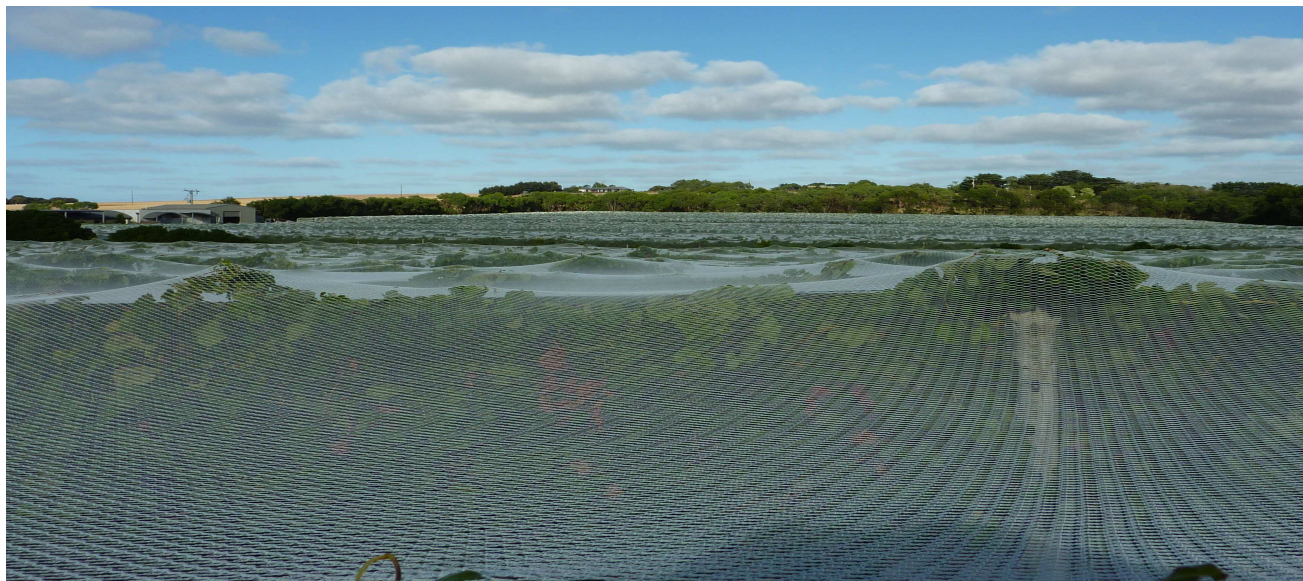


News from the Hen

No. 8 Autumn 2010



Nets – just acres of fun



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Its not your email system

A number of people have asked why they have received no emails from us even though they put their name on the email list months ago. Well there is nothing wrong with your system (that we know about) or Maira's diligence in entering new addressees; it is just the particularly slack writer. Can't seem to get past two newsletters a year.

So welcome to the first newsletter for the year, it will also probably be the second last.

Here we go gathering nets in ...

... in April rather than May. Bringing in the nets – one of the least enjoyable vineyard tasks. This year we had all rows in production and hence about 12.5 acres of nets to unclip, rollup and put away. All with the aid of a very ungainly looking netting machine on the back of the tractor – and 4 people.

The worst vineyard job? Putting them out of course; it takes about twice as long and involves much more cursing.

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2010 vintage – current view

What's the difference between wine growers and other farmers? Other farmers never admit to a good year – wine growers never have a bad one. That said, it was a pretty good vintage.

It was also a very early vintage. Our vintage started with the picking of Chardonnay for sparkling base – on February 19. We started picking Pinot Noir the next day. By way of contrast, in 2004 we began harvesting Pinot Noir in the first week of April. The other distinguishing factor this year was the rain.

For the first time since 2005/06 we got near to long term average rainfall for the period from September to February. Other than the new vineyard, we didn't need to irrigate.

While still slightly drier than average, and despite not irrigating, vigour was a real issue. Adam spent more time than usual shoot thinning, de-suckering and canopy trimming – to keep the canopy reasonably under control (or to 'tame the trifids' as he says). Life will be pretty hectic if/when we get a genuinely wet season.

The rainfall also had an impact on berry size in some varieties. Parts of the Merlot took to the good life and ended up looking more like table grapes. They ended up being put to Rosé.

The reds in brief:

- **Pinot Noir** – another small, but good quality crop. This year we managed to get a crop from the 777, so all three clones will be represented in the final blend (first time since 2008). We played around a bit more than usual with picking date (sugar level) and ferment techniques. The end result is a pretty interesting mix of wines for the final blend.

- **Shiraz** – like the Pinot, another small but high quality vintage. We thought 2009 was our best quality to that point – 2010 is looking even better.

The north-south divide continues in the vineyard – differing ripening rates (harvested 10 days apart) and quite different in the vat. The south we co-ferment with viognier and the north gets some whole bunch in the ferment.

- **Cabernet Sauvignon** – production was up this year and quality seems pretty good. It seems to have potential, but time will tell whether it will equal our best to date (the 2008).
- **Merlot** – we had a pretty interesting year with the Merlot. The fruit set was good for the third year in a row (an unusually good run for this variety) so the crop potential was high. Ample rain meant this translated into a big crop. A perched water table occurs in parts of the Merlot and in those parts the berries looked like 'Tom Bowlers'. We ended up putting them to Rosé production – that is looking really good (ah serendipity strikes again). The rest of it went to red production, we'll see how it develops.

