

MJ & AB WAUGH
VIGNERONS

Greenock Creek WINES

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Hi Folks,

And yet another year has flown by and caught us all by surprise! When you work with vineyards the needs of the vines are determined by the seasons, and it seems that no sooner has vintage finished, we get to breathe a sigh of relief if all has gone well, and then plunge right into pruning, and the cycle starts all over again. The days roll over so quickly and before you know it another vintage and another year has passed before our eyes. However, vineyards do give us the pleasure of experiencing the seasons in all their glory, be it a beautiful autumn, a harsh winter or a scorching summer.



Annabelle & Michael

Speaking of which, vintage this year brought mixed fortunes for many people in our area. During early to mid March we experienced our worst heatwave on record, with 16 days of temperatures in excess of 35 degrees Celsius, and many of those days were in the low 40s. This unprecedented heat meant that the grapes still on the vine ripened extremely quickly and all at once, causing quite some chaos for pickers and wineries. As the heatwave progressed many of the grapes just shrivelled on the vines as they were unable to cope with so many days of blazing sun.

Fortunately our grapes were all ripe about a week beforehand, and so we avoided the panic and losses experienced by many of our neighbours. In fact we started picking on 15 February and finished on 29 February, well before the heatwave. However, it keeps us aware that Mother Nature takes a hand most years in what the vintage will produce. After the devastating drought during the spring/summer of 2006/2007 which resulted in minimal crops, we didn't expect this to be followed by a heatwave in 2008.

Mother Nature has also thrown us another curved ball this year with our 2006 Creek Block Shiraz due for release. Unfortunately it hasn't developed as quickly in the bottle as it usually does or as we had expected. Consequently we will be disappointing many of our loyal Creek Block customers as we won't be releasing the wine at this time. We will assess it again in another six months and see how it is progressing, and then make a decision. If the wine is released it will be next year with the 2007 wines.

You will be pleased to know that all of our other wines will be released from the 2006 vintage, along with a tiny amount of 2007 Cornerstone Grenache and the 2003 Roennfeldt Road Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. These three wines will be on allocation due to their tiny quantities and in the case of the Grenache the drought in 2007.

Cellar Door will open this year on Saturday, 13 September, and we once again look forward to greeting those of you who are able to visit us in person. Joe always looks forward to this opportunity to "change hats" and spend some time discussing the wines with our regular cellar door customers, while Henry and Peter prefer to keep out of the limelight and stick to the vineyard and cellar chores. Of course Alicia, Kerry and Karen will still be handling the all important office functions that keep the ship sailing smoothly!

This year we have decided to move away from our conventional mailing list and will be accessing our newsletter customers from our sales database, together with new customer listings. This will certainly be a trial year and we expect there will be a few hiccups, but in order to get our customer list accurate we would greatly appreciate your assistance. Therefore please let us know if you receive duplicate copies of the newsletter and the address to which you would rather have them delivered. We would prefer to use

postal addresses as we are using a separate labelling system for delivery addresses. You will still need to indicate the delivery address on your order form as this may change from year to year, but it is the delivery of the newsletters that is the priority. Of course we are happy for you to receive newsletters at more than one address if you can utilise them at both locations.

Now we get to the difficult subject of freight! You will all be experiencing a significant increase in travelling costs due to the substantial rise in the price of oil. Apart from the direct impact this has had on our running costs for tractors, utes, motorbikes, etc, we have also been advised by our parcel delivery companies that their rates are increasing. We have done our best to absorb much of this cost by keeping the price of our wine the same as last year, and only passing on some of the freight component. However, you will understand the need for some minor adjustments, and we can only hope that in the future this trend will reverse.

Last but not least we are pleased to advise that Miriam's Bed & Breakfast is still going strong, and we have been delighted to welcome a number of our wine customers to stay in the cottage. Give us a call if you are visiting the area and need accommodation and we will see if we can fit you in.

Once again we are delighted to have received comments on our wines from Philip White, and his notes are set out below for your enjoyment.

