

MJ & AB WAUGH
VIGNERONS

Greenock Creek WINES

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Hi Folks,

Well, as we all know, it's the middle of winter and those middle of winter-type happenings are all around us – sour-sobs, Salvation Jane growing in perfusion and pruning, pruning, pruning. But thankfully today the skies have opened up in abundance so it's a choice between starting the newsletter in the warm and snug or pruning in the cold and bleak – guess which one won? So today turned out to be the ideal opportunity to let you know about the fabulous releases we have available for you this year, all reviewed in more detail later in the newsletter by Philip White.

In the meantime it must sound as though we are always complaining about the weather – too hot, too dry or too something else! But then I suppose that's a farmer's prerogative. With that in mind, it would be remiss of us not to grizzle about this year's dose. Last January we were in Melbourne on wine-type business, and it just happened to coincide with the Aussie Tennis Open and a couple of one-day cricket matches against those chaps from Pakistan and, as all Melbourneans will vouch for, the mercury climbed up to 43-44°C on a couple of days, and was quite unpleasant to say the least. However, having finalised our commercial appointments, enjoyed the sport, a few great restaurants and the break in general, we returned to the Barossa. Only to be told that the temperature here had surpassed Melbourne and had reached 49°C (or about 121°F in the old money) in our back courtyard – no use for man or beast!

The vines didn't appear to be affected too much, but our precious avocado tree, which was loaded with half-developed fruit when we left, had thrown every single one, and the leaves looked like something you would find in a tobacco curing shed! Just too much for a sub-tropical tree. It has since recovered – thank goodness!

Now for the vines. Things were going great guns. The flowering was good, the grapes set very well, no fungal diseases to speak of and as I said, everything looked great. Then, in late February, about three or four weeks before our harvest was about to begin, down came the rain. On our particular patch we had about 50mls (or 2 inches) in as many days. A mini disaster – the fruit was reasonably ripe, with a high sugar content. Because our vineyards are not irrigated, the vines just lapped up the moisture – to their detriment. Berry splitting “en masse”.

The worst affected vineyards were the Alices and Seven Acre blocks, where we estimated the loss as high as 25-30%. The other vineyards all suffered damage, but not to that extent. However, we can't complain too much as I believe some vigneron lost nearly everything in some areas, particularly white grapes. Consequently our tonnages were down considerably, but the quality was still very good, so we thank the Lord for small mercies.

We are pleased to announce the return of the old favourite, Creek Block Shiraz to the line up. If you remember back to last year's releases, we decided not to bottle the 2000 vintage as we were not satisfied with its style. The summer of 2000 was very hot and dry and we think this must account for much of the difference caused to the wine. Thankfully the 2001 is back on track – big, black and beautiful! As in past years there is only a small amount, so limits will still apply.

Speaking of limits, each year there will usually be restrictions imposed on some of our wines. As truly estate grown wines, seasonal conditions will always influence the quantity available, and we like as many people as possible to try the wines, we feel it is only fair to impose a limit on some of them. Therefore we trust you will appreciate this and understand our situation.

The ranks of our small but very efficient workforce (Henry and Joe in the winery and vineyard, Kerry and Karen in the office, and Amanda keeping in touch with our clients in Adelaide) has swollen by the inclusion of Annabelle's lovely daughter Alicia. She and her partner Justin have returned from a year's

stint in Queensland and have taken up residence in Angaston. Alicia has been in our employ for only several months, but has already proved to be worth her weight in gold. Annabelle is particularly pleased as she has taken over the management of Miriam's Cottage, leaving Annabelle with some valuable time to spend in the office. Alicia is really keen to keep the Cottage busy, so if you are coming to the Barossa and would like accommodation in the heart of Tanunda, give her a call on 0402 283 822, mention that you are on the mailing list, and we are sure she will look upon this favourably.

The bottling of the 2001 wines this year for the first time was entrusted to a small, but very experienced company based a little further up the highway from us at Stockwell, and strangely enough calling themselves "Barossa Bottling Services". With an eager workforce of six or seven, our 2001 wines were bottled with great pride and efficiency. The operation is small, but in the future the plant will be moving to larger premises in the old Laucke flour mill, where they will have ample room to expand, and good luck to them. Everything went smoothly and we were truly impressed by their commitment to the task.

At times I felt a little sorry for the workforce, because Annabelle and the lovely Lyn Tasker, (a highly credentialled consultant that we employ) were riding shot-gun over the whole procedure. Everything from wine levels in the bottle, bottle pressure, cork depth, label heights and so on were constantly being checked, so keeping everyone on their toes!

You may notice that some of the Roennfeldt Road wines are in a conventional bottle. This is simply due to the fact that when we bottled this wine two years ago the imported Futura bottle did not arrive at the bottling hall in time.

