

MJ & AB WAUGH
VIGNERONS

Greenock Creek WINES

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Hi Folks,

It's that time of the year when we sit down and write our newsletter and reflect on the year and the vintage that has just passed. The 2005 vintage was a little late, but the quantities were up and so was the quality, something that doesn't always go hand in hand. Therefore although this is good news for this year, we don't have quite the same good news about the 2003 vintage that we are releasing when our cellar door opens on **10 September**.

Unfortunately the season in 2003 was very hot – up to 49°C in our own vineyards. This caused the vines to shut down and a lot of the bunches didn't develop in their usual way. Then, just before harvest, we had around 50mm of rain, which meant that a lot of the grapes in the area suffered splitting and there were quite significant crop losses. Fortunately we didn't suffer to the extent of many of our neighbours because of our typical low yielding viticultural practices, but the amount of each wine produced from each vineyard was certainly reduced. However, given the extreme weather conditions, the quality of the wine is remarkable good, something that Philip White has admirably pointed out in his attached notes.

I guess what all this means is that this year the offering to our many loyal customers and overseas agents is substantially reduced. This will no doubt cause us some headaches in cellar door and trying to fulfil mail orders. However, we will do our very best to provide as many people as possible with the wines they request. No doubt there will be many people who will be disappointed at not receiving their full order, but we trust you will understand that we can't supply what we don't have (God sets the rules and we just have to live by them!).

It is also unfortunate that the quantity of this year's release of the Roennfeldt Roads is very low. In fact we have decided not to offer the Roennfeldt Road Cabernet Sauvignon as a mail order or cellar door item, as we only have 100 bottles available. However, what we have decided to do is allow those people who are interested in purchasing a bottle to **indicate this on the order form**. Once all the orders are processed we will conduct a ballot to see who the lucky people are. Payment will be processed from the details on your order form and the wine will be forwarded freight free. Unfortunately we can't think of any other way to make a fair allocation for this unique wine.

Now for some much more exciting and pleasant news – we have another addition to the Greenock Creek family – a new grandson – Luke Creagh Manning – the first child for Alicia and Justin, born on 18 December. You can imagine it was a very memorable Christmas for us – and more so for Alicia who was only out of hospital the day before! We now have a granddaughter and a grandson, so perhaps we have a couple of new winemakers in the making.

As many of you know we operate a B & B in Tanunda - Miriam's Cottage. We have been very fortunate in that Alicia is now handling most of this work on her own, which has certainly made life a bit easier and allowed us to concentrate on the vineyards and winery. It also fits in quite well with her new role of "mother" (and Luke is fast learning to use the vacuum cleaner!). The cottage has been extremely popular over the past 12 months, being located as it is in the heart of Tanunda close to shops, wineries and restaurants. So if you are in need of some local accommodation, give Alicia a call on the winery number and she will be only too pleased to assist.

Alicia has also found that one of the many attractions for people staying at Miriam's is to visit the local Farmers' Market on Saturday mornings. Local producers from all over the district come together to sell their fresh seasonal fruits, vegetables, meats and delicacies, gathering in the old winery buildings behind Vintners Bar & Grill on the Angaston Road. It has become quite the breakfast meeting place for locals and visitors, and it is very difficult to resist the wonderful aromas of coffee and sizzling bacon and eggs – let alone all the goodies that are available for purchase.

Once again we take this opportunity to thank the wonderful staff we have who assist us through each vintage, pruning season and the sale of our wines. Without them it just wouldn't be possible for us to manage in the efficient manner that society now demands. Joe and Henry continue to care for the vines, and then miraculously turn into cellar hands on the day that the first grapes are harvested. Once the wines are all put to bed in their nice oak barrels they just as miraculously turn back into the most efficient and skilled vineyard workers. Poor Joe must feel quite dizzy because in September he also manages to work in cellar door for us!

