatives of all those tannins begin to polymerise as their work is progressively done and they gradually release their charges. But the basement is where the soul lives: roast peeled capsicum, mossy earth and porcini mushroom mysteriously glower down there, easily absorbing the oak, which seems more like the juicy dark heart of fresh-hewn blackwood. Like the grenache, this wine has a demanding astringency which draws at the mouth, setting the lubricators gushing, and drawing the blood so close to the skin that there's a wicked intimacy about it. Stunning. Perfect in 2020.

Greenock Creek Alices Shiraz 2007 (16% alcohol; 92++)

Down one per cent on the 2006 alcohol, the Alice is slightly less complex this year, if quite a lot more approachable in its infancy. It has the mint and the quince paste aromas the 06 showed, but the overt aniseed and fennel of the previous wine seem to have been partly replaced by lovely fresh lemon, which is less acrid, less sinister, and simpler. The framboise and cassis of the 06 are still here, too, as is the dark chocolate: it's like a creamy chocolate nougat, and then, with air, it smells convincingly of pistachio pie. So while there are quite obvious similarities with the 06, and this alcohol is lower, I suspect the sparse mudstones and slates of the Tapley's Hill formation and the Yudnamutana basement make the drought tough going for these fairly young vines. These ancient silty stone formations have a fair propensity for moisture retention, so maybe the roots simply haven't got deeply into them yet. Only time will tell. The wine has a doughy aroma and flavour, like fresh white bread, which I have also seen in 07 McLaren Vale reds from vines of similar youth in similar silt and mudstone basements. It's a sweet, syrupy, viscous thing, with an ethereal afterbreath which reminds me of Eartha Kitt singing "I want to wake up in the morning with that dark brown taste." It's really sumptuous drinking now, and it'll bloom for at least a decade.

Greenock Creek Apricot Block Shiraz 2007 (15.5% alcohol; 95+++)

With three whole per cent less alcohol than the 06, this astonishing beast is more closed, remote, and unapproachable. Which, considering the intensity of its predecessor, is really saying something. It took three days before it dared let loose a hint of fruit. While it looks a lot less viogniated than previous years, in the sense that there's less of the freaky apricot aroma and flavour – there is no viognier, of course – it's also less willing to show anything like the blackberry, cherry, and framboise liqueur of previous vintages. For about a week! Instead, the initial fruit department is like a Ditter's dried fruit mix, with solid blocks of dried fig, banana, prune, pear and apple. Then we get lost in the steelworks: gunmetal and lathe swarf, even soldering flux seem to be the note of the day, until about day four, when it begins to show signs of great red wine. It's syrupy and lithely liqueur-like in texture, but not too fat or unctuous. If you drink it within three days of opening, treat it like vintage port, and have it with hard cheese and walnuts. After three days, it deserves perfect aged steak and big field mushrooms, or morels. Or leave the cork in, and give it twenty years' bottle age. As I write, this bottle's been open for week, and it's starting to look like wine: its grainy velvet's gradually beginning to take on a perfect silky sheen, and the fruits that were dry and niggardly are beginning to fill with lovely supple juice and freshness; fair dinkum. It's easily the best Apricot Block yet, and my niggardly points only serve to show how slow the brute will be developing or opening up. This wine will outlive many of us. Confounding and astounding, it's a life monument, a stone solid, damn near perpetual memorial to Michael Waugh's stonefaced stonemason stoicism!

Greenock Creek Seven Acre Shiraz 2007 (14% alcohol; 94+++)

