



VINE *Life*

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Building Rome



The blast, with a sound like muted thunder, thrust tonnes of earth and rubble skywards. Watching from a safe distance, we felt the pressure move through the deep rock under our feet.

The great pile of earth had been carefully placed for safety reasons, over a massive stone shelf drilled with 58 charges. It comprised only a small portion of the 300sqm we needed to clear for our underground cellar. At 1.6m depth we hit rock. Not just any giant granite pancake though. Granite as hard as a rajah's diamonds.

Expensive drill rods and tungsten-tipped drill heads are being broken one after the other. Our blasting expert avows he has not before seen granite of such density.

We had been jubilant to receive Council approval for our new winery complex just before Christmas and had hurried forward with excavation work. Now the site preparation budget has been well and truly blown. Into a fourth week of blasting, the number of explosive charges used now stands in the hundreds and still rising.

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Watching his funds being blasted away is not good for Brad. A certain serenity of character is required. 'Action-man' is tearing his hair out. He was heard to grumble that if the architects could have found a site with more rock, it wouldn't have been at Savina Lane!

The need to store our wine in optimum conditions for long periods is what is driving this whole process. Buried beneath the winery, we are hoping the cellar will not require cooling or heating, or if it does, only minimally, during extreme weather conditions. The concept is sound, the result will make us unique in this

region and one of the few wineries in Australia with such environmentally-sustainable wine storage. Already we have had an enquiry from another wine producer to lease space should it be available.

But it all takes time. And patience. The good news is we start harvesting our second vintage next week, so Brad's attention will be elsewhere for a time.

And as far as progress on the excavation work goes, we'll just have to pretend we're building Rome.

I seem to recall that *it* wasn't built in a day either.



The dense granite makes it tough on drills



Brad with a giant's finger

...a roman coin or two?

Chip, scrape, clunk! The silvery trowel hit something hard. A giant sigh escaped the wielder of the small implement, who was toiling in the rows between the new baby vines.

I was engaged in winking out hundreds of sometimes football-sized balls of granite that sat on or just below the surface of the inter-rows. Left in their beds, they would soon be covered by a thick sward of green grass and lie in wait to wreck the new mower.

Digging in the dirt was something I'd dreamed about doing when I was young. I wanted to be a professor of archeology. I read tomes like "*Gods, Graves & Scholars*" instead of doing what teenagers usually do. My mother often snorted that the only kind of professor I was likely to be was an absent-minded one. Chores were often 'forgotten' because I had my head in a book.

As an avid fan of *Time Team* I was ideally suited to this particular task in the new vineyard and lightened the drudgery of it by imagining I was searching for ancient artefacts. One has to do something to avoid tedium, *n'est-ce pas?*



Cheryl with just a few of the rocks taken from the new vineyard

I piled the rocks into small chortens at the end of each row - all 26 of them. These were later shovelled by our kind son Erin, onto the back of Brutus, the Triton ute and dumped at the culverts on the new road for use in building stone headwalls to prevent erosion.

Sadly, although I did find one interesting-shaped stone, no pieces of anglo-saxon pottery, roman coins or even an ancient arrowhead were uncovered. But I haven't given up. After all, Schliemann kept looking for Troy until he thought he'd found it.



Two 'bridesmaids' help Brad put out the veils

Weapon of mass reduction

The French would laugh and pull out the shotgun. The hunting season every October ensures few birds survive to steal from French vineyards.

Yes, the birds are back. And the battle has begun. If birds could read, their *Lonely Planet* guide to Savina Lane would read something like this:

Five acres of premium fruit. Owners harmless fools with no shotguns or dogs. Emergency rescue service for birds caught in netting provided

One of our many joys here at Savina Lane is watching the bird life. But, at this time of year, rather than delight in the feathered legions massing on our borders, we take up arms and head out to make war on them armed with anything that makes a racket.

This year *veraison*, when the grapes turn from bright green to purple-red, or light gold in the case of the white varieties, has come early, due to January's heat waves. The feeding frenzy had already started well before we managed to put our nets out.

In some areas on the Granite Belt, vines unprotected by netting can be stripped in days. The trouble is, it's a lot of trouble putting it out and bringing it in.

