

MJ & AB WAUGH
VIGNERONS

Greenock Creek WINES

Radford Road, Seppeltsfield

ABN 97 007 797 757

PO Box 79, Greenock, South Australia 5360

Telephone: (08) 8562 8103 Facsimile: (08) 8562 8259

Email greenockcreek@ozemail.com.au

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Hi Folks,

This year has been a really busy one for Michael and Annabelle – they have actually taken some time off to have a holiday or two! Consequently they haven't had as much time to sit and ponder a newsletter. Therefore, to keep them in holiday mode we have decided the office staff (all three of us) should "tell it like it is" for a change, and include some of the gossip that Michael and Annabelle just wouldn't let you hear.

As most of you would have read elsewhere, 2006 was a fairly unusual vintage in the Barossa with quite a lot of rain. This certainly slowed things down for a while, but fortunately it did clear for a while late in March to allow for a warm, leisurely ripening. Unfortunately it wasn't quite so good in other areas, and many growers had great difficulty getting their grapes to the required baume because of yet more rain. However, Michael has waved his magic wand over the open fermenters and the 2006 wines are looking ever so good!



Unlike last year you will be pleased to know that when cellar door opens on **9 September** there will be a reasonable offering of wines, unlike the very low quantities that were available last year. We always say in the office that it is terrific working at Greenock Creek Wines for the first week that cellar door opens! After that we spend most of the time on the phone or email placating people who couldn't get the wines they ordered because they were a little late getting their order to us – for whatever good reason! So please take some pity on the office staff who try their very best to fill the orders, but unfortunately when the wine is sold out it just isn't available. Unlike cordial, we can't just mix up another batch!

You will notice the very handsome photograph at the top of the newsletter! In February this year Michael was named the Barossa Barons' Vigneron of the Year! Family, friends and employees all gathered for the ceremony in Tanunda to see Michael awarded this most prestigious local honour, and one we thought was truly deserving – not that we are biased! Of course Michael is too modest to tell anyone about it, but what better news could we put in a newsletter!

Another reason why Michael and Annabelle don't have time to write newsletters is because they are spending lots of time with their young grandchildren – Luke, who will be 2 in December, and Ashlee who turned 2 in July. Having two toddlers visiting regularly certainly keeps their old bones cracking!

Miriam's Bed & Breakfast continues to attract lots of guests, thanks to the attention to detail being put in by Annabelle's daughter Alicia. When not polishing the silver in the cottage, Alicia helps out in the office, so when you ring to order some wine don't forget to make a booking for the cottage for your summer holidays – or the Vintage Festival next year (commencing on Easter Monday) – or just a romantic getaway for a few nights in the Barossa.

They must be doing something right at Greenock Creek Wines, we can't even tell you about any staff changes. It seems that everyone wants to keep working here! Joe and Henry continue their superman acts by caring for the vines most of the year, then turning into cellar hands for a couple of months during vintage, and in September poor Joe is transformed yet again as he helps out in cellar door.

Amanda O'Sullivan is still handling the Greenock Creek wine distribution in Adelaide, while Kerry, Alicia and Karen try to keep Annabelle and Michael's desks tidy in the office. This works well while they are away on holidays, but is a near impossibility the rest of the year! But it's all good fun and we even sell some wine.

So folks that's another year behind us, but we certainly look forward to hearing from many of you once you receive this newsletter, and to seeing some of you at cellar door. The usual first day scramble is not far off, but we always enjoy catching up with everyone and taking the time for a short chat if time permits. Trusting this newsletter find you all in good health, and ready to enjoy some more fine wines from the Barossa Valley.

Kindest regards,

*Michael & Annabelle Waugh
Per Kerry, Alicia & Karen*

The 2006 Releases

Tasting notes and discussion by Philip White

It's 22 years since Michael John Waugh made his first Greenock Creek Shiraz in an open fermenter he'd built in his garage. From the old vines of the Creek Block, that wine went into barrels in the huge cellar beneath his home, and then out to an appreciative, if slightly disbelieving world. Early releases of Creek Block Shiraz sold as cleanskins for \$7 in The Exeter in Rundle Street, back in the days when Cheong Liew cooked the counteries. You can still buy a good range of labelled Greenock Creeks in The Ex to this day. For a reasonably larger consideration, of course.

