

YARRA VALLEY WINE REGION TOUR

WINE GUILD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INC

4 OCT— 7 OCT 2016



INTRODUCTION

After more than twelve months of planning 31 members of the Guild met in Healesville, Victoria for our Yarra Valley Wine Region Tour. Six wineries were chosen to visit over three days and each one has been written about individually in this report. All members,

except one couple, stayed at the Yarra Valley Park Lane Big 4 Holiday Park. Most of us drove over from South Australia, some with caravans, some staying overnight at Horsham. A number of members took the opportunity to have a longer time away before or after the tour. A few couples stayed on to enjoy

some of the Yarra Valley Shedfest activities on the following weekend. The weather was still on the cold and wet side of the comfort meter but this simply meant we wore another layer of clothing. Due to inclement weather the Tuesday evening barbecue gathering was cancelled and replaced with a nibbles and drinks session the next evening around the fire in the 'games' room at the Park. This year we made the decision to hire a bus to take us to the wineries and Friday night's dinner. This was a great idea and added to the enjoyment of the three days. The final official gathering of the tour group was for dinner at the Yarra Glen Grand Hotel. We were provided with a private room surrounded by 'Olde Worlde' decor and enjoyed a very substantial and delicious meal together.

DOMAINE CHANDON

Day one of our Yarra Valley winery tour and we arrived at the stunningly attractive Domaine Chandon Winery, Australia's only sparkling specialists with genuine French heritage. We were met by Baptiste Lava (Wine Ambassador) who hosted our tour ably assisted during the wine tasting by Hospitality Operations Manager, Craig Toomer.

In 1987 they established their vineyards in the Yarra Valley with their first plantings of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir vines followed in 1990 with the opening of their cellar door. They have continued to grow premium grapes in this cool climate region. The architecture and setting of the winery, cellar door and associated buildings reflects the prestige of this famous brand.

Baptiste lead us through the history of Chandon in Australia and provided a brief explanation of the wine production whilst the group viewed sections of the winery from elevated walkways and platforms. In one of the riddling rooms he demonstrated the final processes of production of their methode traditionnelle sparkling wine.





The wine is produced from their own vineyards and from carefully selected contract vineyards within the cool climate Yarra Region.

They produce a number of sparkling and still wines of good to very good quality. These include Cuvee which is produced from the finest juice and NV sparkling which are made with the aim to create the same style each year. We learnt that there are many different types and qualities of sparkling wines made here

with the quality, in part, being determined by length of time on lees in the bottle before sale.

At the end of the presentation and generous tasting, we enjoyed shared platters for lunch in the equally impressive restaurant.

The wines tasted were:

- 2012 Vintage Brut
- 2012 Vintage Brut Rose
- 2011 Blanc de Noir
- 2005 Prestige Cuvee
- Cuvee Riche



COLDSTREAM HILLS

When James Halliday established Coldstream Hills in 1985 he did not make it easy for himself with respect to vineyard siting. The vineyards are on steeply sloping hillsides about 200m up from the valley floor. There is not much top soil either. Apparently he was endeavouring to copy the conditions found in Burgundy. An added, perhaps unforeseen bonus is that he built in some insurance against the effects of global warming. His decision was a good one because we could see the positive effects in the wines of Coldstream Hills.

The cellar door was located 800m from the winery, down by the road and space in the winery was limited, so we split into two groups and took turns at the cellar door and at the winery. As we were taken through the laboratories winemakers, Andrew Fleming and Greg Jarratt, showed us a couple of perpetual wooden spoon awards. One was a crushed letter box and the other a shovel which had been eaten away by acid. These objects were clearly products of events outside usual practice in the winery.



At the winery Andrew and Greg treated us to barrel samples of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir which demonstrated the differences between valley floor and higher altitude upper Yarra fruit. For example, Andrew explained that The Deer Park vineyard Pinot Noir 2016 displayed a "gorgeousness" that distinguished it from the valley floor fruit. We learned later that the 2015 version of this wine had just won a trophy at the Adelaide Wine Show.

