

Silver Wings Newsletter No. 13. Feb 2015

I'll start by wishing all of my readers a safe and prosperous 2015. For those who couldn't attend my October 'Lost Wine Sale' you missed a great opportunity to taste some amazing aged wines at remarkably low prices. The successful weekend was truly enjoyable, interacting with so many wine interested people. My cellar search has continued since and I surprise myself occasionally with what I find.

My entire winemaking career has been shaped by my dedication to producing long lived wines and throughout the past 30 vintages I endeavoured to set aside sufficient quantities of each bottling to maintain a bottle library as reference. My departure from Cleveland Estate negated many of the reasons behind this effort and significantly reduced the quantities set aside. However, there are sufficient to be of interest to enthusiasts and I have decided to release many for sale. Amongst my collection are magnums and jeroboams dating from my first commercial wines in 1990 bottled for personal long term comparison to smaller bottle sizes.

These will be available for sale during my **BIG BOTTLE** weekend along side tasting examples of the same wine in smaller formats if available and also for sale.

For wine interested people this is a 'must attend' experience so please bring some friends and make the most of a rare opportunity. Cheers,

Keith

The BIG BOTTLE SALE
Open Week-end at 28 Munster Terrace.
Sat. 14th and Sun. 15th March 2015
10 a.m til 5 p.m.

Taste the new release of the '96 X.O. Brut plus some recently discovered '97 Brut and Big Bottle wines all aged to perfection in my cellar, plus clearance sale wines make a weekend not to miss!

Cheese and bread will be available with tastings and your friends are welcome.

Melways 2A. E10 - Ph: 9329 8161— M: 0407 291 449

The Orchestrated Tasting

To those who know me it comes as no surprise when I say I am uncomfortable with most orchestrated and media focussed wine events.

So it was with anticipation, I accepted a rare invitation to an expensive and ostensibly interesting wine comparison tasting of Pinot Noir and Burgundy at a very prestigious venue.

On the evening I assembled with a large number of eager participants finding ourselves allocated in groups, each assigned a company winemaker as table coordinator. As it is a reasonably large corporation there was often more than one company winemaker present at each table. As the evening progressed I couldn't help feeling the wine-media heavy table fronting the room from an elevated stage area looked a little like a futuristic satirical painting of the last supper plus wine glasses!

Served masked in flights of six the tastings began and I relished studying some of these high priced new and old world competitors. The first flight I found disappointing in that few were impressive, most allocated a 'nice or pretty' score lacking substance except one from Tasmania.

Then came the comments from the media, entertaining, light and substantially meaningless, I began to get annoyed with their ingratiating approach to their hosts.

The second bracket suddenly took on a new light, most had tannin and acid structures that indicated in one quantum leap we had entered the realms of Burgundy and I began to enjoy the event. When the wine list was revealed this proved correct, so I was surprised to hear winemaker comments criticising them as awkward and unenjoyable. Taking an opportunity to speak from the floor, I expressed my thoughts and began to explain why some people may find young wines intended for cellar ageing not quite so easy to drink as those made for immediate social consumption. During my delivery I became aware of the unease of various corporate personnel around the room and was quickly sidelined by the head of the 'last supper' nominating another company winemaker to hold the floor.

As I seated, my friend and host murmured 'I don't think we will be invited back next year'.

I quietly revelled in triumph, having partially derailed another contrived and choreographed marketing exercise staged to mislead consumers. I mused that the enjoyment of 'throwing stones at the King' must be part of the DNA of being seventh generation Australian.

Mud in your eye, Keith

The Royal Nod.

When it comes to Aussie colloquialisms receiving “the royal nod” is a lot better than “the royal sword” and recently the nod of approval was received for my '96 X.O Brut.

Over the past 40 years Melbourne has in my opinion, constantly offered the world’s most vibrant and exciting cuisine at ridiculously affordable prices. Finally our depth of quality restaurants is being recognised by previously pious foreign cultures and several have been placed among the greatest restaurants on earth, one being repetitively included in the top ten food and dining experiences in the world - Attica.