Having been committed to this adventure from the start, I've been impossibly fortunate to take the whole ride, as vintages, conditions, characters and locations have changed. Searching back through my tasting notes is a rare thrill of gastronomic adventure.

Now Michael and Annabelle have grandkids; their winery is a well-honed tool, and their product most certainly moves. This is due to very hard work, wavering not, and the sort of stoic stonemason's drive that saw Michael build the Rockford complex and the big cellar at Henschke while he paid for all this.

Greenock Creek annually releases five Shiraz wines, two Cabernets, and a Grenache from their tiny fifty acre selection of vineyards, averaging not much more yield than one tonne per acre. As the years wind by, these wines hunker down into their own peculiar styles, as their roots continue to drive persistently, if extremely slowly, into their own peculiar patches of ground. Their points of difference become more clear with each vintage, as the plants age and Michael's beautiful little winemaking plant gradually seems to become an organic extension of the vineyards.

I don't think there has been one other vintage where the wines are as consistently powerful and delicious as this release. While the majority are from 2004, a great year in anybody's book, the Grenache is 2005 (another great year, obviously) and the Roennfeldt's are 2001, which appears to be a real sleeper. There has never been a stronger, more characterful, yet consistent release from Greenock Creek.

This year, all the wines need more time than usual in cellar.

And if that 2005 Grenache is anything to go by, we'd better start loading the credit card up for the 2005s. Pity we'll have to wait 'til 2010 to get our hands on the other two Roennfeldt vineyard reds. If that Grenache is true to its word, we'll be drinking those 2005 RR's through into 2040. Won't we? Okay then, have more kids.

Greenock Creek Alices Shiraz 2004 - 15% alcohol

So this is the wine that Michael planned to be his high-yielding cash cow. You've gotta be joking. Pruned back almost as meanly as the other vineyards, Alices' yields are around two tonnes per acre this vintage, and the wine shows typical Greenock Creek intensity. It has a touch of the aniseed and fennel aromas of the 2001, but little of the prunes and plums of 2002, and hardly a twig of the coonutty oak of the 2003, so it's in better harmony from the start. On opening, its fruits are after the raspberry/cranberry spectrum, a little like a really good Barolo or Barbaresco, which are made from Nebbiolo. Northern Italian reds often have a whiff of feathers about them, which I also smelt here. After a day or two, the bouquet built up a richer, darker layer, like the old Cottee's blackcurrant topping. And the palate's more like that: syrupy and thick, and more of a liqueur than any Greenock Creek I can remember. It is pure essence, its unbelievable viscosity almost hiding its considerable dry tannin. Exquisite. 94 points.

Greenock Creek Apricot Block Shiraz 2004 - 14% alcohol

I can't believe how this vineyard produces Shiraz that smells like it's got Viognier in it, when there's not a Vio vine in sight. The tell-tale peach and ripe apricot trademarks are here as strong as ever. It's automatic. This year's lower alcohol makes a better wine of it, if indeed presenting one that needs a little extra cellar to fully blossom. Its flavours are plush and mushy, like a deep Satsuma stew, with creamy, custardy lees hints. Still, it's very fine and elegant, finishing with the peach and apricot skin tannins that mark this unique vineyard. It's exquisite, polished wine that needs a few years for those preserving tannins to relax a little. 94 points now, more later.

Greenock Creek Seven Acre Shiraz 2004 - 14.5% alcohol

As this vineyard edges toward maturity, its flavours more intensely reflect the stony nature of its soil, and we now see acrid flinty whiffs in the bouquet, like you'd expect in some Loire Valley Sauvignons blanc. It's alluring in a sexy macho way, and that fine mineral tension carries right through the palate. That digested, you can forget Sauvignon blanc, for this has all the contrasting crème caramel, black chocolate, and marshmallow sugar confectionery we have seen in the Seven Acre from the start. In a sense, this makes the wine desirous of extra years in the cellar, so those extremes of flavour draw together. More judicious - lower - alcohol than previous years magnifies this requirement, while making a better wine of it all round. Its finish is smooth, with that touch of crème caramel we saw in the bouquet returning to tease and satisfy. More classic Hermitage in style than any Greenock Creek I can recall. 94 points now, more later.

