



Un grand merci!

Whether you bought our wine because you were desperately in need of some Viognier and Fiano in your cellar, or whether you wanted to try Savina Lane's first vintage (more likely), or even whether you just wanted to support us in another of our slightly crazy?? endeavours (much more likely), we thank you for your orders and especially for those re-orders. We have been humbled by the enthusiasm and generosity of you all.

However, after lugger nine bottles of our wine to France in August, for benchmarking against some excellent whites from Condrieu - France's number one region for Viognier, we've come back bursting with pride and can report that you have spent your money wisely. Our Frogs loved both the Savina Lane Viognier and the Fiano. (More about what happened next page).

We are setting some of what remains aside for our museum and for sale next year as we've decided to hold our 2013 white wine over until 2015, so if you do want to order some 2012 for Christmas, let us know pronto.

There is a huge amount of new wine available everywhere, but little that has been aged at the winery. This, we believe, is where we want to take Savina Lane. But it is a long wait and a huge investment in stock. When we release our 2012 red wines we will have four vintages of red wine in the cellar or the winery and three years of whites.

With the opening of our new cellar door in 2015, we're expecting some of our French connections to descend on us to be part of the celebrations, but, as always, Vine Life friends will have first dibs.

And by the way, if you haven't tried the Fiano for a while, try one again now it has had time to settle down in the bottle. It gets better every week.



Recognise any of these Frogs who've already paid us a visit? The remainder threaten to descend in 2015. From left: Catherine, Jean-Luc, Zorah, the famous Henriette draped around Brad, Champy, Jean-Jacques, Veronique, Annette & father, Francois. We drank Savina Lane Viognier as aperitif and Jean-Jacques supplied three magnificent reds of three different years from the same vineyard in Cornas for a vertical tasting with the main course. Fabuleux!

Frogs don't spare feelings

Unlike many of our Aussie friends who would say our wine was 'lovely' even if it tasted awful because their hearts are good and kind, our French connections never spare one's feelings. It's just not their way.

We had several wine tastings with groups of serious wine collectors, buyers and resellers. And others who just drink a lot (like those on Page 1). Our objective was to have some 'brutal' assessments. We were prepared for our French connections not to like our wines and were ready to take it on the chin.

We started gently though, with some wine-loving friends in Lausanne. "I was pretty sceptical, but now I'm just impressed," one of them said of the Viognier. Scepticism of Australian wine is always the starting point in France.

But the real test came when our oenologist friend Marie, who has her own wine marketing business, put together a panel for a double-blind tasting in BLACK glasses, putting our Viognier up against three viogniers from Condrieu. We protested that our wine was still very young and it wasn't strictly fair to compare it with wines from 2000, 2006 and 2010 but she just smiled and said we'd see.

Now if you've never tasted a wine you haven't looked at first, it is something you should try. "We first eat with our eyes," said some famous chef. That could be amended to we also "drink with our eyes". Not being able to see the colour of the wine means one gains no clues as to its age, especially with white wines.

One by one the panel (which included us), tasted the wines. And now you can have a good laugh because neither Brad nor I picked our own wine and both thought it had not been included in the tasting at all. But we diligently made our notes and gave our preferences. We were astounded at the end of the tasting to be told that our young Viognier had narrowly trumped all the others, being placed either as first preference or second by everyone present.

The assessment of the Fiano was equally positive, although the group had never tasted one before, they all found it well-balanced, delicate, fresh and fruity, as an aromatic should be.

We were particularly delighted to overhear Marie telling a vigneron we visited at Condrieu the next day that our wine had beaten three different examples of AOC Condrieu viognier in a blind tasting the evening before. He was astonished.



Some of the black glasses used for Marie's blind tasting

Marie Bouteille will visit us at Savina Lane one of these days to present a few wine appreciation courses, including some black glass tastings. She is a graduate of the famous wine college at Macon in Burgundy and worked in that region before starting her own wine business. She laughed at our embarrassment at not being able to pick out our own wine and said that often happens with vignerons.

Marie can be tricky though. She told us that during one course she ran, she put slightly salty water into the black glasses and many people thought it was wine and gave it an assessment! (Would I have been tricked? Glad I didn't have to find out).

Marie's wine courses are fully booked whenever she gives them and, having been to one several years ago on a visit to France, I found them not only instructive, but a lot of fun too.

And so, from one end of France to the other, as our load of wine bottles became lighter, our confidence grew. By the time we presented a bottle of Viognier to our Swedish friends, Pia and Anders (yes, they are the same ones I wrote about in *Other People's Kitchens*) who had flown down to France from Stockholm, just to spend one night with us, we knew they'd like it.

"I was sceptical," said Anders, with a grin, "but this is very good. I'm impressed."

Spring sprang and then Jack came back...



Above: The Fiano got away well, but Jack has damaged around 5% of the new growth

It looked like we were off to an early but good start for the 2014 vintage, but as so often happens with any form of agriculture, the weather gods love to play tricks.

Bud burst came a month early due to the unseasonally hot weather. Temps in the vineyard in mid-September reached 37C. During our absence a mighty hailstorm had caused some damage to the first buds but nothing too drastic and when Brad arrived back from France, the Fiano already had new canes thrusting from the stubby spurs left after pruning just a couple of months ago. A beautiful bright green fuzz covered the vineyard.

Then, Jack Frost came back bringing with him below zero temperatures that killed about 25% of the new growth on our Old Vine Shiraz and about 5% of the Fiano. So far the rest seems to have escaped with damage to only an odd leaf or two.

