

# THE WILSON VINEYARD

## POLISH HILL RIVER

No. 41

PRUNING 2001



### THE HALF-VINTAGE

The winter of 2000 was mild, and what rain fell was eagerly soaked up by the parched soil. It would have been ideal to have had a little more winter rain, but spring looked after us there. Budburst was late, and October was both cool and wet, bringing a 100 mm drenching in one day, thus ensuring lots of pre-flowering moisture and an overflowing dam. But by our calculations, in early November,

the vines were about three weeks behind schedule. December was warm and dry as December should be. Most of January was one continuous heatwave, which hastened veraison; normally we start to see the colour starting to appear in the second week in February, but this year it was before Australia Day. February continued hot, and for the first time in 15 years, vintage started in February. It was a frantic first half of March as many varieties ripened

*A dreadfully contrived vintage picture: we scoured the whole vineyard for that brightest autumn leaf!*

at once, however became more manageable as a result of extremely low yields. By the equinox two thirds of the vintage was in the tanks, when a cold-wet snap brought harvest to a halt for a week. Thereafter vintage tailed off in mild and dry conditions.

Riesling - richness and complexity, and promise of being a great vintage for this variety.

Chardonnay - intensely flavoured wine with excellent balance.

Cabernet Sauvignon - the past few vintages have been a battle between waiting for sugar levels to rise before the vines dropped their autumn leaves. In those years we had to content ourselves with grapes that were 12.5 Baume, or at best 13. This year we settled for a whisker under 14. Obviously this is going to give us wines with oomph, but we are optimistic that they will not be hot and jammy.

Shiraz - low yields but clean ripe fruit and the small berries have given a high skins to juice ratio which should augur well. Again, we had no trouble getting sugar, and the harvest maturity was 14 Baume.

Zinfandel - Yes!



## THE LOGO

This little logo has appeared on our 1998 Shiraz, and 2000 Chardonnay, and was developed in conjunction with graphic artist, Greg Judd. It depicts the eternal cycle of seasons in the vineyard, and features the family unit of Ma'n Pa and the two kids.

## OUR CROW COLUMN

### Bin 95 Hippocrene

Bronze medal, Class 11, 2000 Clare Valley wine Show  
Bronze medal, 2001 Cairns wine show.

### 1998 'Gallery Series' Riesling

Silver medal, class 13, Australian Small winemakers Show, 2000  
Silver medal, Class 50, 2000 Royal Hobart Wine Show  
Bronze medal, class 13, Clare Valley Wine Show, 2000.

### 1998 Semillon

Bronze medal. Australian Boutique Winemakers' Show, 2001.

### 1999 Semillon

Bronze medal, class 22, 2000 Royal Hobart Wine Show.

### 2000 'Gallery Series' Riesling

Silver medal, class 25, 2001 Sydney Royal Wine Show.  
Bronze medal, 2001 Cairns wine Show.

## THE LOCUSTS

The warnings had been out for some months about a great locust plague that was about to swarm into the Clare Valley, and gobble up all the vines. Having survived two previous infestations we found this information somewhat alarmist. The long-awaited invasion eventuated in mid December, and as with previous visits, the locusts fed on the ground, and left the mature vines alone. This year we had a small patch of new vines (nebbiolo), that had been fitted with vine guards to protect them from hares and kangaroos. The locusts found it fairly cosy chewing away within the guards. For a while the hares and the kangaroos got their nebbiolo back on the menu, but when the season was over the score was something like Vines 97% and Critters 3%.

## MORE ON CORKS

Our 1986 riesling was a gold-medal wine in its youth, and a few years later was still dazzling the judges. How's it look now? We keep small reserves of past vintages and look at them occasionally.

The bottle we opened had a slight (less than 1 cm) ullage, and a cork that was moist (and near rotten) all the way through. The wine was oxidised and awful.

So we found another bottle that was not ullaged, and were encouraged by a reasonably healthy looking cork which had allowed the wine to moisten it only half way. This wine was totally destroyed by overwhelming cork taint.