Greenock Creek Creek Block Shiraz 2004 - 16% alcohol

This one's not as swampy and marshy as many Creek Blocks have been, and while many have displayed fennel aromas - the volatile fennel grows right along the creek - the distinguishing factor that tells us this is Creek Block is its mild Dutch licorice tang, with that pinch of salt. There's no Piltdown Man this year, but a pleasant touch of tea tin, and overt chocolate, like in 1999 and 2003, with a pleasing shot of after dinner mint as well. The palate's massive and squishy, like dark chocolate custard in a trifle, and that black tea comes back with its tannin to balance the lingering, solicitous, salacious finish. Like the 1999, the wine seems more alluringly feminine than most Creek Blocks. 95 points now, more later.

Greenock Creek Cornerstone Grenache 2005 - 16% alcohol

Like 2001 and 2003, the surly old Grenache in the stones on Roennfeldt's Road turned on the blood and roses in 2005. I thought upon its release, that the 2003 was the best Grenache I'd seen, and then suggested the 2004 was at least as good, if completely different in character. But none of that

prepared me for this one. Some years (1998, 2004) the wine seems more in the south of France style, while 2000, 2001, and 2003 were more after the Spanish school, with polished leather and more bullring than berries. This release is another thing again. It's ravishing, mighty, and, even at this alcohol, incredibly elegant. Acidity is the key. Attempting to nail a comparison from the Old World, I reckoned this was "the Chablis of Grenache", in the sense that its acidity was closer to a lean Chardonnay, a stiff young Pinot, or even a Riesling. But this is red, no doubt about it. It's utterly rude at first sniff, with a carrion twang of roadkill as much as fresh raw steak or freshly-made metwurst. Then the blood and roses and Turkish delight aromas rise. So, expecting forceful complexity of flavour, I was surprised to discover a svelte, if powerful palate, built completely around its considerable acid. One for the cellar. Amazing. 95 points now, more later.

Greenock Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 2004 - 14% alcohol

This humdinger is heading in the same direction as the legendary 2000 Roennfeldt's Road Cabernet - it seems to have more varietal definition than many GC Cabernets have shown. While it has a little of the struck flint/dolomite acidity that the new Seven Acre Shiraz displays, the Cabernet variety manifests itself here with hints of tea and the green methoxypyrazine/phenolic edge of tomato leaf or deadly nightshade. There are leaves amongst the blackberries, too. Bitter chocolate hints say it's Barossa, with classic Cabernet mint arriving cheekily in the finish. It's a gorgeous velvety wine of immense intensity and opulence. In fact, its fruit's so big and strong that it took three days to begin smelling of any oak. 95 points now; another one with time.

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Cabernet Sauvignon 2001 - 13.5% alcohol

Only very slightly stronger (1.5%) in alcohol than its amazing predecessor, and equally well-balanced, this RR may eventually outpace that wine with its sheer, unfathomable intensity. This one's sooty and wild, with a gully full of blackberry vines outside, the ripening berries oozing juice on the dust. For the first time, I reckon there's a whiff of eucalypt here, too - Bacchus only knows where that came from. Other than that, the brute's so dense and impenetrable, it'll take well over a decade to open up at all. It's about as alluring now as a chunk of black coal with raspberry syrup poured over the top. After three days of air it began smelling like a bushfire. Any clues? It's mighty, right royal wine that'll occur before I die, if I'm lucky. If I'm not, pour some on my box, and neck the rest before you lower me down. 95 points now, many more later.

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Shiraz 2001 - 16% alcohol

Here we see what large amounts of alcohol can do. Compared to the surly, very very grumpy Cabernet, this RR is almost the opposite. It's suddenly fresh and approachable in style, with an enormous extract of raspberry and Satsuma dominant, and plenty of dusty American oak showing without overwhelming the fruit. As in most years, the wines are chalk and cheese in style; it's hard to believe they come from the same vineyard in the same year. The gap is greater than usual with these 2001s. This is like a big fortified Grange in its manner. It's juicy, open-hearted and naughty. The sort of thing Bacchus would have first thing in the morning. Great intensity, major viscosity, raspberry and tannin. One of the more approachable and mannered RR Shiraz's, if only for its rather humungous alcohol, which, by the way, offers little resistance to the thirsty. Delicious. 95 points.

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