We trust this brief update finds you all in the best of health and enjoying your red wine drinking.

Kindest regards and best wishes,
Michael & Annabelle

The 2008 Releases

Tasting notes and discussion by Philip White

UNLOCKING THE ROCKS

Time for some rough science. While global warming is such a hot topic cough cough it seemed perfectly appropriate to take a little geology lesson: geology shows we've had global warming before. So, like, how bad can things get?

Before you check out Snowball Earth on Wikipedia, let me quote a report of Hoffman, Kaufman, Halverson and Schrag, suggesting one of the things that happened at the bottom of the Neoproterozoic groups which underly Greenock.

"... biological productivity in the surface ocean collapsed for millions of years. This collapse can be explained by a global glaciation (that is, a snowball Earth), which ended abruptly when subaerial volcanic outgassing raised atmospheric carbon dioxide to about 350 times the modern level....resulting in a warming of the snowball Earth to extreme greenhouse conditions. The transfer of atmospheric carbon dioxide to the ocean would result in the rapid precipitation of calcium carbonate in warm surface waters, producing the cap carbonate rocks observed globally." I'm sure they make a big difference, but there were no Hummers in those days.

It was also high time the Barossa seriously compared local wines according to their geological sites. But fearing that they may end up with a geology somehow less desirable than others, some vignerons have opposed such an approach for decades. Their excuse? They say they don't want an appellation imposed like those of France. My response? It's not a man-made imposition. It's in the ground beneath you. It was there first.

So a highlight of my thirty years of wine writing finally exploded like a firework, when, in June, I was invited to assist the Barossa winemakers assemble a blind tasting of 52 unfinished 2008 shiraz wines from across the breadth and length of the Valley, from Lyndoch to Kalimna. These were tasted in brackets roughly according to their geological sources, as set out in *The Geology of the Barossa Valley*, a brochure and map by W. A. Fairburn, available from PIRSA.

The tasting was astonishing, while predictable enough. Neighbouring vineyards in each precinct offered flavours and aromas in common, and these characteristics changed from precinct to precinct. This pioneering tasting, conducted with thirty wine writers from around the world, will no doubt be the first of many such exercises, and marks the beginning of a whole new database of gastro-geology.

The base rocks around Seppeltsfield, the Greenock Creek homestead, and Roennfeldt Road are all from that Neoproterozoic, the geological era in which multi-cellular life first appeared. This era stretches from about 550 million years ago to 1.2 billion years. Just for reference, the Universe seems about 13 billion years old; Earth about 4.5 billion. While these old rocks are generally below the topsoil, they do extrude, and have of course influenced and added to the formation of much of that soil, which very directly influences the flavours of the grape.

But it's those base rocks that really interest me, particularly when I read back labels and brochures claiming "our vines are grown in some of the oldest soils on Earth". Most of the Barossa geology formed in the Tertiary and Quaternary, the last 50 million years; its soils are only tens of thousands of years old: most of them are such recent alluviums they're barely soils at all. "To the geologist, soil is the dandruff of the Earth", my friend Wolfgang Preiss, Chief Geologist of the Geological Survey in PIRSA, sagely uttered on a recent field trip.

The Greenock Creek vineyards are on four quite distinct formations. The creeklines, both at the homestead and Roennfeldt's, are very recent alluviums, just tens of thousands of years old. The cabernet, the Creek Block shiraz, and most of the Apricot Block are in such alluviums. These deposits fill the creeklines between the sharply-dipping older strata which protrude in the ridges. These include the blue-grey dolomitic siltstones - Willunga slate, for example - of the Tapley Hill Formation, deposited as sediments in still deep lakes that once covered the area about 750 million years ago. The Seven Acre and part of the home blocks are in this formation.

Below that lies the Yudnamutana Subgroup. This dark mix of siltstone-derived soil with blotches of bright quartzite and pebbly dolomite is up to 800 million years of age. These layers reappear in Clare and the Adnyamathanha country of the North Flinders. They are pocked with dropstones, which were deposited by floating glacial ice floes. These rocks were one of the fascinations of the great geologist and explorer, Sir Douglas Mawson. Alice's and part of the Apricot Block are in Yudnamutana.