As a "by the way", it is our belief that there is a direct relationship between the level of taint in a wine, and the duration of contact between wine and cork. That's only common-sense, but it is an issue that has not been addressed by those researching the problem. The practical application here is that a young wine that has been in contact with a mildly tainted cork for only a few weeks may open fairly clean, but if the same wine was left for 15 years, it would be ruined.

Returning to the task at hand, we managed a third bottle of the 86 riesling. Again there was no ullage, and the cork looked good. Better still, the wine was a delight, and still young and lively.

## SYNTHETIC CORKS

We have used stelvin closures for some of the 2000 "Gallery Series" Riesling, and will have all the 2001 riesling bottled with stelvin closures. Technically, the stelvin is the best wine closure, but has some drawbacks in other respects. One is the fairly expensive (certainly for our volumes) cost of having one's mark printed on them. Another is the limited range of bottle shapes that are available with a stelvin thread.

Take the example of our dessert 'Leucothea' that has been packaged in a tall 'Futura' 375 ml bottle, and then sealed with natural bees wax. The same bottle in a stelvin top would completely lose the presentation effect. Our most recent bottling of this wine used 'Normacorc' closures that are an extruded synthetic, and have an appearance very close to a good natural cork.

We have also bottled some of our 2000 Chardonnay with these 'Normacorcs'. We have put away a quantity of this wine with both natural and synthetic corks, and also with some of each stored upright and upside-down. The plan is to look at these wines as they develop over the coming years.

Meanwhile the natural cork producers continue to flood our mailbox, whilst it is rare to have a week where every wine we open is free of cork taint.

## **WEBSITE DEVELOPMENTS**

Our website went on-line in March 2000, and over the next few months we tidied it up a little and wondered whether anyone actually read anything in it. In November, to our surprise, we discovered that we were number 69 in the top 100 liquor websites in Australia. Since then we've drifted in and out of that list a couple of times.

Our website consultants get rather excited when we start talking about any change that is going to increase the "hits" that the site gets. It's very easy to become fired by their enthusiasm, and we find that we have to restrain ourselves from time to time, and remind ourselves that website hits is really a very minor part of the big picture. After all, it's making better wine that it's all about.

Our website aims to be an information resource, particularly on matters of history and tourism relating to the Clare Valley. In the months ahead we will be packing in even more features.

Presently there are four new features.

Opus One on our expanded website is the Clare Valley Riesling Trail, or more correctly, the now defunct Clare railway. The feature that is now on-line is a skeletal history, that will gradually be padded out as we do more research. The Clare railway could not be justified in the first place, however my theory is that it helped keep the electorate sweet at a time when the Temperance Alliance was on the ascendant, and may well have saved South Australia from a Prohibition fate.

Opus Two is all about Carl Mayerhoff's vineyard which had its beginnings in Beechworth, Victoria, in the early 1850s. Not much to do with the Clare Valley, but then Carl Mayerhoff did establish his vineyard with cuttings sent from Germany. Was he one of Australia's riesling pioneers? - now that certainly is getting closer to home. He was also my great-great-grandfather.

Opus Three. Commencing with this edition of our newsletter, what is in print will also appear on the website and with each new edition the file of archived newsletters on the website will grow. We have also gone back through all the old newsletters, and flagged some of the classic stories, and these are now on the web.

Opus Four is the Clare Valley Eating Guide.

## **CLARE VALLEY EATING GUIDE**

For most visitors to Clare the eating experience has become as important as the wine experience, and to meet this demand there has evolved a large food-service industry. With so many eating places to choose from, visitors have to resort to either "pot-luck" or to follow various personal recommendations. We find that visitors to cellar-door constantly seek our opinion on where to eat.

It was clear that there was a need for something more informative than the listings provided by the tourist brochures, and more objective than the advertising material generated by the various establishments.

Our Clare Valley Eating Guide is a feature that has been attached to our website, and has become operational during the last half of March. Our intention is to update the Guide about monthly.

Over the years we have patronised local eating establishments purely for the enjoyment, but the decision to embark on this project has required us to look more critically at their service, and do a lot more eating out during the summer.

