

Silver Wings Newsletter No. 1

Yes, I'm back! Having felt like a cork in the ocean for the past few years, things are finally beginning to settle into what resembles routine in its demands and accordingly, I am moved to write another newsletter. This however is quite a milestone, being the first of my new life and direction as "Silver Wings". The name was inspired by a poem I read long ago. "I slipped the surly bonds of earth and danced the sky on laughter silvered wings." This represents the span of my life as a pilot before winemaking to my recent transformation as wine consultant for an American company. Once again I spend much time travelling on aeroplanes and love it.

Vintage this year was a gentle pace by comparison to my time at Cleveland where there was always some other urgent priority to interfere with proceedings. My wine-making assistant Will Fraser (retired G.M. of Kodak) was such good company that I began to feel the "gentleman wine-maker" syndrome for the first time. My grower, Vince Conte at Shepparton Victoria, supplied me outstanding Shiraz and Mourvedre fruit from his 50 year old vineyard (inherited from his father). My obligation to make great wine and justify our commitment, turned vintage into a very pleasant and rewarding process. This was more like therapy than work and just what I needed.

A very cool and extended autumn meant that the 'old vines' Shiraz and Mourvedre' ripened slowly, developing deep flavours and such colours that it challenged cleaning winery equipment. Vibrant, fruit dominated Shiraz with great tannin structure is the result. It has my mouth watering just thinking of it. The 'Old Vines' Mourvedre' is the best example I have seen from this variety any where in the world. There are very few serious wines produced from Mourvedre', even in Provence (Southern France). With Vince's 50 year old vines and low crop levels I have produced a deeply flavoured, velvety textured wine of great balance. Stored in new French and Hungarian oak barrels to add structure and complexity, this wine will attract considerable attention when released late 2005.

By the time you receive this news letter, I will be in the United States with Marquee Wines, working to establish greater market share with their Ozzie wine portfolio. I return in October and invite you to attend my "Cellar Door" every weekend during the month of November to take advantage of the lower wine tax and price reductions, please read on for details.

Cheers,
Keith Brien.

One Flew Into the Cuckoos Nest

Walking away from Cleveland, I turned my back on thirty years of heartbreaking work and much of life's expended energies, knowing I should have been happier than what I was. My decision has been vindicated by how I now feel.

My first choice was to continue doing what I love and so, I made enquiries about sharing a winery until I found my direction once again. To my delight, the owners of Goonawarra Winery in Sunbury were most friendly when approached and I now comfortably share their small winery, high on the hillside in building #21, in the Victoria University Campus at Sunbury overlooking Melbourne.

This is no ordinary place. It has the most spectacular city and bay views outside of flying and one of the most charming clusters of historic buildings in the state.

However the buildings have a slightly daunting history. For 150 years it was the Orphans and Psychiatric Asylum. Do I sense a suppressed chuckle, a whispered, "Keith is finally in the funny farm?" But that's alright because I like it here! Yes, another twist of fate has surprising connotations. You'd have to be mad not to enjoy the views and the straight jacket keeps the wind off my back.

All jokes aside, architecturally the place is stunning with buildings from earliest Colonial to grand Edwardian, creating a marvellous complex to visit. Yes, you can now leave at will and the giant brick wall has been breached tastefully in strategic places so wandering around does not have to be in circles.

I will be open for business in building #21 (next to the Boiler House) for a brief period during weekends **6th & 7th and 20th. & 21st. November for tasting and sales** of my new range of "Silver Wings" wines and you are invited to attend.

See you there, Keith



Winery press in ancient Pompeii C. 100 B.C.

Cellar Door at Lancefield & Sunbury.

Every weekend from Sat. 30th October and through to Sun.28th November I will be offering tastings and sales of my new release “Silver Wings” wines. Based at my cottage in Lancefield (the driveway past Cleveland) you will also find me at the Sunbury Victoria University campus on alternate week-ends Sat. 6th, Sun 7th. and Sat. 20th., Sun. 21st. Nov.

On the weekend of the 20th and 21st of November at 11 a.m. each day, I will conduct cellar tours of the winery facility at the University campus and tastings of barrel samples of the 2004 vintage wines. Please advise if you wish to attend one of these events so I can plan things accordingly and feel free to bring friends or colleagues whenever you choose to visit.

I have some wonderful wines to offer you, some of which will be the last releases of stocks grown and produced at Cleveland, which I retained. The Brut Rose’ and 1993 Grand Reserve X.O Brut will never be produced again and are outstanding examples of my craft. I believe the 1993 X.O to be the best sparkling wine I have made.

Some rare magnums of older vintages of Cleveland wines from my private cellar will be offered as an added incentive to purchase my new releases, names will be drawn from a hat to win these remarkable wines. Only the best of vintages were hand bottled into magnums for future generations of drinkers to enjoy. It would appear that now is the time to offer these to my supporters in celebration of life’s new directions.

