



VINE Life

NUMBER 3/2012

No forgetting

It was Remembrance Day. That and our 2,000 stiff white vine shields lined up in military formation, reminded me of the carefully-tended war cemeteries of the Somme, with their thousands of white tombstones. We'd been there not that long ago tracking the route of Brad's grandfathers who both fought in France in WWI. A sobering experience.



Two thousand white vine shields stand guard around the baby vines in the new vineyard

At 11 am, November 11, I straightened my aching back to gaze across the sea of white vine shields and reflect. I thought how fortunate I was, despite the tedious and back-breaking task on which I was occupied.

For days, while Brad wrestled a tall shield into place around every seedling, I had been carefully taping each one to the trickle line. Essential if we didn't want them blown away, destroying the new vines as they took flight.

We'd had two magnificent young men in to plant the vines a few days earlier. Dread-locks to their shoulders, broad and tanned, they cheerfully and expertly planted our new *petit manseng* and *montepulciano* vines in their new beds directly in front of the winery site. We were so

Brad digging in a 'dead man'



grateful to our friends the Kirkwoods and Carlsons for being here to help prepare the vine shields and lay out the seedlings for the planters.

Setting up the new vineyard has been demanding work for Brad, although he had some muscle boys in to heave the 52 seriously heavy ironbark strainers into place. Everything else Brad has done. Weeks spent marking out, putting out trickle lines and mid row poles, digging in the stays and 'dead men' and preparing the soil. Thankfully, our good friend Rob Abbas helped him sow legumes and grasses in the interrows. Now we just have to watch over the new babies and hope their little heads emerge one day out the top of the vine shields .

Phil Kirkwood & Phil Carlson put out the baby vines for the planters





from leaf bud



to flower buds



to tiny white flowers



and finally, berry set.

The big burst

Spring has busted out all over the vineyard. This is our first ‘bud burst’ and it’s a big thrill. The local wine industry celebrated the event with a special dinner. It’s a time of renewal and energy and a wake up call that the next vintage is on the way after the vines’ long winter sleep. It will be early starts from now on.

First a tiny woolly bud appears, then a couple of minuscule leaves. Then the new growth bursts forth, gathering pace each day so that within a few short weeks, the vineyard goes from rows of dead-looking vines to long, curling tendrils covered with bright

green leaves and what looks like miniature bunches of grapes. These are the vine flowers that soon open up into tiny white flowers, then one by one, fall away. Within days of ‘cap fall,’ berries appear, pinhead-sized at first, but soon growing into recognizable bunches of grapes.

As with last vintage, the Fiano was first away and the Graciano the last. Each day now there are more and more tiny berries forming and if no hail arrives to spoil our fun, we’ll be putting those bird nets out again before we know it.



The colours of sunset taken just a week ago. The vineyard clothed in green and the S-bend over the new culvert in the foreground.

We’re on a road to somewhere...

Self-described ‘earth sculptor’, Mark McNichol came with his giant machines and built us a beautiful road to the future winery that is the work of a true artist.

Our new road through the property winds for almost two kms from the creek crossing near our entry, past our old cottage, does a chicane around two large gums and across a new culvert over the wide spoon drain, then hugs the vineyard until it crosses a second culvert. It then turns sharply west, passes through our stone pine plantation and ends up in the future car park of the new winery. It is indeed a masterpiece and gives me a lot of pleasure to look at and take early

morning strolls along its hard-packed gravelly surface. I am tempted to try out my grand-daughter’s bicycle along the straight. Perhaps when Brad isn’t looking...

Soon we’ll have the big bang here. We’ve had a visit from the local powder monkey who is to blow up some huge rocks in the way of the new underground cellar. Mark McNichol will be here to dig out the remains, most of which we hope, will be used in the construction of a two-metre high stone wall around the winery. More details on that next issue. Our Development Application is currently with the local Council.

Good-bye to all that

Although I loved this place on sight, I took an instant dislike to the ugly old iron shed that stood near the cottage.

It was the focus of attention as visitors drove up to the house. That and the ancient Hills Hoist, which provided wonderful views of my knickers waving to all new arrivals from the washing line. Well, now the eyesores have both gone thanks to Barry & Janice Lake who moved the washing line, and Robyn & Ian Webb and their girls who demolished the shed. Ian wielded a huge sledge hammer like an Olympian while Brad gave it a final tug with the tractor and it came down, to loud cheering.

Down comes the old shed



Where is our wine?

For those who are eagerly awaiting wines from our first vintage, the whites are now in bottles for release in mid 2013. The reds are in barrels for bottling next year and release mid 2014. Here are winemaker **Mike Hayes'** notes on our two white wines:

2012 WILD YEAST VIOGNIER

Exotic aromas of marmalade and tropical fruits with a touch of citrus peering through. The delicious palate exhibits dried apricot and stone fruit flavours intricately balanced with a hint of smoky oak and seamless acid.