We are now trialing Brad's new invention, which he built himself for only a few hundred dollars. A sturdy steel frame welded to a 3-point linkage, is attached to the back of the tractor. It supports a half-wool-bale sized bag that holds one row-length of netting. On a pole attached to the frame is an oval-shaped ring that can be suspended above the vine row. The net is fed out through this as the tractor crawls along. Two 'bridesmaids' walk on either side of the vine-row to pull the white veil-like netting down to the ground.

A new method of fastening the netting is also being trialed in the *graciano*. Instead of the usual wrap-around system which requires clips around each of the vines and often results in nets being held tight against the fruit, lengths of wire are placed at ground level on each side of the vine row. The nets are fed under these, pulled taut and if necessary, clipped in place. This system also helps hold the nets out away from the fruit, making life more difficult for the thieves.

It's a good start, but there are still many hours to be spent in the war room, perfecting our weapon of mass reduction that will, we hope, discourage the feathered bombardment of our vineyard every year.

Below Left: Veraison in the graciano

Below: the new system, less work if the nets go out just right.



Hey babe, take a look at you now...

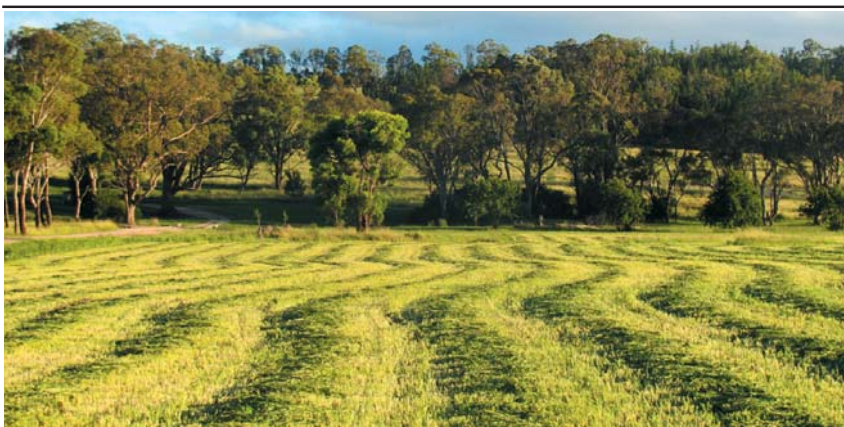


The baby Montepulciano vines are thriving
We've had a 95% strike rate from the two acres of tiny banded vines planted last Spring.

The selected varieties, in this case, Montepulciano and Petit Manseng, were grafted onto a root stock with the right characteristics - such as vigour and disease resistance - for this region, in a special vine nursery. This strike result is gratifying, as we've heard that up to 40% or higher loss in new plantings can occur with banded vines.

But now Brad needed to trim the lateral growth off the dominant shoot and clean out dead leaves and tiny weeds that had found sanctuary inside the vine shields. My job was to open each one then follow behind him to close the shields and re-tape if necessary. But it only seemed like yesterday I had spent weeks taping all 2000 of them to the trickle line to prevent the wind blowing them away. Now I had to undo all that!

I know it's no use complaining to my friends about this. Some people of my acquaintance have unkindly suggested the work is good for me and better than going to the gym!.



Mulch ado

Brad planted millet last spring to use as mulch in the vineyard. Above is a picture of the millet after cutting and before the machine arrived to turn it into big round bales. Our grandson Rohan says *Savina Lane* is a *real farm* now!



Something to celebrate

Hard to believe but we are now into our second vintage at Savina Lane, which means we've lived here for a whole year. Through four magical seasons where every day has brought us something to marvel at, to take pleasure in, to make our hearts soar, even if, at times, our bodies have complained.

We celebrated by opening a bottle of our own wine. The 2012 *Fiano Classico* is everything we hoped for and as our winemaker, Mike Hayes says, it will just get better and better over time.

It is likely we will have a limited release of our first vintage white wines later this year, just for our friends, the readers of this newsletter.

To help us celebrate our first anniversary here, the Symphony Hill connection came around with a gift of bottles of their gorgeous 2003 *Reserve Pinot Noir* and a 2002 *Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon* from their Museum collection.

Our *Fiano* was duly tasted, discussed and given the thumbs up of approval. They also approved of Brad's sushi dinner as there was very little of it left at the end of the night.

It's bad but it could be so much worse

Thanks to all who have been worried about how our vines are dealing with the constant drizzle, misty grey skies and bursts of heavy rain given that we are so close to harvest and the grapes need sunshine to make sugar.

