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VIGNERONS

Greenock Creek WINES

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Hello Friends!

Well you are probably wondering what has happened to us this year! Our newsletter is a little later than usual, but because of some changes to government tax regulations we decided to delay the release of the wines and the opening of our cellar door for a couple of weeks. We can tell by the phone calls and emails that some of you are really on the ball and know that something is amiss! However, there is nothing to fear, and as it has turned out it has worked out really well as it has given us a little more time to finish off the pruning, which was delayed somewhat by the beautiful rains that we received in July and August.

The 2004 vintage has come and gone. It seems rather easy to say this now that it's all over, but there were a few worried brows around the Barossa prior to the start. Although the 2003 winter was quite reasonable in the rain department, and spring-time frosts weren't anything to worry about, the early heat in September caused a problem or two. Three or four days of extreme heat in September gave the vines a rush of adrenaline and they obviously thought it was time to go, and proceeded to make enormous growth, especially in the Shiraz vineyards. This unfortunately used up too much of the available ground moisture, and hence put stress on the vines when the real heat arrived in February and March. All in all though the fruit quality was excellent, and we only lost a small amount due to dehydration.

It's interesting to note that the vineyard that suffered the least was the old Shiraz block on Roennfeldt Road, nevertheless Michael and Joe went through the vines and cut off 20-25% of the crop prior to veraison. This was rather hard to do, knowing that even "over cropped" the old vines would produce top quality grapes. Michael and Joe had to be reminded from time to time that they weren't being harsh enough with their thinning, but just had to keep going and not look behind!

Vintage for us started on 11 March, with the crushing of the Seven Acre block. This vineyard is always the first to ripen, which incidentally is the western most block we have. Picking proceeded for the next seven weeks until the last pick, which was our little block of bush Mataro on 28 April. Thankfully no two vineyards ripen at exactly the same time, so we could stagger things enough to enable our local contract picker, Kevin Lange and his crew, to pick everything by hand.

The winery worked faultlessly, as usual. It's always a bit of a worry during vintage that our "you beaut" South Aussie electricity supply will fail at a crucial moment! We had a few hiccups, but nothing serious. One extremely useful new machine we used for the first time this year was an elevator that we designed to remove the marc from the fermenters. In previous years it was a bucket-by-bucket routine into the basket press, which was a very messy and slow process. But this little three phase elevator, made locally, was a blessing as it is now a one-man operation with very little mess. A real gem – we should patent it!

This vintage we were very pleased to have the company of a young man from the office of "The Grateful Palate" in Los Angeles, the company that distributes our wine in the USA. He was a Cuban named Alberto Garcia. He stayed for the whole vintage and lived in one of the cottages next to the winery on Roennfeldt Road. Henry and Joe really appreciated the way in which he could fill in the labour gaps from time to time, and no matter how tedious or

boring the task he never once complained, but then he didn't say much either. He's welcome back any time. Thanks, Alberto.

We mentioned the 2003 weather previously as being very good rain-wise, and we are pleased to say that the 2004 season appears to be even a little better. The rain this winter has been over a longer period and seemingly not too heavy, which allows the moisture to penetrate further down the root zone of the vines. But once the soil is saturated naturally the runoff fills the dams, reservoirs, rivers, etc to the point that even the Greenock Creek was around 30cms deep and running past at our ford. Most unusual.

Although the Barossa is predominately known as a wine producing area, its reputation as a high grade food provider is coming to the fore day by day, as anyone who has been to the Saturday farmers' market at Angaston would agree. Excellent local produce including veggies, meat, poultry, olive oils, breads, etc and of course cheese. Greenock ladies Sue Evans (the wife of Joe, our long serving employee) and her sister Tracey Skepper have started a small venture called "Ballycroft Artisan Cheese", and are delighted with the response they've received from locals, Adelaidians and from across the border. Their cheese range includes a fresh curd "quark" style, a washed rind, a white moulded and a semi-hard pressed cheese, all very moorish! They are contactable on 0410 183 215 or at PO Box 719, Greenock 5360.

Sometimes it is hard to believe that Annabelle is running a "you beaut, hi-tech" office with all its mod cons when you took a look at the floor. At one stage when Annabelle and I were interstate Annabelle's daughter, Alicia, found a tiny baby rabbit abandoned by its mother. Being a fervent animal lover, and having a lengthy vet nurse history, Alicia came to the rescue, and to cut a long story short, this delinquent rabbit spent its formative days doing wheelies and other unsociable things on the carpet of the office. Thank heavens when the time came that it could feed itself it was corralled in an escape-proof cage.

By the way, there are grins galore in the household, as we are proud to announce the safe arrival of our first grandchild – Ashlee Catherine – first child to Jarrod and his wife Cathy on 22 July.

