



Winery Tour 18-22 October 2013

Over the period 18 to 22 October, the Guild ventured south to Mt Benson and then Coonawarra wine regions. Fifty-six members and guests signed up for the Mt Benson visit, whilst thirty of them followed up with the Coonawarra segment. From all accounts that I've heard, everyone seemed to have enjoyed the visit immensely and on behalf of you all I offer a sincere and hearty vote of appreciation to the organisers – Roger King, Pete Rawlins and Paul Rogers. Now, here's the story.



Friday



I've never seen a camp kitchen that looked quite so attractive. Was it the sparkling clean BBQs waiting for our fare? Could it be its well-appointed nature – microwave, stove, good-size fridge? No, I think on balance it probably had more to do with the rows of bottles of wine just waiting to be tasted!

To be accurate, Woodsoak Wines had done a very good job of bringing the feel of their cellar door to the camp kitchen. (Well, that's if they had a cellar door, which they don't – but that's another story.) Our presenters, Will and Sonia Legoe, had decorated their presentation area very well, with the Woodsoak Peacock much in evidence. Even better than that, though, was Sonia's opening remark, "why don't we just start pouring?" Now you're talking.



Will and Sonia presented their full range of wine, six in total, with generous servings. As we tasted, they also spoke about the Woodsoak history – from sheep and cattle to wine – and candidly about their processes and problems. Woodsoak is a vineyard rather than a winery and the wine is made under contract. Accordingly, and as they themselves pointed out, neither Will nor Sonia had deep knowledge of the nuances of the winemaking, but this did not detract from the presentation or, indeed, from the wine. After all, they still knew more than me!



In lieu of spittoons for the tasting we were advised to use the grass immediately outside the camp kitchen. I did not see it get heavily watered – testament to the wine's reception by our members. Sales seemed pretty good as well.

All in all, a great start to our tasting weekend. During their presentation the Legoe's had told us that Robe, where they are located, is a region of its own and not actually part of the Mt Benson Wine Region. Excellent, a great tasting and we hadn't even started yet!

By the way, for the record it's Wood-soak Wines, not Woods-oak – but those of you who were there would already know that.

Wines Tasted:



- NV Zaahira Sparkling (pinot noir and chardonnay)
- 2010 Mayur Chardonnay
- 2012 Rani Rosé
- 2012 Pyaar Pinot Noir
- 2009 Raj Shiraz
- 2009 Vijay Cabernet Sauvignon



BBQ

Following the Woodsoak tasting there was an invite to a BYO everything BBQ in the same area. I'm pleased to note that most of our members who had made it to the tasting stayed for the BBQ. I imagined that it might have been somewhat of a challenge to get that many people fed via two not-terribly-large hotplates but all seemed to flow quite well. Perhaps the bottles of Woodsoak Wines, much in evidence, helped guide our members' patience. A great evening. Now let's see what tomorrow brings.





Saturday



After a brief drive back in the direction of Adelaide (a stretch of road that would become all too familiar over the course of the weekend) we arrived bright and early at Wangolina Station. Apart from the pretty cellar door buildings, the lovely rose gardens and the well-maintained lawns the first thing I noticed was that everyone had the good old Aussie salute going. Despite the fairly strong wind the flies were undeterred and persistent. I was to learn that wind and flies seem to be relatively constant features of the Mt Benson District.



Spot on time at 11 o'clock we filed onto one of the wide verandas of the cellar door buildings, surprisingly not followed by the flies, and took up a tasting glass each. I should pause to note here that not quite all of us filed onto the veranda as our sizeable contingent was just a little more than said veranda could comfortably handle. Still, with thanks to our relatively new PA system, those who remained among the roses were not excluded.

After a brief introduction to Anita Goode, winemaker, we duly started tasting the first of what would turn out to be ten wines. Throughout, Anita spoke with knowledge and incredible humour about her winemaking techniques as well as the history, climate and soil of the District. She even offered us an insight into her own approach to the enjoyment of wine and if I remember correctly "wine for breakfast" was uttered more than once. I also learned of a new and mysterious drink called "Gin and Moscato".



One aspect of Wangolina Station that I found particularly interesting is that Anita does not have crush and fermenting facilities on the premises and the wine is actually wholly produced at Bird in Hand in the Adelaide Hills. Gosh, these country folk must travel a lot.

As well as being incredibly knowledgeable about her chosen vocation, Anita is a gifted talker who was quick to admit that she talks too much. Not surprisingly, then, we went over time, although such was the nature of the presentation that it never seemed to drag at all. Indeed, the only obvious reason for the shuffling feet is that our members had been standing longer than they thought. Boredom was certainly not an issue. I also found the wines extremely pleasant – particularly the whites, which were crisp and flavoursome. I loved the Moscato!