The Deer Park vineyard is at 400m altitude. The wine was made using 100%

whole berries during fermentation, a process which adds to the gorgeousness. In contrast, the second Pinot Noir, also from 2016, was made from fruit from the Yarra Valley floor. Some whole bunches were used in the pressing. Andrew pointed out that the wine displayed "pith and tannin and some beetroot



characters.”

Under the ownership of Treasury Estates, Coldstream Hills has become a medium sized winery but it still has flexibility built into its operations with a gantry used to move tanks and equipment around in response to the demands of the vintage. At the cellar door we were generously treated to a large range of wines which continued the cool climate theme as seen in the barrel samples.

The overall experience gave us some special insight to the effects of cool climate, or should I say cold climate, because the wind coming up the hill on the day was icy. How Murray Trainor survived in just a polo shirt I don't know.

- Wines tasted were:
- 2013 Sparkling Pinot Noir Chardonnay
 - 2015 Sauvignon Blanc
 - 2015 Deer Farm Pinot Gris
 - 2015 Deer Farm Chardonnay
 - 2015 Single Vineyard Deer Farm Chardonnay
 - 2015 Reserve Chardonnay
 - 2015 Pinot Noir
 - 2015 Hazeldene Pinot Noir
 - 2015 Deer Farm Pinot Noir
 - 2015 Esplanade Pinot Noir
 - 2012 Merlot
 - 2014 Reserve Shiraz



SEVILLE ESTATE

Day two, after a very civilised starting time, we headed to the Upper Yarra Valley to the Seville Estate Winery which is set in a picturesque location commanding great views of the countryside. We were warmly greeted by Graham and Margaret Van Der Meulen and their dog, Betty. This couple purchased the winery in Dec 2005 after moving from Queensland where he was a successful builder and developer. Their vision is to build on Seville's reputation for excellence in production of boutique cool climate wines and they have a clear understanding that 'truly great wines are made in the vineyard.'

Dr Peter McMahon planted the first vines at Seville Estate in 1972 and it is his grandson, Dylan McMahon, who is the current winemaker.

The 20 acres of vines are grown in deep red volcanic clay producing low yields.

The estate also houses a function centre where we gathered for our wine tasting and lunch whilst not being able to take our eyes off the wonderful vista offered through the large floor to ceiling windows.



Their wines have just picked up four trophies in the recent Yarra Valley Wine Show. In the James Halliday Chardonnay Challenge they were awarded the 2nd top Reserve Chardonnay.

This speaks volumes as to the quality of the wine some of which is sold to China and purchased by Qantas.

There are three levels of wine in the range being Barber, Estate and Reserve and all of these are made on site. We had a very generous wine tasting which included the 2005 Old Vine Reserve and the Seville Estate Dr McMahon Shiraz.





This was followed by a very tasty and enjoyable lunch prepared by Margaret who not only grows some of the produce but acts as Chef for the cellar door and functions.

Some of the other wines we tasted included:

- 2013 Sparkling Blanc de Blanc
- 2015 Barber Chardonnay
- 2015 Reserve Chardonnay
- 2004 Estate Chardonnay
- 2014 Estate Riesling
- 2015 Rose
- 2014 Estate Pinot Noir
- 2012 Estate Shiraz



DOMINIQUE PORTET

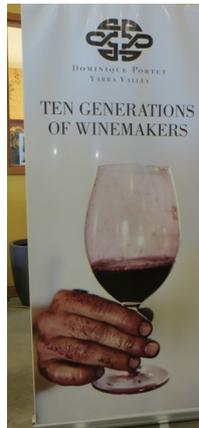
As we approached the cellar door building at Dominique Portet we could see that it had a French look about it with several French doors facing out to what was a beautiful sunny day. Expectations were high since the winery is one of the more well known in the Yarra Valley, having been established in 2000 by a wine identity. Reading the information on the web site also raises expectations about the nature of his wines because we are told that Dominique Portet is a ninth generation winemaker from Bordeaux and his father was régisseur (vineyard and winery manager) at the first growth classified Châteaux Lafite-Rothschild in Pauillac.

We were taken by the nervous but keen Gina to the winery where we saw that a new bottling line was in the process of being installed. It looked expensive in its stainless steel cladding. Again it raised expectations. No expense was being spared to maintain control over wine quality.