I look forward to showing you my new and exciting range at either venue - **please note the dates for Sunbury tastings so I don’t miss you!**

Melway references:

69 Shannons Rd Lancefield (the driveway past Cleveland) **Map 609 ref: J 8.5**
V.U.T. Sunbury campus Bldg 21 (next to Boiler House) **Map 382 ref: E.8.**

The Missing Punch Lines

Its hard when you don’t understand a joke, but its downright embarrassing when you tell a joke which no one thinks is funny.

My last two newsletters from Cleveland contained jokes which no-one could think were funny, because the printer had dropped the punch line out of the text box when placing borders around the stories.

Sorry about that! So here’s a short one, all intact.

Question:

What’s the difference between a top jazz guitarist and a Pizza Supreme?

Answer:

A Pizza Supreme can feed a family of four!

MEDICRANK

The casualty room of any hospital is no place for anyone to spend enjoyable time, least of all in a country hospital and least, least of all, as a public patient. However last summer I endured a very long six hours, waiting for a medical examination to determine damage to my spine due to a serious fall from a vehicle on my farm. Lying in agony for such a period, prompted many thoughts, including “if I could only walk, I would run away!” until I was eventually visited by a Doctor “sorry, too late for the Xray dept., they’ve gone for the day!” and for the first time in 37 years, I was admitted to hospital for observation and X-rays, (when the staff returned).

Being wheeled down the corridor by nursing staff I felt suddenly comforted that at least I was now in safe hands, right up until the entrance to the ward.

The nurse lent down and said “Your bed is # 4 could you just set yourself up and we’ll be back in a few minutes”

“Jesus, are you joking?” I managed to mutter in my doped euphoria.

“Oh! You couldn’t do that for me?”

“No I can’t!” ran the conversation. “Well, we will have to do a bit of manouvering!” was the cautious reply and with that they began to crash the bed against each of the three walls leading to the ward doorway as they explained that “the beds don’t exactly fit through .. grunt .. oomph!” and with more than a little amazement, we arrived in the room (doorway minus a bit of paint and a chunk of wood). “Can you get into bed now?” they asked, puffing from the exertion.

Laying flat on my back, I strained my bruised neck to the side to see that the beds didn’t quite match in heights – the ward bed was higher than the casualty bed and it was pretty obvious none present were going to lift me into place.

Luckily, I do push-ups in my daily exercise program so without further debate, managed to roll onto my front and with every muscle straining to keep my spine rigidly straight, managed a crab-like crawl on hands and toes into my ward bed.

What a relief to be drugged, drugs! ! freely dispensed and many of them yet still a sleepless night.

Finally, after being X-rayed the following day, confirmation came that my crushed vertebrae had not protruded and although the prognosis was positive, I would have to spend the next week in hospital. Back in my bed I realized why I hadn’t been able to sleep, the under-sheet was plastic and the bed cover (Doona) was also plastic! It was like being reincarnated as a slice of Kraft cheese. They were quickly disposed of onto the floor to the smiles of understanding by the other (inmates) patients. After several days, the pain subsided enough for me to acknowledge the other occupants of the room and begin to explore my new habitat. This was difficult because the bed head was about 400mm from the wall, which meant that my cupboard, telephone and light switch were actually behind my field of view and reach! never mind, I was there to recuperate and sleep was my best friend.

On the third day I began to feel hungry and ventured to peruse the menu. Reasonably standard fare seemed the order of the day, but I was pleased to see that evening meals were served at a civilized 1930 hrs (7:30 pm) and placed my order. At 1745 hrs (5:45 pm.) I was woken from my afternoon slumber by delivery of my dinner “This is a bit early” I thought. Sitting as upright as I could, I observed the hospitals version of Lasagna. It would make any Italian burst instantly into tears! Good heavens, am I supposed to eat this? I mused and

Medicrank continued.

began my first and last attempt. It was then I realized my mistake, meal service wasn't at 1930, that was the date the menu had last been printed !

The following day a ward orderly came to change my bedding and we chatted during the procedure. "Are you a farmer or a builder?" she asked

"Actually, I'm a farmer and a builder", was my response.

"I thought so, all farmers or builders have red or blonde hair", was her learned observation. I was stunned, does this mean she hasn't driven over the hill 15 minutes to Broadmeadows where blonde heads cannot be sighted? Or perhaps not ventured further to Melbourne? I chuckled in agreement with her and held my tongue, there was obviously a lot more for me to observe here.