Eventually, the presentation (and tasting) came to an end and we were invited to purchase if we wished. As far as I could see, there was a bit of a mini rush to the counter! A great start to Mt Benson proper.

Wines Tasted:

- 2013 Semillon Sauvignon Blanc
- 2013 Sauvignon Blanc
- 2012 Pinot Gris
- 2010 Section 67 Semillon
- 2010 Section 67 Sauvignon
- 2013 Moscato (Frontignac)
- 2011 Shiraz Cabernet
- 2012 Tempranillo
- 2010 Section 67 Shiraz
- 2010 Section 67 Cabernet Sauvignon



Norfolk Rise

VINEYARD MOUNT BENSON

Just a short hop up the road had us at Norfolk Rise, where a superbly appointed Barrel Hall greeted us. Someone had gone to a lot of trouble to dress and lay tables and make us feel special. We were told that the programmed “light lunch” was to be a BBQ but that it wasn’t quite ready. In the mean time, we were invited to buy wine to have with lunch from the “bar”. On offer were two of the wines previously tasted at Wangolina Station and two that we subsequently learned were as yet untasted from Norfolk Rise. All available by the glass or the bottle.



To digress momentarily, it was clear from this that there was quite a connection between Wangolina and Norfolk Rise. It seemed that Wangolina were cooking the BBQ (many thanks to Kristen Pryce and her helpers for the excellent fare), both wineries had wine available for lunch and, in due course, it turned out that Anita from Wangolina was back again with us during our tasting of Norfolk Rise Wines. Still, back to the story.

The light lunch duly arrived and proved to be anything but light. Sausages and shashlicks (both reportedly superb) formed the basis of the BBQ, whilst delicious salads and lovely, crusty bread was also available. There also seemed to be more than enough of everything, although your Committee briefly considered a shashlick stick audit, which was subsequently abandoned.

After lunch, we were introduced to Norfolk Rise winemaker, Dan Berrigan. Following this, to help us digest the light lunch (or possibly to stop us falling asleep), we took a tour of the winery, which was quite impressive. Who would have thought that the largest winery set-up that I had personally visited would be located in the relatively small district of Mt Benson. Perhaps I just don’t get out enough! Even more impressive was the fact that the whole was run by only three people. Wow!



Dan showed us the winemaking workings and gave us an insight into what each of the components does. I was interested to note that despite the large set-up there was no bottling facility – indeed, the finished wine is transported to Melbourne for bottling and distributed direct from there. Dan also spoke about the nuances of his own approach to wine. Finally, he took us to where we could see the vineyards and spoke about the unique aspects to growing grapes in Mt Benson. A closer inspection of the vineyards was considered but not undertaken due to extreme care needed with regard to phylloxera.



With new knowledge, at least for some of us, we returned to the Barrel Hall, now cleaned of all evidence of lunch, for a guided tasting of the Norfolk Rise range. Ben gave us insightful information on each of his wines as we tasted. Again, the wines were most pleasant – personally, I particularly enjoyed their Merlot.



At one point, Ben advised that he added small amounts of Riesling to his Pinot Grigio and his Sauvignon Blanc “to take the edge off”. One of our members commented that, whilst the winery obviously had Riesling, it clearly did not bottle it as part of its range. There followed a lively and intense discussion on the nature of wine trends. I don’t think anyone expected that but Ben and Anita, as well as many of our members, contributed with enthusiasm. I think that much was learned but nothing was resolved. It did, however, round out the visit nicely. If I had any sadness at all about Norfolk Rise it was that their wine was not available for direct purchase – only mail order. This slight disappointed was subsequently assuaged at the Robe bottle shop, which carried some of their wine.

Wines Tasted:



- 2013 Pinot Grigio
- 2013 Sauvignon Blanc
- 2010 Merlot
- 2010 Shiraz
- 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon





Having tasted 15 wines, as well as having wine with lunch, I found the thought of dinner a little daunting. Still, we had a few hours and so, perhaps, a brief walk along the nearby beach might clear the head and refresh the appetite. It did not! Still, we'd committed to dinner and we would make our appearance – hopefully the menu would contain something light (but not light in the same way as lunch).