As more wineries are being built and more producer's licences issued, so the number of B & Bs in the Barossa and surrounds is increasing at equal speed. However Miriam's Cottage seems as popular as ever, so if you feel like a break from it all and want facilities that are in close proximity to the restaurants and wineries in and near Tanunda, give Annabelle or Alicia a call on the winery number.

Annabelle and I, and the whole workforce, are very pleased once again with the 2002 and 1999 Roennfeldt Roads, and are looking forward to releasing them to our much respected clients. Hoping to see you in cellar door or hearing from you by fax, email, phone or morse code soon.

Kindest regards,

Michael & Annabelle Waugh

The 2004 Releases

Tasting notes and discussion by Philip White

While I've had my pesky nose in the barrels of Greenock Creek almost as long as Michael, I cannot recall a vintage release of the sheer strength and force as these breathtaking wines. Jeez I'm a lucky bugger.

Just after the 2002s were bottled, I moderated at the Shiraz Alliance conference in the Barossa, where, with hundreds of international winemakers I tasted hundreds of international Shiraz wines (moderator?), so by the time I got home to wallow in these new release Greenock Creek they'd had a week or so to settle, and my organoleptic funnels were all thoroughly wetted, whetted, and whatever. I was ready. In tune. Dribbling. Couldna get a better man for the job.

Of course these annual tastings are highlights of my life. But, especially after tasting the world's Shiraz the week preceding, this tasting was the red equivalent of doing the base wines at Krug. And it gets even better. Vintage 2002 is considered by veterans old enough to remember as the coolest (in both senses of the word) since 1956 or 1964. Ripeness came gently, with beautiful natural acidities. These Greenocks absolutely hum.

To make a good thing better, the new winery was kicking in by 2002, and Michael had more chance to keep everything just the way he likes it. Rarely will any of us have the chance to taste a suite of wines as polished, accomplished, honest and true to terroir as these.

Because of their outrageous quality, the 2002s tend to overshadow the 1999 Roennfeldts, but don't be misled there, either. These RRs are better than any before, reflecting Michael's healing influence on those ancient strugglers from that tough old paddock. This is best manifest in the 2003 Grenache, from the same block, and the barrels of 2004 Shiraz and Cabernet: we can continue to expect better and better flavours from Roennfeldt Roads. Buckle up and be patient.

The notes on the new releases were written while the bottles stood open on my table from Wednesday, 4th August to Friday, 6th. Plus signs (+++) after my point score indicate a wine which will win more points as it matures. It's during the awkward juvenile delinquency of bottling that good wines look their worst.

Ladies and gentlemen, start your stomachs!

Greenock Creek Cabernet Sauvignon 2002 – 14%

In this immaculately cool year, the Cabernet seems more Creek Block than the Creek Block Shiraz. It's chockers with the fennel, anise and dried meadow flowers aromas of the Creek. Which is where it is, after all. But there's also plenty of sweet fresh blackcurrant and cassis, and all the elegantly polite twists of this and that which first growth Bordelaise would love to have more often. The palate's elegant and slick, fit and healthy, and winds itself around your palate like a deliciously willowy lover. The finish is wicked; those extremely fine tannins quietly waiting to protect and preserve this wine for at least fifteen years in the right cellar. Taste one now, but if you taste another in five years, you'll regret wasting the first baby. 94+++

Greenock Creek Cornerstone Grenache 2003 – 16%

This is a sicko wine. It's over the top, shockingly brazen in a dusky Iberian sort of way, and pierced everywhere. For once the Grenache is more accurately reflective of its Roennfeldt Road's heritage, and must be the bargain of the century considering all that. Like last year's release, it smells much more of Spain than the Rhone, with lashings of coal tar and polished toreador's boots and harness rather than the politely polished sheen of rosewater and turkish delight that you'll find in the very best Rhone Grenache. It even hints at sweaty bullring livestock, if you get my drift; as much the whiff of animal panic as costumed and perfumed composure. The palate's elegant but tight and compressed, with extremely fine tannins, hidden, but firm acidity, and a long, long, sweetly bloody finish. While its sinister threat of pugilism seems almost composed and contained pugilism now; it'll go mad in the next few years, and might be ready for submission in five. Best Grenache I've seen. 95+++

Greenock Creek Alices Shiraz 2002 – 16%

Mellow, soft, supple, with dark plums and dried prune aromas mingling with rummy Old Gold Dark Chocolate, this wine smells both rudely, frankly sensual, *and* thick. The palate follows suit perfectly, being impossibly smooth and syrupy, with extremely fine tannins and neat, lithe, cleanly assimilated acidity. All this seems impossible for a third crop vineyard, but there you are. It has none of the aniseed and fennel vegetals of the 2001, indicating they may have been as much the fruit of unripe juvenile vines as a reflection of the terroir of Alice's. But how that 2001 wine could possibly have been unripe at 15.5% alcohol beats me. This one's better. It'll go years, but I wonder whether it's worth the torture of waiting – it's ravishing now. But then, it does taste better after 48 hours air ... 94+++