The answer is, not well. But when we hear of farmers in other parts of Queensland who have lost crops entirely or are right now watching them rot in the paddock, we don't dare have a whinge.

Yesterday we detected the first signs of *botrytis* in the tempranillo, despite having taken preventative measures using the latest science.

If the bad weather is prolonged and the grapes don't receive a good bout of sunshine soon, it is likely we will lose a serious portion of the crop this year and the alcohol levels will be down. How much down and how badly affected by disease, will depend on how much more rain we have. As well as rot, they are vulnerable to splitting due to the amount of water they are taking in through the soil.

There is no sign yet of *botrytis* in the fiano. We tested it a couple of days ago. The pH and acid levels were excellent and the Baumé level, which measures the sugar levels in unfermented grapejuice, (thus giving the winemaker an indication of the potential alcohol content of the future wine), was almost exactly the same as last year...and we know how good that vintage is, (and you will too when it is released).

Despite our concerns about the crop, we rejoice to see our tanks overflowing, the ground water table way up, the creek racing over the top of our small bridge, the spoon drains looking like silvery canals and the dam overflowing into the grassy paddock in front of the cottage. Until now we were in rainfall deficit for the year so the extra water will have some positive effects.

And with our decomposed granite soils, we have no problem getting into the vineyard. No muddy boots at Savina Lane so we are luckier than many..

We are starting to learn, like everyone else engaged in agriculture, that there will be good years and bad. But we hope we don't get the ones that are worse.

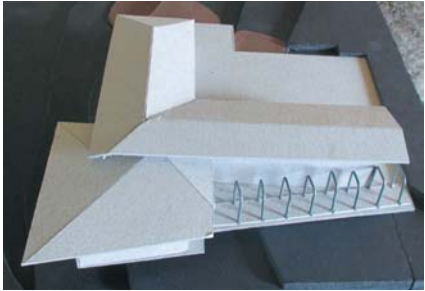


Above: Wide spoon drains act as canals to take water away from the vineyard and direct it into the dam, which is now also overflowing.

Below: the little bridge over the creek is now under water



The winery & cellar door take shape



Pictured above is a model of our new winery complex. The cellar door in the lower left corner, has a kite-shaped roofline.

Architects Peter Roy and Julie Derrick have been working on the final design of our new winery complex for months now and we are close to lodging our building plans. With a little luck we'll start construction by the end of winter. They've both been regular visitors to Savina Lane and I am beginning to think they like Brad's cooking as much as designing our winery, although one or other of them usually brings home-made morning tea.

The complex comprises a winery building that sits above the underground wine storage cellar and a plant room, cool room and bottling room under the same roof as a new machinery shed (but quite separate). There will also be a water treatment plant and all services will be underground.

The cellar door, built on the western flank of the winery building, will feature a long curved bar where we will offer tastings; a viewing deck over the vineyard; a built-in fireplace and a gift shop where we hope to sell some beautiful wine-related and hand-crafted items. There will be a kitchen where Brad can cook our lunch and a roomy office for the two of us to share with a panoramic view of the vines.

If things go well, we hope to launch the new cellar door in late 2014 to coincide with the release of our 2012 vintage red wines. You will be invited.

Top right: Architects Peter Roy, Julie Derrick discuss the design of the winery with Brad

Below: View of Savina Lane from the hill to the south. Our cottage is centre right and the small red star marks the site of the new winery complex



And that's that!

Only other bit of STOP PRESS news is that our application to close the narrow lane that leads into our property has been approved by the State Government and once the survey plan has been registered we will be able to start fencing and re-grading it. Might even plant some rose bushes along the verges.

The idea of closing the lane came from Architect Peter Roy who saw the advantage of us been able to have an impressive entry and signage on the more important road, rather than be hidden away at the end of a gravel lane that was accessed via two cattle grids. It was an inspired idea.

Our neighbours have been wonderful and fully supported the idea of closing the lane even though it will mean their cattle will no longer be able to graze it.

If you are up this way, come and see the progress on the winery and have a stroll in the vineyard. But you had better bring your gumboots.

Cheers **Brad & Cheryl Hutchings**



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If you've missed out on Issues 1-3 and would like to be part of the ongoing story of Savina Lane, send us an email and we'll forward the back issues to you and add your name to our circle of Friends of Savina Lane for future updates.