The Hopeless Hill, on Roennfeldt's, is on the border of the Yudnamutana and the underlying Burra Group, where we get to really ancient glittery micaceous schists, metasilstones, calcilicates and quartzites. These are as old as it gets in the Barossa. The Roennfeldt shiraz, cabernet and the Cornerstone Grenache are in Upper Burra.

In geology, there are many arguments. But having finally got this sorted better than ever before, I'll never approach Greenock Creek wines in the same way. The distinguishing characters of each vineyard already make much more sense, and the differences between the Greenock Creek/Marananga/Seppeltsfield/Roennfeldt vineyards and the much younger formations in the rest of the Valley become even more meaningful.

So that's the ancient history. Contemporary history includes the salination, through introduced irrigation water, of the young creekline sediments and clays. And, of course, it includes current weather and climate. People are finally beginning to understand my salination theories. Now, the pace at which the climate is changing must force closer investigation, much quicker than anybody has imagined necessary. If, in a couple of decades, man can change the soil sufficiently to kill a vineyard, we can surely bugger up our air. Or maybe old Mother Earth will just carry on doing what she did before. Now and again, as geology shows, something makes her lose her cool.

Which may or may not have to do with the force of this year's new releases. One thing is very obvious, and very admirable. Michael does not bugger around with what the Earth gives him. These wines are utterly honest indicators of their vintages. Where many winemakers would reduce alcohol by poking the black snake - the water hose - into their crushers, or adjust the wines with sophisticated centrifuge techniques or other methods of removing alcohol and/or reassembling the flavour profiles, you can rest assured these wines are accurate reflections of what all that geology, climate, and indirect human influence have injected into the Greenock Creek grapes.

I first tasted these wines daily over a week soon after bottling. They were too scary. So I opened another set a month later, and tasted them over five days. They had settled dramatically, and projected their balance of acid, fruit, alcohol and whatever much more vividly. I'm sure they'll look even better by the time you get to open yours. Just be careful: the stronger wines are certainly not to be guzzled, or had with fish. Let them air for a day or two, and enjoy them slowly, with great cheese.

Greenock Creek Cornerstone Grenache 2007 (15% alcohol)

Aromas: milk chocolate, raspberry fruit gum, red roses, mettwurst, Iberian ham, blood pudding, wet leather, saddle soap, peat. **Flavours:** milk chocolate, raspberry gum, peat. **Texture:** viscous, sinuous, extremely fine dry tannins, steely acidity. **Aftertaste:** very firm protective acidity, lingering raspberry gum, faint chocolate chips.

Summary: The great war between Waugh and his grenache, which Michael regards with magnificent disdain, continues a bit like the Wars of the Roses. The grenache from Hopeless Hill on Roennfeldt's usually reeks of red roses and blood. Plenty of red roses and blood in this potage: magnificent, intense and powerful, yet perfectly balanced, with that rapier of steel acidity giving it a very firm, but supple, chassis. Which is the opposite of the gossip about Richard III, who is cruelly alleged to have been a hunchback. Otherwise, this bouquet smells pretty much along Richard's lines, with some wet harness, sweaty flesh and peat reek adding to the stuff mentioned above. You may even detect a whiff of the old hawthorn bush. If there is fruit, it's raspberry, but right royal raspberry it be, mark my word. And while it may not quite reach the new King through the fray, it certainly has the tenacity and power to battle on unhorsed, and topple the odd standard-bearer. After thirty years of warfare it may even resolve. 94++ points

Greenock Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 2006 (16.5% alcohol)

Aromas: pretty herbage – Corsican mint and catnip, musk, marshmallow sugar, blackcurrant, blueberry, dried fruits: apple, fig, date, wet schist. **Flavours:** Christmas pudding, dry blackcurrant, mint, anthracite, spinach reduction, plenty of lignin. **Texture:** sinuous, lean, athletic, firm, unyielding, stiff acidity, schist/flagstone tannins. **Aftertaste:** very dry, very long, savoury, dried fig.