We were hoping our third vintage was going to be another one like the perfect 2012 year, but as always, it's in the lap of the gods. However there are compensations. Seeing dry, dead-looking 'sticks' come alive is a magical experience.

Below and right: Frost damage to our precious Old Vine Shiraz heritage block

Below: First tiny buds appear followed by small flower heads that will become bunches of grapes.



Savina Lane goes to State Parliament House



Ewen Macpherson of Symphony Hill Wines (left) showed Brad the ropes at State Parliament House

When asked to suggest a small Granite Belt winery for a presentation to some people engaged in wine marketing in China and other influential members of the Chinese community, our friend Ewen Macpherson from Symphony Hill Wines, kindly put forward our name to share his stand.

The presentation was held at State Parliament House in Brisbane the night before we left for France, which made things a bit tricky, but we managed to put brochures and signage together in just a few days and pack ourselves, our wine, the displays and our luggage for France all into the Tiguan and drive down off the mountain to Brisbane in time to check into a CBD hotel. We had to be at Parliament House early enough to prepare our presentation before guests arrived.

As this was our first ever wine tasting presentation, we were a bit nervous, especially having to have our wine X-rayed on entry. It was a fascinating evening with performances by a Kung Fu master and students, a wonderful Chinese pianist and a Chinese magician.

Brad had to say a few words about Savina Lane to the gathering, which was great PR as there was a bunch of State politicians in attendance. We made some good contacts for the future and were delighted when State Treasurer, Tim Nicholls, who is also the Minister for Trade, introduced himself and tasted our wines (he preferred the Fiano). He spoke to us about the opportunities in China and offered the help of the Trade Office should we decide to pursue exports. At this stage we don't have enough wine to export to the Sunshine Coast, but never say never...





He's been at it again

The sounds of welding, banging and bashing were once again emanating from our machinery shed as our home-grown 'mad inventor' fabricated his latest little work-reducing bit of machinery before we left on our French study tour.

Brad can't take full credit for it, although it was his idea to build a rake that could be pulled along behind the tractor and would manage to scoop up only the pruned vine canes and not any of the stones that keep floating to the surface in our decomposed granite soils.

There are of course many rakes used in viticulture, but we needed one that wouldn't gouge out the carefully-planted legumes and grasses that cover the rows between the vines.

A close friend, Rob Abbas, suggested using the giant tines from the big rakes once used in the now-defunct sugar cane industry on the Sunshine Coast. Rob kindly located some for Brad and brought 16 of them up to Savina Lane in the back of his 4WD. And so, here we went again with another home-built labour-saving device. It works perfectly and not a blade of grass suffered in its trialling and use.

Last year we spent hundreds of dollars paying backpackers to rake up the pruned vine canes. I also spent many hours at this task. Some people just leave vine canes strewn as they please in the inter-rows, or use a

flail mulcher to break them up, but this is not the look Brad likes. He likes nudity in the vineyard. No weeds, no sticks, no stones. So a lot of time was spent last year achieving a neat and tidy vineyard. Pruned vine canes can take years to break down and Brad feels they can harbour fungi and pests.

The trick is to 'pull' the vine canes properly first and lay them across the rows. Yanking out cut canes that cling to the wires takes a considerable amount of energy, but it is great exercise. I suppose the next thing he'll do is make a pair of mechanical hands to do this job too.



The pruned canes must be pulled out by hand

Phil (and Ann) the Magnificent



Phil helping us with the planting of the new vineyard in November 2012. I know he'd rather I used a pic with his hat on, but sorry Phil, I could only find this one.

While we've been dilly-dallying around France looking at vineyards and wineries, two exceptional people have been taking care of our precious vines and my new forest of deciduous trees planted in early winter before we left.

Although we told them there was nothing that HAD to be done, except water the trees once a week, Phil insisted on a jobs list just in case he got bored with watching the vines sleep. To please him, Brad thought up a list of 'options' that Phil could do if he chose, but that Brad planned to do himself on his return, and of course Phil worked his way through the whole list!

Ann literally kept the home fires burning and hand-watered every one of the 100 big trees that Brad planted along the 300-metre drive up to the house. It's a tedious job that takes around two hours and she did it every single week during our absence. And was rewarded by seeing the first buds of Spring appear.

Thank you both so much. With friends like you, Savina Lane doesn't really need us.



If you've missed out on Issues 1-5 and would like to be part of the ongoing story of our vineyard, 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.

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SAD SWANSONG

Our two wild Black Swans had six gorgeous babies, however I'm devastated to report that none survived their first month.

We counted them anxiously for two weeks every morning, when the parents brought them out for a swim around the lake, hoping there would always be six.

But nature has its ways. Just after we left for France a friend saw an eagle take one and within days, the other five had disappeared, almost certainly victims of a big fox that has been sighted numerous times here. Small clumps of grey down were found in the paddock.

The parent swans soon left, but we hope they will return next year when we hope to have found the money to get our fantastic 'earth sculptor' Mark McNicholl back to create an island sanctuary at one end of the lake.

Protected by a 'moat' at least any birds that care to have a family while visiting Savina Lane, will be safe from foxes and quolls. Can't do much about the winged predators, but the sneaky night marauders are the major threat.



Postscript:

The big fox is now depleting our bunny life. We don't mind this, but Mr Fox is on notice to take himself off soon or face the consequences.