Greenock Creek Apricot Block Shiraz 2002 – 15.5%

Somehow this intense, yet supple red wine smells as much of guava, lychee, and peach as anything roughly fruity. But red it is, and there's red stuff there in abundance. It has very slight peppermint hints, and that lovely light top note that smells like marshmallow sugar dusted over a bowl of fresh ripe fruits soured in kirsch. Which is not to say it smells overtly alcoholic; it's a full 0.5% lighter than last year's (!), and freshly opened, it's not porty. The palate, too, is radically different to the '01 – it has no porty tones. It's smooth and slender – for a Greenock – with more Cabernet-style vegetal greens evident. I can't recall a wine of this strength that retains such fresh svelte elegance and vibrant life. The aftertaste is bone dry, with all those hints of mint and leaf rebounding in the extremely long, tapering finish. Only the after-breath hints at the alcohol level. I'd like my breath to smell – and taste- like this wine for the rest of my life. Perfect balance, elegance and poise, and ripe for fifteen years in the dungeon. 94+++

Greenock Creek Seven Acre Shiraz 2002 – 15%

This bugger smells like Sangiovese at first. Don't ask me how. It certainly doesn't kick off like any previous Seven Acres, but it has that distinctive chookhouse reek – feathers as much as fowl – that reminds me of super-tuscans of impossibly ethereal prices. Bright, but meek fruit beings to peek through after a few minutes, and there's a pleasant mint-and-caster sugar dusting that takes a little time to rise. Then, one after

another, a whole farm of flavours make their appearance. Aniseed. Licorice. Black tea tin. Mulberry. Dried prune wrapped in grilled bacon and stuffed with a blanched almond. Clean, balanced oak. Take a bow.

In the mouth, the wine is surprisingly supple and athletic after all that fanfare, with sweet juicy fruit, firm, sinuous acidity, and extremely fine dry tannins. It's neither porty nor thick. This is the Seven Acre in an ideal, extremely rare cool season, and it shows an aspect of the vineyard I don't think we'll see anywhere often, even here. The wine will last for twenty years, and I wouldn't be opening much of it for five or six. It really does need some time to harmonise, but it'll be mindblowing. 93++++

Greenock Creek Block Shiraz 2002 – 15%

This is more immediately harmonious and polished than most recent Creeks. It seems to be more classically predictable Barossa Shiraz of the highest order than one of your typically dirty, swampy, sweaty bayou-bluesy brutes. Its smooth, glossy aroma lets little glints of the usual aniseed and chocolate components show with time, and there's that delightful lolly shop whoof of dusting sugar, but that's it for the first half hour. The palate's slender, with the lithe, sinuous acidity of a pole-vaulter, but hidden in a delicious wrapping of the cleanest, most intense and promising Shiraz possible. The final tannins remind me of a Chinese seaweed-in-chicken stock soup – brimming with the savoury flavour and texture that the revering Japanese call umami. In a sense, the Creek Block's cross-dressing for a year. As a gal, she's a helluva lot prettier, and probably a lot more intelligent. 95++++

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Shiraz 1999 – 14%

Immediately more polished and seamless than previous Roennfeldt Shiraz, this lush lozenge of history is almost well mannered and polite. It's deceptive: coffee-like oak and mulberry/blackberry fruit in nice tight balance. But look long enough, and your subconscious gastronomic memory will hoist forward almost every red fruit known as it sorts through that mysterious bouquet. The palate, too, is more focused and concentrated than usual, even pretending elegance and poise. But once again, let it roll around the mouth and a rainbow of fruits and savoury greens ever-so-gradually unfolds. The tannins are fine, velvety and drying after all that concentrated silk. On first opening, you could do the sniff, swirl and swaller and say "So What?" But only after twelve hours air do you begin to really see how much oak's there, and how intensely compacted that amazing fruit is. After forty-eight hours, it's still getting better. Twenty years, easily. 94+++++

Greenock Creek Roennfeldt Road Cabernet Sauvignon 1999 – 13%

Knock, knock. Nobody home. It's like rapping your knuckles on a block of black granite. Like the 1999 Roennfeldt Shiraz, this one's tighter than previous Cabernets from that rough stoney patch of terra firma. It opens ever so gradually. Eventually sweet and lissome blackcurrant and blueberry aromas mingle with charry oak, like a fine pie cooking on a woodfire stove. There are dark twists of tea tin, and then toasting marshmallows, and then Pop's old briar pipe, and then a cedary closet, and then the dirt-floored grange shed with its hessian sacks of fruits, beets and onions. In the mouth, it's at once vibrant and calm, lithe and sinuous, velvety and deceptive, elegant yet intense. You can tell straightaway that it needs at least a decade. Taste it again after twelve hours and you'll be betting two decades. It grows spearmint and the whole damned lollyshop with a day's air – even its acidity seems to increase. Forty-eight hours, and it's still gradually blooming. It's nuts. 95+++++

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

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