The whites in brief:

- **Chardonnay** – a good cropping year for this variety. We decided we should continue with our sparkling project and hence half the area went to that purpose. It was picked early (lower sugar, higher acid) in mid February. The other half was picked a month later for still wine and co-fermented with what little Viognier we had.
- **Sauvignon Blanc** – this variety has never been a big cropper for us. This year's crop was again modest in size, but stunning in quality – lifted aromatics and intense flavour. We also took up an offer of some fruit from East Gippsland. This was more exposed fruit – hence lower acid and

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tropical fruit flavours. The final blend of the two is quite exciting.

- **Viognier** – crop, what crop. This variety had a holiday – very low fruitfulness resulted in a crop of not much more than half a tonne. A small amount went to co-ferment with the Shiraz and the remainder to co-ferment with the Chardonnay.
- **Riesling** – we again sourced grapes from Leongatha South and also a small parcel from Warragul. We continue to make an off-dry (slightly sweet) style.

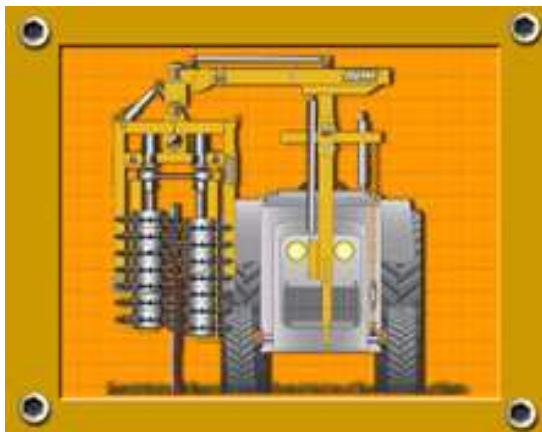
In the (old) vineyard

Things are pretty quiet in the front vineyard – the nets are off and in the shed, the vines are still near full leaf so there is not much to do. Just the occasional mowing of the centre row – more for visuals than anything else.

So it is time to start doing all the jobs around the property that get put off during busy periods. A few little infrastructure jobs, like getting an old refrigerated container operational with a single phase dairy vat system – increasing our chilling capacity and giving us a facility to cool fruit prior to processing.

This and that and maybe a bit of time off.

Once the leaves drop in early June we will be back into it again. The pre-pruner will come and do the rough first prune. This device has two sets of spinning blade cutting heads that are offset mounted on the front of a tractor – here's a diagram I found on the web



The trick is, it manages to chop the canes down to the desired level, while dodging around posts and sliding along foliage wires without cutting them.

Once the pre-pruner has been through, we will go through and do the detailed (hand) pruning to leave the desired number of buds for next season.

New vineyard

The photo below shows Sauvignon Blanc rootlings planted in October 2009. From 15cm stub above the ground to that in seven months – we are pretty amazed. Just shows what 55 cubic metres of chicken manure and some water can do.



From little cutlery big things grow

In the last Newsletter we had a field of plastic cutlery. Despite our best laid plans (or at least our beautifully aligned cutlery) we did not end up with centimetre perfect post alignment. The rip lines underneath our cutlery markers wandered and hence as the posts were thumped they followed the rips and wandered off course as well.

But that's all cosmetic – the vines have done well. The first eight rows of Sauv Blanc look big enough to set for a crop next year. From planting to first crop in 18 months is fairly standard in Mildura and like areas, but not in these parts.

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Not all have done as well. The Riesling (which is less vigorous) and vines planted as 'green-tops' and callused cuttings are less well developed and will come into production in 2012.

Hens on a cause

Steve Jenkins sent me this photo of Tina, Chloe, Vicki, Elisha, Peter and him resplendent in Hen T shirts and looking surprisingly fit after completing the 2009 Upstream Foundation Challenge. The event involves a 50km run/walk along the Yarra – from Docklands to Donvale.

Steve & the team



The 2009 Challenge raised a total of \$170,000 for Australian and overseas charities. This is an annual event so check out the web site – www.upstreamfoundation.org.

Wine comings & goings

Since the last Newsletter, we have swapped from 2007 to 2008 vintages for the **Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Shiraz**. Together, the 2008 reds are probably our strongest vintage to date.

Farewell also to the **2007 Bin2 Pinot Noir** – you will never be seen again. 'Bin2' was possibly the dumbest name we have come up with for a wine. That and its low price prompted considerable concern and even avoidance from tasters (many tasters would not

even try it – must be something wrong with it they thought).

The **2009 Pinot Gris** has come and gone and the **2009 Riesling** is all but gone.

The **2008 Chardonnay Viognier**, came and went in a flash and has been replaced by an entirely different version from the 2009 vintage. The 2010 vintage will see something between the two in style.

Another major change was the **Sparkling Red**. The 2005 was a blend of Merlot, Pinot Noir and Shiraz and the base wine had been oak matured. The 2008 is a Sparkling Shiraz and had no time in oak. Quite a different style, but one proving very popular. The current release is $\frac{3}{4}$ gone.

We have another parcel still on lees, to be disgorged in the second half of 2010. We wanted to look at the impact of extended lees contact and hence held a portion back.

The **2009 Viognier** took longer than usual to get over bottle shock and was not released until January. Lovers of this variety be warned, the 2009 is half gone and there will be no 2010.

Distribution

Distribution – we have finally taken a small bite into the bullet and appointed **Monacellars as our distributor in Gippsland**. Monacellars are based in Morwell and already have started to build our presence in the region.

A sad farewell to Wonthaggi Cellars that closed this month. Under the management of Michael Turton this store was a great supporter of Gippsland wines – both in their listings and their support of the Gippsland Wine Show. Michael promoted and hand sold many local wines – to the benefit of both the local industry and visitors to the region. We wish him well in his next venture.