It is a project which has consumed considerable time and expense, and will continue to do so. Certainly it is an enjoyable project but its purpose goes beyond that.

Other wineries ingratiate themselves to local establishments by providing marketing knick-knacks like aprons and corkscrews, or have their slogans painted on billboards or menu blackboards. These are practices that we find crass, and note that none of these "give-aways" improves the lot of the consumer.

Our Eating Guide is aimed directly at giving something to the consumer. Superficially it is an information resource, but the deeper intention is to strike a more competitive field with improvement in both quality and value.

Our website Eating Guide is, to the best of our knowledge, a novel concept that has not been applied elsewhere. It will be interesting to see if similar guides will eventually sprout in other wine regions.

Later in the year, the site will be boosted by a comprehensive history of Clare's gastronomy revolution, which is largely a phenomenon of the last 25 years.



## 1999 'Gallery Series' CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Sue Adams is our feature artist for the latest in our Gallery Series. The work that she has done for the 1999 Cabernet Sauvignon is in her usual style of oils, that is strong on purples and blues. For the 2001 riesling label, Sue surprised us with the revelation that she had other colours in her paint box.

The 1999 'Gallery Series' Cabernet Sauvignon is a bigger and more tannic wine than the previous few vintages. It is 88% Cabernet Sauvignon and 12% Merlot.

Colour: deep crimson with purple on the edges.

Aroma: plum jam with some chocolate and coffee.

Palate: predominantly plummy and backed up by some blackberry and cloves. An easy drinking wine that has an agreeably fine tannic grip on the finish, like a good cabernet should without being too hot or heavy.

## WEBSTATS

Our ISP (Internet Service Provider) provides statistics on who is hitting our website, and all that. About three-quarters who visit our website are the result of a direct request for our site. The other quarter find us as a result of a search. The stats list the "search strings" that generate these hits, and the consistent top search string is the Wilson Creek Winery in the U.S.

Geographically, Australia consumes the biggest slice of the pie chart, followed closely by "unknown" wherever that is. The one that worries us most is a relatively minor category called "US Military". One of the listings shows the search engines that are targeting our site,; the top search engine on our list is Google. The stats tell us the time of the day and which day of the week. Weekends, for us are quiet on the net, and on the 24 hour chart, there is one spectacularly impressive high - 1300 hours. Conclusion - Australians are honest to the extent that they use the boss's computer for private biz, but they do it in their own time!

*There are some weeks when it seems that business is one step forward and two steps back; but another week will be two steps forward and only one step back. Then there are days when the mailbox contains comments like these: JLW*

*Wine makes us happy!*

*Congratulations. I was fortunate to be able to enjoy a bottle of your Gallery Series Cabernet Sauvignon. In my opinion it is one of the best reds I have enjoyed.*

**This newsletter** is produced by The Wilson Vineyard at Polish Hill River. Permission is freely granted to reproduce any material contained herein, although acknowledgement of the source would be appreciated. The winery is open for sales, weekends between March and November, 10.00am to 4.00pm. Smoking is not permitted. Coaches and minibuses are accepted only by appointment. Sales cellar and toilet at winery are accessible by the disabled.

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**[www.wilsonvineyard.com.au](http://www.wilsonvineyard.com.au)**

## Wines Currently Available

2000 Chardonnay  
2000 *Gallery Series* Riesling  
1999 *Gallery Series* Cabernet Sauvignon  
1998 Shiraz  
Bin 95 Hippocrene

## Forthcoming Releases

For release in the Spring  
2001 *Gallery Series* Riesling  
1999 Shiraz

## FACTS AND FIGURES

The Wilson Vineyard is a family-owned business. The winery only uses grapes from the Polish Hill River sub-region of the Clare valley. All vintage and cellaring processes up to the stage of bottling are carried out on the property. Vineyard established 1974. First licensed 8 July 1980. Vineyard area 15 ha. Aspect, easterly. Soil, acidic red-brown loam over decomposing slate. Average rainfall 700 mm. Total landholding 60 ha. Average elevation 425m.