Looking back over our newsletters, we noticed that in 1988 we were talking about fencing! It seems that we discuss this every year and yet before you know it another year slips by without it getting done. However, this time it has made us reflect on the past 15 or 16 years of life at Greenock Creek.

We remember when our little cottage was in quite a state of disrepair to the way it is now. The first planting of Cabernet Sauvignon in front of the cottage, and how the two of us pulled out the old vines with tractor, chains and muscle, and then replanted with Cabernet Sauvignon.

From that vineyard we moved to the top Seven Acres which we had to clear of rock, almond trees and some Riesling vines that just couldn't stand the heat on that slope. Although neighbours watched and wondered what we were up to, we managed to plant our wonderful Seven Acre Shiraz even though it was in 40°C temperatures. The posts and wire we couldn't afford until the following year, and we sighted the posts in the complete opposite temperatures!

The next was a big leap in purchasing our Roennfeldt Road property, the Shiraz and Cabernet needed nurturing with lots of TLC. They were re-trellised and a cover crop planted the first year. The apricot orchard was grubbed out on the eastern slope and many a ton of stone was collected before the ground could be ripped – for more stone! The planting went smoothly, but the rabbits and heat cost us approximately 30% loss, so the following September we replanted. The first release of the Apricot Block Shiraz was the 1998, and when we have a bottle we believe it was worth every bit of frustration we had getting the vines established.

In 1997 Alices Shiraz was planted, and as you know the 2000 was the first release. Although our youngest vineyard, Alices has a special meaning to us because of the two ladies in our lives after whom it was named. It's very pleasing to look across the creek onto the Alices vineyard and to remember what an easy task planting up this block was compared to the Seven Acre and Apricot Block. We also remember that it was between the planting of the Apricot Block and Alices, that the winery was built, which was the linchpin of the whole operation.

This brief summary was not to bore you folk who have been with us for many years, but a short summary for the people who perhaps haven't been buying our wine for so long.

We are slowly moving into the technological age, coming to grips with new computers, the internet, viruses, SPAM, etc!! Consequently in the future we hope to supply as many people as possible with our newsletter via email. Therefore, if you would like to receive your newsletter electronically as from next year, please include your email address on the tear-off slip provided at the end of the newsletter, and we will place you in the "address book"!

Hoping you all have had a good year.

Kindest regards,

Michael & Annabelle Waugh

The 2003 Releases

Tasting notes and discussion by Philip White

This tasting is always the highlight of my year in Australian wine. No other set of vineyards gives such a range of luxurious flavours from such a small proximity, from only three varieties.

Now that Michael and Annabelle have completed their spacious winery and cellars on Roennfeldt Road, Michael has more control over his winemaking, and can keep all the ferments entirely separate, along with each parcel of pressings. He has a better library of oaks, to better match the vineyards to their timber. The vineyards have even better chance of reflecting their particular terroirs, and, in spite of a peculiar year when some of the alcohols went, well, berserk, we have some of the best wines yet made at Greenock Creek in this release.

With the exception of the Roennfeldt wines, which of course have been in bottle for two years, I tasted each vineyard's fruit from an approximately proportional barrel selection just before assemblage, and then spent a day at the bottles a week after bottling. These notes were finalised on Monday, 11 August 2003.

I heartily recommend all these delicious wines to you!

Greenock Creek Grenache 2002 – 15.5%

The Cornerstone Vineyard, on Roennfeldt's, has gradually changed its flavour as Michael has rejuvenated the ancient vines on that impossibly harsh, stony ground. In the vintages since 1995, the wine seems to have gradually lost its polished rosy sheen, which was reminiscent of a feminine Grenache-dominant Cotes du Rhone, and it's picked up more and more of the Spanish leather and Parade Gloss bootpolish aromas I would normally associate with particularly good Spanish Grenache, which is more macho, intense and mysterious. In place of the roses, we now see impenetrable blackberry. While intense and confounding, it remains perfectly smooth and composed, even while it's now reflecting the flinty, mineral nature of the soil, with some gunpowdery whoof and perhaps even a touch of mint. Very fine tannins give the finish some extra might, as if it needed any more. It's ravishing wine that works the mouth, provoking severe hunger. Then, as it breathes over five or six hours, it seems magically to release some of that old rosiness that some of the earlier vintages had. It'll probably last for fifteen years. 94++++

Greenock Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 2001 – 14.5%

As this vineyard ages – it was planted in '88 and '89 – it seems to project more cabernet leafiness when its wines are very young. This is perhaps more reflective of the fennel and swamp aromas of the old Creek Block Shiraz, down in the reeds next door, than of your usual vine-leafy cabernet. But it's pure Creek, anyway you look at it. Michael has given it a little more fireplace oak, which balances that subtle herbaceousness nicely. Both will subside and mellow with time. The palate's incredibly smooth, with sweeter, more intense berries than that juvenile bouquet would have you expect – it has beautiful harmony and length – and it's more fine and elegant than either the '99 or '00. After three to five hours open, it seems to show even better balance, which looked impossible at first opening. It really needs a few hours before pouring, and it'll live from 12 to 15 years. 93+++