Summary: Immediately after bottling, this wine was as wide open and dippy as a 2003 Bordeaux. That was when the great heatwave ripened everything and killed many French. A month later, it's a tight, unyielding brute of a different order altogether. Sure, it has some pretty decorations in its bouquet, and there are some live fruits immediate, but the wine's real power lies in the dried fruits that lie compressed and velvety below. These are flavours which will take many years to unfold. Another step down are the cellar essentials: firm acidity, and tannins of flagstone, reduced spinach and lignin. So while it's your slightly awkward and tight youth so far, it will grow into something that might not actually kill Frenchmen, but it will certainly frighten many. Fifteen years should see it relax. 93+++ points

Greenock Creek Alice's Shiraz 2006 (17% alcohol)

Aroma: aniseed, licorice, cocoa, milk chocolate, tea tin, stewed prunes, blanched almonds, stewed quince, cloves, mulberries, dried apple, blackberry leaf. **Flavour:** mint, nettle tea, prune syrup, chocolate bullets, marshmallow, framboise, tea tin tannins, borscht. **Texture:** supple, nicely viscous, syrupy, fluffy, very dry dolomite tannins. **Aftertaste:** rich, syrupy, drying, thick, split schist/mudstone/dolomite tannin.

Summary: And I can remember when Alice's was destined to be the "commercial" block, with slightly higher yields than the others, to present a more "drink now" wine which wouldn't require quite so much cellar! Pull the other one. This monster is a magnificent blacksmithed essence of shiraz from the ancient Yudnamutana, which contains deposits dropped from floating glacial ice floes which were carried inland, far beyond the edge of deep ocean and our current shorelines. A rock fruit salad, in other words. Which may explain the confounding depth of this wine, which can be "drunk now", but not without risk. Its aromas, depending when you look, will contain all the above, and Bacchus only knows what else. The flavours are similarly astonishing and complex. The finish is as tannic as Yudnamutana dolomite, which is generally used for road metal, so should not wear out with undue haste. Ideally, I'd wait at least ten years. 93+++ points

Greenock Creek Seven Acre Shiraz (2006 18% alcohol)

Aroma: sweet, alluring, dark chocolate, blanched almonds, dried apricot, dried prune, coke, swarf, railway sleepers. **Flavour:** licorice, aniseed, beetroot, juniper berries, gin, hot alcohol, red dust. **Texture:** thick, syrupy, irony, extremely dry tannins. **Aftertaste:** hot, sweet/dry, juniper tannins, challenging.

Summary: Back when the Seven Acre roots were just beginning their extremely difficult journey into the fractured siltstones and quartzites of the Tapleys Hill Formation, its wines were pretty confections to sniff, and neat, if intense, cordials to drink. Tapleys Hill Formation is made up of deposits that settled at the bottom of very deep, still lakes after the retreat of the ocean that left us the Yudnamutana sediments. As these tough roots delve further, the wines become much more complex and challenging. This is the most intense and powerful Seven Acre yet. Incredibly, it seems destined to settle in a balanced, if overwhelming state of grace. Its acidity and depth of flavour are as tight as iron, yet those pretty, teasing confectionery bits of its bouquet remain as felicitous and salacious as the first Seven Acre bouquets. This is breathtaking, astonishing wine. I know it's hot, but so is gin. Anyway this serves a different purpose. You can drink it with steak. 94+++ points

Greenock Creek Apricot Block Shiraz 2006 (18.5% alcohol)

Aroma: deadly, hyper-intense, blackberry, marello cherries, marshmallow, fruit muffins, anise, kalamata, licorice, Lindt chilli chocolate, beetroot. **Flavour:** deadly, hyper-intense, cassis, framboise, apricot, coffee and chicory essence, anise, licorice, mint, iron. **Texture:** supple, hyper-intense, swarfy acid, demanding tannins, elegant, dumbfounding. **Aftertaste:** swarf, acid, essence of all juicy red fruits and roots and black spices, demanding, ever so long.