As it turned out, the menu at the Robe Hotel was quite comprehensive for a country pub with a number of unusual dishes and a strong emphasis on seafood (local, of course). Wine prices were also reasonable and corkage, for those who brought their own, quite modest. I was also impressed by the way the Hotel took our orders, reprocessed them into table lots, and delivered meals table by table. Quite an effort for a pub that is probably not that used to large groups. Okay, I accept that one or two little mistakes happened and some of our members felt they were kept waiting longer than they would have liked but, all in all, I thought it a job well done. Also, speaking for myself, I very much enjoyed the meal that I still didn't need.



Sunday

On the now familiar road to Mt Benson our esteemed treasurer, Brian, regaled Norm and I with stories of the Guild's last visit to this district and to Ralph Fowler Wines in particular – back in 1938 I think he said, although I may have noted that date incorrectly. On that occasion, the Guild had turned up but the host had not. With the gate firmly shut cars were sprawled all over the roadside until, at last, the proprietor arrived in "local time". We hoped that such would not happen on this visit and, indeed, it did not.



More flies! Windy! We also noted as we arrived a rather unusual trellising arrangement and resolved to find out more about that. Ralph, along with his wife Deborah, had definitely prepared for our arrival and had one of their winemaking sheds nicely adorned with tasting glasses. Bang on time at 11 o'clock we were again drinking, a fact that I resolved not to mention to my doctor.



Ralph proved to be another Mt Benson "character" and he regaled us with unusual stories and amusing anecdotes as we worked our way through his wine portfolio. I was beginning to be amazed that such a wealth of diverse stories could be found in the small radius separating the wineries we'd visited so far. Ralph was a naturally gifted storyteller and our time with him flew by. Once again I found the wines extremely pleasant but on this occasion noted they were mainly reds with white being represented by a lone Viognier – our first, and as it turned out, only Viognier whilst at Mt Benson. I particularly enjoyed the Shiraz Viognier, a blend that does not generally suit my palette. I put that down to the fact that it contained only 4% Viognier.



We also found out about that trellis I mentioned previously, which turned out to be a Lyre Trellis (its shape being reminiscent of a musical lyre) and learned that it was used to help ripen grapes planted in difficult to ripen areas by opening them to the sun. We also learned that Ralph had what seemed to be an unusual but interesting approach to his irrigation, maintaining both wet and dry roots on the same vine. Not only does this reduce water use but also changes grape quality, resulting in many of the desirable fruit characters normally associated with water stress.



As we'd completed our tasting of Ralph's wines a little early there ensued an open discussion that brought out a wide range of interesting questions and opinions. Our members seem well able to ask the insightful questions yet Ralph fielded them all well. I came away with the overriding view that Ralph has some unique ideas in his winemaking and is well capable of thinking outside the square.

Wines Tasted:



- 2009 Viognier
- 2012 Shiraz Viognier
- 2010 Shiraz
- 2012 Merlot
- 2010 Merlot (Cleanskin)
- 2010 Sticky (Sauvignon Blanc)



Our final venue for the Mt Benson part of the weekend was literally "just across the road" at Cape Jaffa Wines. Here we enjoyed a pleasant buffet-style lunch of quiches, baguettes and rice paper rolls – all of which were delicious but, apart from the baguettes, could have been served a little warmer. This lunch was served in Cape Jaffa's barrel hall, which had been quite literally dug out of the limestone hillside. The geology was fascinating to see and gave a great insight into how the district is formed below the surface. Lunch was accompanied by Cape Jaffa wines, which were available for purchase by the bottle (at cellar door price) or the glass.

After the first course of lunch (holding the chocolate brownies in reserve for post tasting) we were introduced to winemaker and General Manager, Derek Hooper (the other of Cape Jaffa's winemakers, Derek's wife Anna, was not present on the day). Derek, ably assisted by Ann Whisson and Kate Napper, then commenced the tasting proper. He began by documenting the history of Cape Jaffa Wines – his presentation being beautifully punctuated by the popping of corks (ahh, they're playing my sound). Whilst not so much a storyteller as some of the other winemakers, Derek proved to be a knowledgeable and erudite speaker. During the tasting his discussion ranged from "biodynamic organic" to concrete tanks. His detailing of the "astro calendar" was a particular highlight and could prove useful to the Bureau of Meteorology. As we worked our way through the wines Wally the wine dog busily vacuumed the floor of all lunch crumbs.