Then of course we have Amanda selling our wines in Adelaide, Kerry, Alicia and Karen keeping the home fires burning in the office, while Michael and Annabelle spend their time on holidays!! Well you would think that there isn't anything left for us to do, but you just try running a small winery!

So folks, that's the year in a nutshell! We look forward to hearing from many of you once our newsletter goes out, and to seeing some of you at cellar door. No doubt there will be the usual mad scramble on the first day, but after that hopefully we can relax and spend some time chatting to the many familiar faces. May you all be enjoying good health, happiness and many fine wines from the Barossa Valley.

Kindest regards,

Michael & Annabelle Waugh

The 2005 Releases

Tasting notes and discussion by Philip White

We drank a coffee with Annabelle, and as we mulled, my brain skipped nervously from that calm table to the possibilities of exactly what a bloke like Michael means when he uses a word like "big". It had to be out in the nether regions, however you looked at it.

Having spent three days communing with these new wines, I have to say that Michael means big when he says big. Not only are these huge, utter behemoths, but they're big in every direction: great acidities, great structures, great flavours, and great alcohol. Most significantly, they're balanced, partly due to that powerful acidity. And I don't mean King Kong balancing on stilettos, precarious and silly. I mean balanced like the pyramids. Not falling over.

But the most overwhelming aspect of this release is the fact that I can't recall a year when the individual wines were more pronounced in their differences: never have the vineyards seemed more distinctive and characterful, or more true to themselves. Think of a difference between any two of the 2002s, and you can magnify it in the 2003s.

Part of this is due to the peculiar vintage, but some of it comes from Michael and his team really getting the pulse of the new winery, confident in the luxury of letting the ferments have their way, and ensuring all pressings can be kept separate, ready for reblending with each vineyard's free run.

And once again, in the face of my intense suspicion of wines of high alcohol and not much else, Greenock Creek gives my Presbyterian piety the finger, in a humorous, pleasant, but gastronomically monumental way. I bow.

You will have many years of pleasure plunging about in these glasses. To take the pyramid thing a little further, I reckon I'll be like the sphinx: I'll be loving 'em til my nose falls off in the sand. And they'll still be pyramids.

Which is not to say that size is restricted to 2003. The 2004 Grenache is utterly mind-boggling – remember it comes from Roennfeldt's, but gets the early release and lower price partly because Michael doesn't particularly love the variety. The 2000 Roennfeldt's reds? Well, read on. Mighty Shiraz. And I can't recall a Cabernet any better than this one. From anywhere.

This year, I've dropped my plus signs. I had previously put these after my scores to indicate wines which would win more points as they matured. Reading back over years of notes, I realize, that with Greenock Creek, they're almost meaningless. They're not precise, and people found them confusing.

Suffice to say all these wines will live for many years, and all of them will improve as their delinquent juvenile edges are worn away by the gradual passage of time.

Greenock Creek Cornerstone Grenache 2004 (16.0 per cent alcohol)

This is at least as good as the 2003, but a completely different wine. It has none of the bullring of that macho brute, but is still an enormous, overwhelming wine of incredible complexity and confidence. On opening, its aromas were vegetal, with mysterious wafts of aromatic tobacco, briar, licorice, and dark chocolate. As it breathed over 36 hours, it magically grew cherry aromas, and almost turned into the naughtiest triple-X rated Cheery Ripe. In the day after that, it also produced lollyshop musk. In contrast to these frivolities, its palate was thick and porty right from the start, but with powerful acidity and very persistent fine tannin. And as those vegetal aromas gradually declined in the bouquet, they appeared more forcefully on the palate: on day two, I reported cabernet-like leafiness, giving the flavour a silly illusion of elegance. All the way, the wine was amazing for its reluctance to leave the sensories and slide on down the little red lane. It simply didn't want to go home, insisting on staying to play. It's a totally original, astonishing wine that breaks all my rules. Cellar for ten years or more. 95 points.