Then to the climate controlled maturation facility where we saw lots of French oak barrels with the characteristic red stained centre section. It seems that it is a French tradition to deliberately stain the whole section for aesthetic reasons. Red stains around just the plug hole does look messy, doesn't it?

We also saw some sparkling wine bottles in storage. Gina explained that the wine was made from Tasmanian fruit from 2006 and was maturing on lees. That's a very long time on lees. No, we did not taste it.

Then on to the tasting room. Five wines were neatly lined up. The anticipation was palpable. Gina was doing her best to host us. It's OK Gina, we won't bite.





The first wine was the NV Brut Rosé made from the three classic Champagne varieties, Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay. Very nice. Pippa the wine maker came in to answer questions. She explained that Petit Verdot and Malbec were being grown and this was the first year that the fruit had been vinified. So far so good. Presumably it is destined for a Bordeaux blend. Next the 2016 Sauvignon Blanc and the 2016 Fontaine Rosé made from Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Shiraz. Both beautifully made delicious wines. Expectations were beginning to be satisfied, but like Oliver Twist, we wanted more.

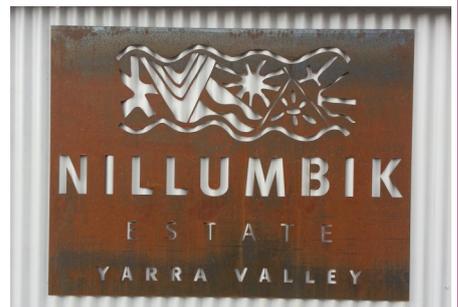
Next were the 2013 Pinot Noir made from Gippsland fruit and the wine for which Dominique Portet has developed a well-earned reputation, the premium 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon made from Yarra Valley fruit with 5% merlot added. It spent 18 months in oak. Both wines clearly deserved the title "premium" and they showed the finesse that Gina was promoting as a point of difference. They left us salivating for more.



NILLUMBİK ESTATE

Nillumbik Estate was the wildcard entry. It came highly recommended by a friend but there was still an element of risk. What did we really know about this winery? We piled in the bus on the Friday morning and set off for a location, not in the Yarra Valley itself but in the hills surrounding the valley in the Shire of Nillumbik. Up the side road and into the bush until we came to the entrance which was barely wide enough to swing a cat let alone a large bus. The bus driver earned his money as he negotiated the driveway and parking bay. No cars. No people. Not even a cellar door dog.

Well, any doubts quickly dissipated as soon as we entered the winery. It was small but it had a welcoming vibe. Tables for 31 people had been squeezed in. Very cosy. The winemaker and proprietor John Tregambe was there with some helpers to give us a warm welcome and it was not long before we were all seated and being treated to an engaging introduction to Nillumbik Estate. John with the aid of PowerPoint told us how his family have been making wines in Italy for several generations and his father, who is 80 years old, still does the lion's share of the hand pruning. He opened to the public in 2013. The site is on a steep hillside facing north. The topsoil is thin and so the vines bear only 1.5 to 3 tons per acre.



John then took us into the vineyard to give us a feel for the terroir. The impression was that it is a very harsh environment. As we were to discover it is one that yields great results. In the cramped winery John proudly showed us his Italian machines. A Mori crusher de-stemmer and a bladder press. The storage cellar was packed to the gills with more barrels, fermenters and stacks of finished wine. His wines are as natural as possible so he uses added sulphur judiciously.



Back at the cellar door we began the Master Class. With the aid of flavour charts and a score sheet he carefully took us through the wine judging process. Masked, in front of us we had two of his Pinot Noir wines. The Domenic's Paddock 2013 and the same from 2015 which had just been bottled. First we scored each wine for colour and clarity, then for aroma and finally for palate and finish. John was brave enough to allow us to score his wines. He was very interested in the result. By consensus, the 2013 received a gold medal and the 2015 a silver. The 2013 had many of us issuing oohs and aahs. A very alluring mix of fresh berries and barnyard/forest floor characters. Unfortunately, because John had only five bottles left we could only take home the memory.