This is the equivalent of food royalty and accordingly the competition to be included in their wine list is little short of ferocious. So I was somewhat surprised to be offered an opportunity to present my latest tiny offering of X.O. *Macedon* Brut for consideration on their list. The offer was made because in their considered opinion there was no Australian sparkling wine available of the quality required to present ‘by the glass’ with their food.

When the day came there were some anxious moments for me as I awaited their deliberation and when the sommelier smiled and said ‘congratulations, we will take whatever you can sell us’ it was a little like receiving the royal nod.

From here on we shall refer to it as “Macedon Regis!”



“Nobody Cellars Wine Anymore!”

It is the standard expression of most young winemakers having graduated from Australia’s Agricultural Universities, echoing the corporate mantra maintained since the mid-90’s. This mantra was, I believe, created to accelerate their conversion of styles and the market positions of once long term wine brands into the cheap and ready drinkers of today. So many once proud, world class Aussie wine brands subsequently descended into the bargain bin styles in market positions previously allocated to casks. I pose the question ... is this statement true?

Not in my experience, is my answer. So where did the belief originate? I am aware that the mantra began to proliferate in the 1990’s from an Industry statistical study, however to my knowledge the methodology of this study has never been examined and experience dictates that the manipulation of broad based statistics can lead to any conclusion wished to be placed upon them. In this instance the conclusion of convenience was pushed by our most respected winemakers and once it had been accepted by the Industry, it became a self fulfilling prophecy.

The likelihood is that the percentage of consumers cellaring wine has remained unchanged despite the propaganda, as I know by market exposure the majority of sincere wine enthusiasts aspire to build their own cellar collections, many achieve this in a small way and others in grand fashion, admirably filled with notable wines although now largely with foreign labels. The rewards for me are that in amongst those labels are often my own and when opened at 15—20 years of age regularly shine in quality well beyond their higher priced and profiled international competitors.

Attitudes toward wine cellaring in this next generation likely contain an element of social change within this country, many young people today have been gradually excluded from employment opportunities which would have developed their affluence. However this should have been balanced by the startling wealth and disposable income of others. But so complete is the schooled change in attitude of most winemakers in Australia that the long term cellaring market segment has been largely abandoned to nations who take their wines far more seriously. The easy drinking Australian styles clearly suit the accountants who dictate fast stock turnover and screw cap closures, fit that criteria perfectly. Unlike past eras our wines are mostly produced or refined to lack both tannin or acidity sufficient to offer anything but 1 to 2 years bottle development, after which it’s a waste of time hoping for some miracle improvement. Whilst the same pressure of immediacy has been upon the European wine Industry, their lack of corporate domination means traditionalists have been able to hold their ground.

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This leaves them an almost unchallenged market segment should consumers wish to cellar wine for their special event in the future, and foreign wines now dominate our domestic market place and at price points unattainable by local producers regardless of style. This perhaps is the biggest loss of all through the success of this mantra.

The heavily marketed perception that Australian quality wine is cheap when it cannot be, has undermined faith in perceived quality and resulted in consumer unwillingness to pay premium prices.

This has reinforced the classic 'cultural cringe' of Australians and coupled with recognition of the lack of cellaring potential, has left sincere consumers almost without domestic choice. Sadly winemakers like myself who make long lived styles are neither recognised by our Industry nor media alike and the future of these Australian wine styles remains bleak.

My memory of drinking the legendary wines of Australia is one of acknowledgement of massive tannin or acid structures when young, allowing the fruit to develop after cellar aging often for many years before becoming easy drinking and some, like the Seppelts 1954 Hermitage GRP, even approachable. These tannin structures were recognised by the Industry and wine judges of their time and rewarded with Gold medals and Trophies despite the wines occasionally taking 20 plus years to soften. It's a pity there is no such recognition or even an Australian show category presently in which to enter and our wine education and culture, appears to have degenerated into a massive corporate experiment.

Cheers, Keith

**Some
oldies but
goodies**



The Lost Wines:-

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Tasting Notes:

'97 Brut Macedon (cleanskins)

Bouquet: Aged complex Chardonnay fruit underpins strong yeast characters.

Colour: Deep green gold with fine but persistent bubbles.