Greenock Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 (15.5 per cent alcohol)

This is a deep, sultry, moody and reluctant wine, with little of the juvenile vivacity of the summer meadow and swamp flower aromas of the 2002. It's already a more harmonious wine, but it's not giving itself. Yet. That will come with the years. It smells a bit like an old smoke house at first, with a little assistance from the oak. But then the creekside location of the vineyard begins to nudge through, and after a day's air, it's like a sweet, sweet, hot baked tart of boiled blackberry – leaves as much as berries – with reduced spinach jam steaming on the side. The palate's thick and viscous, with immediate tannin offsetting its vintage port juiciness. It's huge. It's the hammered blacksmithed resin of Barossa cabernet at its most surly and intense, and it'll perform an impossibly slow explosion during a decade or so in the right dungeon. How do you get in there? What can I do to be locked in with it? 93 points; more later.

Greenock Creek Alices Shiraz 2003 (16.5 per cent alcohol)

Alices delivers its fourth crop like four semis colliding at a crossroad. One's loaded with coconut and caramel chocolate bars, one with blackberry syrup, another with fine dry tannin, and a fourth loaded with pure alcohol. To be more polite, you could cut that back to two – American oak and tincture of Barossa shiraz; or just one nuclear spontaneous combustion blast of flavour, after the smoky oak style developed by Peter Lehmann, Max Schubert and John Glaetzer, Wolf Blass' red master, in the 'seventies and 'eighties. Funny thing about those guys: all grew up in smoky kitchens – Max was a blacksmith's son – and all were/are heavy smokers. The smell of smoky wood is home to them. They judge their bacon by the degree of smoke it's had. Which is not to say the Waughs have ever seen a whisper of stray smoke loose in their house (Michael was a stonemason who specialized in the hyper-efficient fireplaces designed by Benjamin Franklin). Better to suggest that this amazing vineyard, which was intended to be Greenock Creek's straightforward commercial yielder, simply, audaciously, packs out more and more punch every year, and one of the obvious things to do with its mad fruit is wrap it in smoky oak. After twenty four hours it looked sweet as a pina colada, with that oak barely managing to wrap around the intensity of Alices' cordial fruit – while the mouth's talking to the carpenters, the juicy fruit crawls determinedly through the slats. Then comes that wave of tannin. Whooooeee! Lord knows how long it'll take to smooth out – a decade? – but one thing's manifestly obvious: Alices is no commercial slurper. 92 now: more glory later.

Greenock Creek Apricot Block Shiraz 2003 (16.5 per cent alcohol)

On opening, this one declares its hand by smelling as close to dammit to a 100 year old Para port. (At least it's in the right neighbourhood.) If you've never had the pleasure, try tar, leather, peat, et cetera: the alcohol-soluble aromatics, as opposed to the more fragrant and ethereal water soluble ones. Then comes a wave of intense licorice and fennel essence. After a day, it's more like a healthy compost, with beetroots. Followers of this letter might recall my unlikely suggestions that the old apricot orchard earth, like that of Condrieu in the Rhone, produces apricot-like flavours, as you see in viognier. Earlier Apricot Blocks have indeed smelt as if they had a little viognier in them, which they didn't. But this dippy theory reoccurs in this 2003, in the sense that the wine has that raft of tannins that makes viognier, but even more so, nebbiolo, distinctive. (We now know that the DNA of viognier is almost identical to nebbiolo, and the two are very close relations.) At one point, I felt these tannins were a little green, after cabernet, like we saw in the 2002, raising the impossible likelihood that the fruit could have happily ripened even further! It smooths out noticeably after three days of air, however, retaining its intensity as it becomes more supple. It will cellar for a very long time indeed. Right now, it's another scary leviathan. 94 points now; more later.