Summary: Unlike Alice's, Roennfeldt's, and Seven Acre, the Apricot Block grows mainly in recent alluvial sediments washed down from Roennfeldt's Hopeless Hill to overlie the relatively recent clays of the creeklines. This is the most powerful and intense Apricot Block yet. While its alcohol is prominent and hot, it presents as a drink that could sensibly frighten the living hell out of you, which is what the vintage gave, and here it is, so let's go. It glares at you. Are you coming, or what? This looks nothing like a shiraz viognier blend, as some previous Apricots have appeared. This looks like a perfumed billet of iron from a foundry. It has a sexy dark chilli chocolate flavour, and yes, a touch of the old dried apricot, but there's also a tonne of currants in here for you to chew. All wrapped in that deep, dark chocolate. And iron. And yet, once you've absorbed a mouthful, it soon seems to make nearly perfect gastronomic sense. Have it with a hot chilli cassoulet, of, say, boar's neck and ox shin, and it tastes like a persistent lozenge of blackcurrant and pinker berries. Like a lolly. Some lolly. Start again in five years. 92+++ points. Or 93+++ . Whatever. Some of you will be thinking 75. C'est la vie. You're reading the wrong newsletter.

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Shiraz 2003 (18.5% alcohol)

Aroma: confection (musk sticks, marshmallow sugar), essence of coffee and chicory, fudge, caramel, mulberries, cloves, black pepper, iron, coal, coke, leather. **Flavour:** Kahlua, orange chocolate, Dutch licorice, dried prune, dried fig, mulberry conserve, blueberries, pecan pie, hot alcohol. **Texture:** intense, viscous, syrupy, fluffy, velvet, ethereal. **Aftertaste:** hot alcohol, breathy, syrupy, dry, woolly, dusty.

Summary: Another freakish compaction of natural history from the Hopeless Hill. The old Roennfeldt's Vineyard lives more in rock than dirt, giving us a lozenge of tense shiraz, looking like caramel wrapped in gunmetal upon first opening, and gradually morphing, with air, to something like a slab of Mississippi mudcake floating in a primordial Caribbean of Kahlua, dark fruits, and Curacao oranges. It's almost dessert – it's hardly table wine, and is really an almost impenetrable liqueur. It tastes like a geological epoch. Bacchus only knows how long it will live: it seems likely to live forever. Probably the hottest alcohol we saw in a Greenock Creek was in our last chardonnay, the 1997. That alcohol had softened within ten years. Given the simple cell density of this fruit, with all the tannin that brings, I'll take a punt and suggest this will be learning some manners by about 2020. 94++ points

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Cabernet Sauvignon 2003 (16% alcohol)

Aroma: stewed quince with cloves, apple pie, ripe blackberries on the vine, mulberry, aniseed, swarf, gun oil, deadly nightshade, tomato leaf, dark chocolate, split schist. **Flavour:** lean compressed cabernet, tomato leafy, mulberry and blackberry jam, pastry, kalamata, marello cherry, stewed apples and pears, clove-like tannins. **Texture:** intense, lean, skinny, astringent, sharply tannic. **Aftertaste:** astringent, grippy, very dry, schisty tannin.

Summary: Another piece of prehistory you can drink. This makes the shiraz appear approachable. Somebody made a pie of stones and fruits and mysterious spices and vines, doused it in kirsch and Chanel No. 5, for that dash of aldehyde, then put it in a press and reduced it in volume to the size of a lozenge, coated it in bitter chocolate, then put it in a blender and made a liqueur from it. Which never happened, of course. Tiny black grapes were picked, squashed, fermented, strained, put in a barrel of new French oak, left alone, bottled, and released at five years of age. That's all. It will last for an epoch or two in the cellar. 89+++ points