Greenock Creek Creek Block Shiraz 2001 – 16.5%

Ooooh. A little like the highly-perfumed 1999, this Creek Block shows the naughty ooze of face cosmetics and lipstick, but the pretty florals of the face have a good wipe of that tell-tale Creek Block swamp all over it, too. Whatever's the girl been up to? If it's a boy, who's he been kissing in the reeds? Below that temporary crisis, we have the usual deep well of beetroot and mulberry, and maybe just a hint of the creek line fennel. It's deep, fabulous wine to sniff from a big Riedel. The palate's ultra-lush, and smooth, with more syrupy texture than I can remember from anything short of Roennfeldt's. Mr Parker may have to extend his point scale. Only at the very end does the alcohol get poky: it's hot, but not much different to the old Chardonnay from next door, which settled down with a few years in the dungeon. The finish is porty, but it still has grand acidity, and picks up lovely flashes of dark chocolate and sandalwood as it breathes. It'll go a decade, easily. 92++

Greenock Creek Seven Acre Shiraz 2001 – 14.5%

Those two full per cent points of extra alcohol make this wine more harmonious than last year's release, if not more forward. It's probably the best Seven Acre since the vineyard was planted in 1990, even more dense than the previous wines, and that acrid wintergreen edge we saw last year seems this year to be more of a reflection of the stony terroir, giving the wine a sharp, but totally inoffensive whiff of gunflint. Previous Seven Acres were usually quite floral and feminine at their top notes. This one's more masculine, but it's still luxuriously smooth and mellow, long and lovely, and it finishes with the textbook fine dry tannins we've seen in the previous years. After twelve hours open, it was releasing faint pepper, and a little more fireplace oak than I saw at first, but it's still in perfect harmony. 94++

Greenock Creek Apricot Block Shiraz 2001 – 16%

This young vineyard's really starting to hit its straps as it ages. That alcohol (!) reveals riper fruit than before, but the wine is still more intense with all sorts of aromas and flavours – it doesn't smell simply party – although it might be a touch more forward for that sweetness. Instead, it has a very smooth and welcoming aroma, like Tia Maria, Kahlua, and prune. The palate shows some party tones, however, with vintage velvet in a very smooth, slick harmonious style, with quite firm acidity to balance. The alcohol leaves a wicked hint of Bacchus on your breath. After five or six hours of air, the bouquet also begins to release some acrid struck flint aromas, reflective of the vineyard's terroir. It'll last at least eight years. 92++

Greenock Creek Alices Shiraz 2001 – 15.5%

Second crop, and we get even more of that gloriously sloppy Mississippi chocolate mudcake that we saw from last year's first release. The vineyard's already showing quite distinctive terroir hints, with some of the mud, fennel and aniseed of the cabernet, just across the creek. But it's all chocolate here, really, with thick blackberry syrup, sensual, naughty and extravagant. The finish shows really good tight balancing tannins with that same shot of black tea tin that gave the 2000 some edge, promising a greater, grander future. Twelve years. 91++

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Shiraz 1998 – 16.0%

Richard Lionheart at kindergarten was my note on the 1995 Roennfeldt's, and it fits just as well here. So does *"raw, juvenile, savage and untrained, yet sleek, velvety and intense – blacksmithed country wine at its most honest and hearty."* It's a mammoth wine, with lashings of stewed strawberry, mulberry, blackberry and plum heaving about in its big oaky trough. The huge, slushy finish is incredibly long, and gradually picks up green vegetal hints – from where I can't tell, but they're just a hint at what else will appear through the years – amongst a wallow of aromatics that remind me of the first cedar-box coffee grinder I held between my little knees at Mrs Bagnara's in 1956. Her salami smoker was always just outside the door, so you could never smell one without the other. It's a monster wine that takes at least eighteen hours to open and will last at least fifteen years. 93+++

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Cabernet Sauvignon 1998 – 14.5%

Sublimely elegant, breath-takingly intense, perfectly poised, and maybe just a little threatening, this is the best Roennfeldt's yet. Like the '97, it's rich and hearty, with a basket of gourmet picnic meats, exquisite fresh fruits, stewed prunes, dark chocolate and a box of cigars hovering in its unfathomable bouquet. Rarely can you taste a table wine with such a range of unlikely aromas and flavours, but really, they're in perfectly mannered harmony. It's polished, huge wine, sweet and creamy and concentrated. After twenty-four hours of air, the brute seemed to have become more elegant yet more complex and forceful. I don't know any other cabernet like Roennfeldt's. This will last at least 20 years. 94++++

Note: Plus signs (+++) indicate wines that will earn higher points as they mature.

Important

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(Please tear off and return to Greenock Creek Vineyards and Cellars, PO Box 79, Greenock SA 5360)

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