Greenock Creek Seven Acre Shiraz 2003 (16.0 per cent alcohol)

Typical of the vineyard, this Seven Acre shows that pretty dusting of caster sugar and lollyshop on opening. There are wafts of lavender and violet, too, with time. Strangely for a wine of such strength, these are usually smells I relate to water soluble aromas, as opposed to the alcohol-soluble ones seen in the Apricot Block. Below these top notes lies a well of essence of blackberry and dried fig – heady, sweet, syrupy alcohol-driven aromas with coconut oak atop. After a day, it had settled to show more compost and sedge, and, strangely, in contrast to such mud, even the dry whoof of the Seven Acre dust. (That's all there is in the vineyard: loose dust, hard dust and stone.) The wine has more slender viscosity than the others, but it's still intense, stewed, syrupy and tannic, with lingering after-tones of caramel sauce and Christmas pudding. Breathtaking wine. Fifteen years, easily. 94 points now; more later.

Greenock Creek Creek Block Shiraz 2003 (15.5 per cent alcohol)

After last year's atypical release – it was NOT overtly swampy – the reedy, fennel-lined Creek Block is back on track this year, with all the bubbling mystical midday decay of the Black Lagoon. There's still just a touch of sweet fruit essence on top of the darkness, but the rest is all primeval and mysterious: back to the old Mississippi mud cake chocolate, soused in the sauce which pickled the Piltdown Man. It's not typical shiraz in any sense, but this most difficult block remains its maker's sentimental favourite. The palate has hints of old cider apples, like Kingston Black, squashed and pungent in a press, and a lash of Vegemite, or Marmite-like salt. It's big and soft in texture, as it will eventually become in flavour, but it has tight acidity below all that mush, and extremely fine, velvety tannins. So all that prehistoric decay is wrapped up in a sophisticated three-piece cashmere pinstripe, Church's brogues below. 92 points now; the future is all in the swamp. Mysterious, but sure. It'll glow.

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Shiraz 2000 (14.5 per cent alcohol)

No proper Australian will claim 2000 was even a slightly good year. The big industrial vineyards suffered most: the blight of hen-and-chicken struck right across the country: unripe, green, lentil-sized grapes hanging beside bursting over-ripe ones, like you see in zinfandel in an ordinary year. The big guys bullshitted about the failed crops being a godsend which would ease Australia's over-supply. Yeah. Oversupply of commercial muck.

As often occurs, canny growers with responsibly modest expectations of yield did better, either picking earlier by hand to minimize damage, to therefore take advantage of the higher natural acidities early selective picking provides, or picking the hen-and-chicken holus-bolus, to take advantage of the firm natural acidity the little green blighters provided.

No bother is evident in the 2000 Roennfeldts. This shiraz is intense, sharp, impossible, iron-age wine, somehow misplaced in time. It reeks innocently of mulberry essence, dried fig, and marshmallow sugar, neatly, sensually entwined with seasoned American oak. This takes on the morning fireplace aroma when served cold, at cellar temperature. But overall, for a Roennfeldt Shiraz, which can be quite hairy and feral, this one's intense, but supremely, sublimely, maybe presumptuously, elegant. It's hardly believable. It's very, very fine, old-fashioned wine, from the days before industrialization, but dressed for after. And it's cellar for at least twenty years. 95 points now; five or six more later.

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Cabernet Sauvignon 2000 (12.0 per cent alcohol)

Bordeaux should stick its nose in here. At first it's like a great Medoc, but compacted. It has aromatic florals, like lavender and musk; and reminds me of the old Guerlain perfume, Jicky. Next morning, it's moving to St Emilion, with the prettier aromas of cabernet franc expressing powerfully, but politely. After two days, it's more outrageously juicy, and fruitsweet in the middle, like that rare bird, great merlot. It has very, very fine, elegant tannin. It's smooth, genteel cabernet, perfectly balanced. One of the best I can recall, from anywhere. One of the best cabernets ever? You bet. Cellar it for fifteen if you must; it'll rock in five or six. 96 now, much more then.

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