After several more fun filled days learning to walk again, I checked myself out of hospital and packed my few clothes into a bag, which I had placed on the bed. It was then I noticed the sign at the bed head on the wall, placed so there was no possibility of sighting it by a bed-ridden patient. It detailed all the instructions of how to operate the telephone, light switches and other

creature comforts placed directly underneath the sign , on the wall, out if reach and behind the pillow on which I had rested my head. I recalled how during my travels in Europe, I learned that the first Public hospital was designed and built in the mid 17th Century about 1660.

My, how far we have progressed !



Special Wines For Gifts or Celebrations.

I have re-established my Museum cellar of vintage Cleveland wines, which I am offering to my news-letter clients for purchase.

Since the beginning of production at Cleveland I managed to store examples most years and can supply you a list of the wines available and prices when you contact me.

I intend to create a web-site where you may browse, but it won't be until November after my return from the U.S.A.

Please contact me via email as the preferred method and I look forward to recommending wines for your occasion.

Heaven?

Paris is such an exciting and engaging place. From the moment of arrival from a torturous journey from London (a separate tale to tell) I felt a sense of enlightenment. The wonderful balance of architectural refinement and cultural beauty on this vast scale was incredibly refreshing to my emotion ‘battle-weary’ soul, still reeling from the upheaval of my departure from Cleveland, a demanding new business schedule in the U.S. and the constant hassle of airports and security checks.

A lovely little hotel room with a balcony view to the nearby spires of the Notre Dame and the busy plaza below inspired a refreshing tingle of enjoyment to my numbed senses. Time for a new vision of life! I could think of no better place to start. Despite jet lag and a desire to make contact with the real world (my internet connections were not working) I was dragged to an evening medieval music recital at “Saint Chappelle”. This was at the other end of the Notre Dame island and the most stunning 13th Century architectural masterpiece. One could not help being emotionally moved by the intimidating vastness of the beautiful towering cathedral windows and ceilings combined with the ancient melodies and soprano (sung in Castralto by Fabrice di Falco). Off to a restaurant meal sitting down at 11 p.m. was not a problem for our local bistro and after a nice premier Cru Beune to wash down the braised pigeon and veg, I was feeling very human.

Paris continued to delight us for the next few days before departing for my long overdue return to Bourgogne on yet another pilgrimage to my wine Mecca. Wild and windy storms enshrouded our drive south until we settled into a comfortable establishment in Chablis for the evening. A stark reminder of the devalued Australian dollar left us relieved of \$600 after a nice meal in reasonable surroundings!

My arrival in the Cote de Beaune at Meursault was as warmly received as if I had never left. The Bouzereau family treated us to several days of consecutive tastings and feasts, the highlight of which was the opening of a 1949 Volnay ‘Champons’ in offering to my recent birthday (my birth-year 1948 was apparently not a good year in Burgundy!). The wine was in sensational condition with a brilliant colour, lovely subtle palate textures and clear sweet fruit characters.

After checking in and out of several hotels and accommodation houses we finally found what we were looking for on the outskirts of my favourite village in Burgundy. ‘Meursault’ is a small Domain called “Moulin aux Moines”(Mill of the Monks) with their winery “Clos de Moines” or “Walled vineyard of the Monks” in rough translation, which offers rooms. Not the cheapest in town but the most wonderful accommodation environment I have had the pleasure of encountering. Shortly after checking in, my travelling companion called from the outside patio on the verge of the vineyard “Please bring the camera you must record my entry to heaven!” Seated on a stone paved walk way against a 10m high ancient and many faceted stone wall, a babbling brook between her and the sun soaked autumn coloured vineyard, it was easy to feel we had passed into another spiritual world. Life was good again.



Above: Hotel De Ville, Meursault

Remember What?

I recently suffered a near death experience in a fall from a truck onto my head. No insights to heaven for me, despite seeing many stars! But an awful headache for a month or more, a very stiff neck, some crushed vertebrae and a slight case of amnesia.

I've never suffered this before, so far as I remember, except when having to pay bills! So it came as an unexpected shock during conversations, such as what happened when accessing my Credit Card security details.

Merchant: "What is your mothers maiden name?"

Keith: "What do you mean??"

M: "Your mother ... you do have one?"

K: "Do I ? .. oh yes, of course I do, um .. what was the question?"

M: "Her maiden name"

K: "Whose?"

M: "Your mothers maiden name?"

K: "Good heavens!"

M: "I don't think that's correct.. are you all-right Mr. Brien?"

Then suddenly, it all flooded back into mind, leaving me feeling decidedly unsettled and quite embarrassed. So if you've had any strange conversations with me (stranger than normal!) please accept my apologies, as I have no recollection.

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I do/do not wish to receive your Silver Wings Newsletter or have changed our address, please fill out this form and return to me at your convenience.

Please remove/update my name from the Silver Wings mailing list:

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....

Email:

Return this form to:

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