Viognier has been grown in the Rhone Valley of France for around 2,000 years. It almost disappeared after the fall of the Roman Empire, was revived in the 9th century and almost lost again after WWII when only a few hectares remained. It is one of the few aromatic wines to pair well with seafood as well as most Asian dishes. Or just enjoy it with soft cheeses as an aperitif.

2012 FIANO CLASSICO

Enchanting aromas of white peach and passionfruit with a fragrant honeysuckle lift. The seductive flavours of tropical fruit, including pawpaw and lychee, deliver richness to a powerful finish of nectarine and melon elegantly balanced with structured acid.

Fiano has its origins in ancient Rome. Virgil, Cato and Pliny the Elder, knew the variety as *apianum* and the latter wrote that it was one of the few Roman wines worth drinking. With intense flavours and aromas it is one of the few whites that can be enjoyed with seafood and poultry as well as red meat.

Wild things

Here's an update on some of the wildlife that calls Savina Lane home.

Young Joey and his mother, our resident Eastern Grey kangaroos, have been joined by a large male. Mum is probably carrying another little joey. While wary of us, they don't seem as flighty these days.

We had a short visit from a huge Black Swan. The wood ducks, grebes, herons, egrets, cormorants and the little Eurasian coots seemed happy to share the lake with him.



A squadron of rosellas and parrots have been taking more than their share of the gorgeous plums on the old tree near the house.

Brad has now twice rescued a small turtle from bird attack. And tiny green frogs are entertaining us again at night, catching unwary insects on the outside of the windows.



Three wee rabbits, the size of chocolate Easter bunnies, are now residing near the machinery shed.

The huge water dragons are back in the creek and at least one red-bellied black snake lives in our pile of granite boulders near the pines.

We don't mind sharing.



Brad does his bit as a wine show steward

Some of the pink stuff please

The Australian Small Winemakers' Show was held late October in Stanthorpe. Brad and I were among the 30 or so local people in the wine industry who acted as stewards at the Public Tasting that followed a week of judging by some renowned winemakers from around Australia and NZ.

The 450 folk who managed to get tickets to the public event, first enjoyed lunch with entertainment, then had the chance to taste 1650 wines produced by smaller vineyards from across the country and NZ. Of course, no-one managed to taste them all, but a few tried. Spittoons were under-utilised.

Every entry in the Show had a Class number (mainly based on variety) and an individual entry number. There were 88 classes, including sparkling and fortified and some experimental wines, as well as just about every variety of white and red wine grown in Australia and NZ.

To enter, a winery must produce less than 200 tonnes of grapes annually. (When in full production, we'll be lucky to produce 15-20 tonnes. At least we'll qualify for entry!)

Patrons selected tastings by class and entry number from their Show booklet. Some were serious about the tasting and went for all the gold-awarded wines, others just asked for some nice 'pink' stuff or something sparkly, it didn't matter what or whose. Our job was to locate the selection, pour a taste for the patron, then race back to the table and return the bottle in the right class and number order so other stewards could find it.

Earlier that week we had joined Ewen and Elissa McPherson, owners of Symphony Hill Wines, (where our wine is being made), at the awards presentation dinner. We were almost as delighted as they were with their scoop of gold and silver medals and a special trophy.

Granite Belt wineries did exceptionally well. Golden Grove took out the top national award for Champion Small Winery and needed a trailer to take their haul of medals home. The judging panel Chairman, a famous winemaker from the Barossa Valley, noted that the Granite Belt only produces about 0.1% of Australian wine, but had won more than 11% of the gold medals on offer at the Show. Encouraging that.

The last word for 2012

It has been almost a year to the day since we first set out for Rivendell ...woops, that's Frodo's line...since we first set eyes on Savina Lane.

Not for a moment have either of us regretted the change in our lives. As the year draws to a close we have many amazing memories of our first four seasons on the vineyard, many of which concern our gold-standard friends who helped us do what had to be done to bring the place up to the mark.

Now that there are no more horrible jobs to do - all those 'one-off' things have been done - Brad can enjoy working quietly in the vines and driving his tractor while I have time to plan a lovely garden and perhaps find time for some writing or even sewing.

The old perfumed roses that I pruned last autumn rewarded me by exploding with squillions of blossoms. Ditto for the lavender. The wisteria needs a stern talking to, but I'll have time for that now.

So, for those who came, saw and worked so hard - thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We wish you a satisfying end to the year, a peaceful Christmas season and many happy returns to Savina Lane in 2013. Next time, just enjoy!

Have you missed out?

If this is the first *Vine Life* you've read, you might like to catch up on the story of Savina Lane. Just send us an email and we'll forward you the previous two issues. Or phone us at: 07 4683 5377

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