OK, here's the record-holder: this dour Easter Island stone-hewn rockface of a wine is four whole percent lower in alcohol than its predecessor. Four. Count 'em. Four. So what's the difference? It smells more like stone, for a start. It smells like the Flinders Ranges in summer. In fact, it smells like the smithy out the back of a shearing shed in the Flinders ranges in summer. In the first couple of days, I could smell all that, easily. Hot iron, forge coke, old harness: you get the drift. In day three, the blacksmith, or the farrier, or whomsoever they have these days, magically opened up a lunchpail with a huge wobbling jelly of blackcurrant decked with wild cherries preserved by his Missus in her Fowlers' Vacola, and doshed it up to the dusty lads with fresh whipped cream. But it's the dust that prevails, even after a week of oxygen: burlap, almond shells, the smell of a freshly-blasted quarry, these hard things predominate. Over the days, there's a fascinating counterplay between hardrock mining, blacksmiths and Flinders farriers, maybe even the sweet smell of horse, and then the fruits: juniper, then bitter wild black cherry, then prune compote, then warmed black olives, fresh purple figs, quinces poached in burgundy with cloves, and so on. They all gradually emerge, blinking, into the light. Then comes the finish, barging in with stone and steel and acid and black tea tannin from a tin pannier. If I had another week with it, which is impossible because this letter must finally be written, I reckon it might wring more points outa me than that damn Apricot Block did. Jeez. Impossible.

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 (16.5% alcohol; 94-5?+?+?)

Having recently drunk both the 95 Roennfeldt's, I feel sublimely confident in saying this wine hasn't even begun to form yet. It shows such magnificent disdain to the intruder, that it seems it feels the little matter of flowering, growing, vintage, barrel and bottling are but a frivolous bagatelle compared to the long hard work of waiting to grow up in the dark. Musk and candied lemon are the top notes. Working down, as through a perfume from the pit, we see the intense essence of entire blackberry vines, black pepper vines, and the smell of old tea tin. Then comes the slightest insinuation of your actual fruit: roast green capsicum and stewed apple. And all this is in a doughy, pastry-like pudding, perhaps like crêpes suzette. Commit it to your mouth. It has a totally teasing, entertaining, but surprising texture, like cotton wool. (Essence manufacturers market a tannin that gives this feeling, and label it "Fluffy Tannin", a term they pinched from my wine reviews a decade or two back.) But below that cushion, the chassis is all acid. Given the wine's sheer might, it's strange to grasp that its spine is whippy and feminine, but so forceful that it makes the tannins seem to hang there like redundant feathers – the acidity's so staunch, preserving tannins don't even seem required at this stage. It's a surly infant creature fuelled by the blood of great nuns and martyrs. The finish is not yet formed. It's velvety and supple: a bunny rug speckled with melting chocolate chips. But there'll be no greenstick fractures unless they're yours. This wine needs at least twenty years. It is actually too infant and disjointed to score accurately. After three days of air, the finish began to show gentle tar, moss, earth, and the distinctive reek of mighty swamp myrtles. A couple more days saw the emergence of a dribble of salmonberry and cranberry liqueur, and the pastry seemed to be amalgamating with the chocolate chips. Respect.

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Shiraz 2004 (16.5% alcohol; 95+++)

As with the RR cabernet, scores are practically meaningless with this infant monster. The two percentage points of alcohol it's dropped relative to its predecessor seem only to make the wine more confounding, impenetrable and contradictory. Plus signs, which usually indicate cellaring potential, are useless unless you regard them like the Xs on the tag of a tee shirt: you can't have too many, because eventually you'll need 'em all! This is masculine wine, wild and gamy: a really awkward young duffer but obviously of great breeding. Say a young Henry VIII, lost, wondering, between main course and dessert. It first exudes unlikely dandyish whiffs of musk, butterscotch fudge, and sherbert. Dare to push the nose closer and you hit a beef wellington decked with fresh acidic blackcurrants and a lush mulberry sauce. A touch more air and you'll see the smells associated with tannins: aniseed balls, piquant, dusty walnuts, and, from the oak, just the slightest hint of furniture polish. Tip some in, and you'll be amazed to find it fleshy and sensual, like a wicked slippery liqueur: almost a dessert red, but not quite: memories of sabayon with blackcurrants; as borderline but enticing as the Mexican chocolate sauce Cheong occasionally pours on schnapper confit, but here it's poured on King Henry's big beef pie. It's slightly hot, sure, but that's minor compared to other sins of the flesh going down in there. The whole shock leaves you with a royally indulgent, carnal exhalation, and lips like Marianne Faithful had in 1968.