Palate: A fine effervescence sprinkles the tongue and allows the complex Chardonnay fruit to dominate the long palate to a remarkably fresh finish given it's 14 years on cork.

1996 Late Disgorged Brut X.O. Grand Reserve

Cleveland Estate fruit, 18 years on lees, disgorged October 2014 and liquered with X.O. Cognac.

Bouquet: Strong yeastiness dominates the elegant fruit characters retaining a finely balanced intensity.

Colour: Deep golden green with fine and vigorous effervescence.

Palate: Explosive effervescence supports the intense, complex fruit flavours filling the palate in a powerful display of great balance of yeast and fruit supported by a fresh and clean acidity with nougat like overtones from the X.O. Cognac.

Winemakers comments:

A remarkable example of the art of fine aged sparkling wine production. This wine offers the greatest yeast complexities achievable in winemaking, complimented by its balanced acidity offering the most complex and rewarding Australian sparkling wine I've ever tasted. This release will not be overshadowed in the company of Bollinger and Krug Champagnes. Enjoy! Keith

BIG BOTTLES

Many vintages starting from 1990 will be available in magnum and jeroboam formats with smaller bottle samples. Too many to list separately so please attend this great weekend opportunity 14—15th March.

~ORDER FORM ~

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Keith Brien Premium Wines

Dozen (mixed or straight) lots only delivered

(Price: single bottle/dozen) Bottles Dozens Total \$

N.V. '99 Brut Rose <i>Macedon Noir</i> (\$27/ *\$300)/...../.....
1996 BrutX.O.Grand Reserve <i>Macedon</i> (\$45/ *\$240)/...../.....
'97 Brut <i>Macedon</i> <i>cleanskin</i> (\$20/ *\$216)/...../.....
2006 <i>Vincenzo's Old Vines Mataro/ Shiraz</i> (\$27/*\$300)/...../.....
2008 <i>Old Vines Mataro</i> \$22/*\$240)/...../.....
2008 <i>Old Vines Shiraz</i> (\$22/*\$240)/...../.....
1999 Pinot Noir <i>The Winemakers Alms</i> (\$35/*\$380)/...../.....
1998 Cab. /Merlot <i>Minus Five</i> (\$23/*\$240)/...../.....

Plus delivery cost (see window) \$.....

Optional insurance (see window) \$.....

Total \$.....

PAYMENT ENCLOSED: CHQ//MC/VISA

Credit Card No

exp.date...../.....

NAME.....

Address.....

Postcode.....

Phone (BH).....(AH).....

Email:.....

Special Delivery Instructions:

.....

Mail to: Silver Wings 28 Munster Tce Nth Melb. 3051

Tel: (03) 9329 8161 or M: 040729 1449 Fax: (03) 9329 6879

e-mail : keith@siverwingswines.com

FREIGHT RATES (Free for 2+ cases to same address Victoria)

MELBOURNE \$7.00 per case VIC COUNTRY \$14.00 per case

INTERSTATE \$17.00 per case PERTH, WA \$30.00 per case

***INSURANCE:** Victoria \$7.00 All other States \$10.00

(Covers any breakages during transit. Silver Wings takes no responsibility for breakages during transit of uninsured wine)

Why Big Bottles are best!

There are many tales of great bottles of wine enjoyed in wonderful surroundings, with food and friends exciting people's imagination of almost unattainable delights. Unfortunately quite often that special bottle stored in your cellar doesn't quite match the expectations of such a life memory event. However there are sometimes sound practical reasons in storage conditions as to why a wine does not meet its anticipated heights of flavour development and here are some simple rules.

1/ Ensure your bottles are kept at a stable temperature, preferably cool and not above 25C for extended lengths of time.

2/ Cork sealed bottles must be laid down to keep the cork moist, screw caps are not effected by storage position.

3/ Cork sealed bottles require humidity to maintain constant cork density and reduce transpiration, dry conditions accelerate aging.

4/ Keep out of direct sunlight and dark coloured bottles protect the wine better than light coloured.

5/ Last but not most importantly the wine style is critical to aging potential. Too many wines today are over refined and lack both the tannins and acidity levels to reward lengthy storage.