But that's not all. The tasting was followed by a generous lunch of all you can eat pizza which was cooked on the spot as only the Italians can do it. A glass of wine was included. Other wines available for tasting were the Northern Hills Chardonnay 2015, the 2015 Domenic's Paddock Pinot Noir, the Back Block Petit Verdot 2014 from King Valley fruit, the Matteo Nebbiolo 2013 from King Valley fruit and the Boomer's Block Shiraz 2013. All of them were tempting.

It was an experience that, apparently, everyone enjoyed immensely. John's enthusiasm and passion for winemaking was infectious. So much so that the bus driver was kept very busy loading boxes of wine into the boot of the bus.



BALGOWNIE ESTATE VINEYARD RESORT & SPA

After another relaxing ride in the bus we arrived at the last of our six wineries included in our Yarra Valley wine region tour. The bus to ferry us around meant everybody could relax in between winery visits and not have to worry about finding the venue or parking once we got there. McKenzie's Tourist Services certainly provided an excellent service and must have put on their best drivers as we couldn't have wished for better service.

We knew that Balgownie was quite a big commercial concern in the Yarra which included accommodation and a restaurant and we had an opportunity to view this, at least from the outside, as we waited briefly for our hosts to organise seating for us in their restaurant so we could rest our weary bones whilst tasting their wine. Very civilized!!



Emma provided us with a brief history of Balgownie and their holdings in both the Bendigo region, where their winery is, and Yarra Valley. The original vines were planted in Bendigo in 1969. These were established by the legendary winemaker, Stuart Anderson. At this time Balgownie was noted for producing some seriously good reds and more recent expansion has seen the addition of white wines into their stable. In 2002 the Yarra Valley site was purchased and Pinot Noir and Chardonnay were planted on the 7 hectare vineyard. The 2002 Pinot Noir plantings matured to the extent that an Estate Pinot Noir was offered for the first time in 2013 being produced from low yielding vines and producing a lovely intensity and depth of flavour. Amongst our tastings was the 2014 Estate Pinot Noir.

Emma was very knowledgeable about the wines and provided us with details about each wine we tasted. This information and the wine were well received and sparked further questions from our group.



The tasting included both reds and whites from across their range, a couple of museum cabernet sauvignons and nicely finished with their Bendigo Tawny Fortified Shiraz.

Wines tasted were:

NV Premium Cuvee Sparkling Brut
2014 Estate Yarra Valley Chardonnay (12 months in French Oak)
2015 Black Label Pinot Noir
2014 Estate Yarra Valley Pinot Noir
2014 Black Label Cabernet Merlot (90% Cabernet, 10% Merlot)
2012 Bendigo Shiraz
2001 Shiraz (under cork, Bendigo grapes)
2013 Estate Cabernet Sauvignon
1999 Cabernet Sauvignon (fruit driven, mellowed tannins)
Bendigo Tawny Fortified Shiraz (NV, fruit cake flavours)



THANK YOU

Our feedback clearly indicated that everybody had a great time and this was due to many people playing their part. This all started over twelve months ago with Roger King, Geoff Lawrie and Pete Rawlins taking on the planning with both Roger and Geoff doing the lion's share of negotiating with the six wineries. Well done to the both of you. I lost count of the emails that were generated to make sure that every detail was properly sorted out.

Firstly, a big thank you to all our winery hosts and staff who made sure our experience was as good as they could provide. We came away with more knowledge including a good understanding of wine making in the Yarra Valley and with many good wines to add to our 'to buy' lists. Not to mention all the wine we brought home with us!

Great job from our bus drivers, Roger and Bill, we felt very safe in your hands.

Thank you to the staff at the Big 4 who made sure our accommodation was trouble free and comfortable. We loved the bird and wildlife. Also, to the Yarra Glen Grand Hotel who made sure our Friday night meal was a gathering to be remembered.

Thank you Geoff Lawrie for writing three of the winery summaries in this report. Also a thank you for the photos in this report from Di Rawlins, Pete Rawlins, Roger King and Geoff Lawrie. Many thanks also to Phil Harris whose notes, taken at each winery, helped so much in the construction of this report.

A big thank you to those who did the introductions and thank yous – Roger King, Geoff Lawrie, Di Rawlins, Christa Mano, Rex Hutton and Pete Rawlins.

It took many people to make this tour work well, so thank you for sharing the workload. Now for the next Wine Region Tour in 2018!!!!