6/ Large bottle formats age significantly slower than smaller bottles due to the ratio of oxygen ingress to wine volume, both at bottling and particularly during storage. And it seems, the larger the better.

There is no better example of the assistance large format bottles offer than a recent tasting experience I enjoyed late 2013. A Methuselah (6lts) of 1934 vintage Chateau Gruaud-Larose became available at auction so I organised a willing coalition of wine enthusiasts and secured it. As the vintage is one of the legendary years of Bordeaux, high expectations of quality were anticipated, however at a great age of 80 years, the contents attracted speculation by us all. A grand lunch was planned and in case of failure, standby bottles of alternative wines brought by the participants were arranged at the event. The final moment of my ceremonial removal of the huge cork was full of anxiety and when it too easily 'popped' without effort, all present were silenced with foreboding. I lifted the massive bottle to my nose and sniffed the esters being released from within and exclaimed "Eureka she's sound!". The wine proved to be not only sound but in excellent condition with potential for further aging.

Needless to say a great afternoons enjoyment has been etched in the memories of all participants and the realities of the benefits of large bottle formats in cellar aging wines, cemented forever within this experience.

N.B.

You can read my detailed tasting notes in the archive pages of tasting experiences on my website.



**A grand sight—the 6 litre
Methuselah of the famed 1934
vintage.**

The moment of truth!



Eureka !!



Carpal's Tunnel

Having been blessed with good health throughout my life and, with the exception of the removal of a damaged knee cartilage through playing Rugby in 1968, I had never required surgery. So it was with a little trepidation I sought first a physiotherapist and finally a surgeon in an attempt to correct what had become, over a life time of work, a debilitating problem with my right wrist and hand. If surgery would provide the solution, then the quicker the better!

Accordingly, three weeks after my consultation I lay in the Epworth surgery chatting with my anaesthetist and surgeon. As I awoke from the best sleep I'd had in ages, I was vaguely aware of some discomfort to my hand but all felt good. Within about another hour of dozing peacefully I was wheel-chaired to the outpatient observation ward and upon arrival, greeted by a cheery and efficient nurse.

"Now you must be" looking quickly at her record book, "Charlene or Keith" she joked

I responded "Definitely Keith, unless they did the wrong operation?"

Proof they made the correct cut!!



The Cost of Heraldry

When one decides to put a shield emblem on a wine label or any printed medium, there needs to be some considered thought. In the mid nineteen eighties I researched my family history to find any heraldry that may have existed before migration to Australia in 1792. At the time an incomplete family tree didn't help, so I decided to modify the Irish O'Brien crest with some compatible pieces of the only Brien crest I could locate, hence creating my own version of family heraldry.

At the very first promotional luncheon my first vintages of wine were dutifully pasted with the new label complete with my chosen coat of arms, the venue being a newly opened city venue frequented mostly by businessmen. At my table were a number of businessmen who seemed very interested not only in my wines but my new label. After the main course I was chatting with my nearest guest when he subtly enquired as to who had designed my label, I eagerly stated "Moi" at which he offered his business card. I read with some dismay that he was a lawyer who specialised in Copyright and trade marks regarding heraldry and crests.

He proceeded to introduce me to his friends (all lawyers) and to my relief he congratulated me on not infringing upon the law with my design ... phew!! A lively discussion ensued regarding the intricacies of English Heraldry law in which he was one of the world's leading experts sharing his court time proceeding against offenders mostly in London and the U.S.A. During my drive home afterward I mused at the statistical possibilities of the chance of such a person being present at the first viewing of label artwork, not very high I think but one never knows who the next stranger may be.

My very legal artistic creation:-



STOP PRESS

I have not entered my current release Old Vines Wines in the show circuit for many years however I did recently with some quite flattering results. Huon Hooke, the Sydney based wine writer and judge, rated them all at Silver medal standard at least and the Adelaide based Master of Wine Peter Musket and his 'Wine Showcase' panel issued a Gold Medal for the 2008 Mataro—not bad results for nicely aged wine at these price points !

Ray Charles I know, I know, I've got a warped sense of humour!



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