Cape Jaffa is a certified biodynamic vineyard, a fact that Derek was clearly, and justifiably, proud of. He spent some time in detailing their approach to biodynamic agriculture and the benefits that he felt were reflected in the wines. Roughly half of the Cape Jaffa range of wines have been fully certified as biodynamic

I enjoyed the Cape Jaffa wines but I thought the tasting to be slightly rushed. Having said that, they did have a lot of wines for us to get through. I also felt that the whites were a little too chilled – product of having come out of ice rather than a refrigerator. Neither of these detracted from the quality and I again found myself enjoying most of them. Again there was a "less usual" white on offer, this time a Marsanne (a small portion of which is now in my wine rack). I should also note that we were rather privileged to have been able to taste the La Lune Shiraz, which has very limited availability and sells for \$60/bottle.



On completion of Derek's presentation a period of spirited questioning commenced, once again proving our member's almost insatiable thirst for knowledge. During this period, Derek did well in repeating questions prior to answering, thus ensuring that we all knew what was going on. Also during this period we managed to catch up on those chocolate brownies, which I can assure you were worth waiting for.

Wines Tasted:



- 2013 Cape Culte Pinot Chardonnay (Sparkling)
- 2013 The Set Sauvignon Blanc
- 2012 Cape Jaffa Semillon Sauvignon Blanc
- 2012 Cape Jaffa Pinot Gris
- 2012 Waxed Lyrical Marsanne
- 2012 Cape Jaffa Rosé de Syrah
- 2012 The Set Shiraz Cabernet Merlot
- 2012 Cape Jaffa Cabernet Sauvignon
- 2010 Epic Drop Shiraz
- 2012 La Lune Shiraz



Well, so much for Mt Benson. Although the Region is small I found it to be incredibly diverse and full of great characters and even greater wines. I'd always been fond of reds from the Limestone Coast, without knowing that "Mt Benson" even existed, and had this opinion borne out over the course of our visit. What I didn't expect, however, is how much I enjoyed the Region's whites – with old favourites like Sav Blanc and Semi Savs being ably challenged by less usual varieties like Viognier, Marsanne and Moscato (with or without Gin). I'm so pleased I went and look forward eagerly to a return. Judging by at least one member's reaction, it seemed to have been a great visit.



I wasn't going on to Coonawarra and so I gave the tip of the official Guild stubby-pencil, now down to less than an inch, one last lick and signed my name with a flurry. This done, I ceremoniously handed it over to your next correspondent. We headed northward with the very satisfying noise of clinking bottles coming from the boot.

Carol Seely

Monday



Monday morning and a casual pack-up and move for those who were continuing to the Coonawarra Wine Region. The sky was overcast so we knew we were in for a cooler day than the previous three. There was plenty of time to venture over to Penola, have a light lunch (a good bakery in Penola), check into the accommodation and make our way to the Koonara cellar door in the main street of Penola.



The Pursuit of Perfection

This cellar door provides a little extra as it is situated within a kitchenwares shop where many of the female members found more than just wine to purchase. With Christmas getting closer I suggested a couple of presents I would like so I will just have to wait and see if my requests come to fruition.

The group of nearly thirty members was introduced to Peter Douglas, the winemaker. Peter is a very experienced operator who has made many fine wines over the years. He is an ex-chief winemaker at Wynns, and, surprise, surprise, is also an ex-student of Andrew Yap. Peter now runs his own business and makes wines for a number of wineries.



Koonara is one of his favourite wineries, particularly due to the quality of grapes coming out of the cool climate Mt Gambier vineyards.

Every winemaker has their preferred style of wines they produce and Peter was no exception. Of particular interest was his use of different yeasts to draw out the different preferred characteristic flavours. Peter's experience showed through as he provided us with a wide

range of information and capably fielded our questions.



Members were impressed with the quality of wines (5 star winery – James Halliday 2012), both whites and reds. The 2012 Pinot Noir is 100% Mt Gambier grapes in 2nd use oak barrels, which will be bottled around Christmas time. The Adelaide Show judges rated this wine as the best ever they had tasted. Many also enjoyed the Pinot Gris, which is made in a style to express its complexity.

Peter's presentation was well supported by Heidi and Sally and we were well looked after. From the number of cases of wine I saw members buying there will be many good reminders of our experience at Koonara for some time to come. Thank you Koonara Wines.

Wines Tasted:

- 2011 The Guardian Angel Sparkling Pinot Chardonnay
- 2013 Lucy & Alice Pinot Gris
- 2013 Sofiel's Gift Riesling
- 2012 Marquise Chardonnay
- 2013 Flowers for Lucy Moscato
- 2010 Bay of Apostles Pinot Noir
- 2010 Angel's Peak Cabernet Sauvignon
- 2009 Angel's Peak Shiraz
- 2010 Ambriel's Gift Cabernet Sauvignon
- 2009 Ezra's Gift Shiraz
- NV The Golden Orb Sparkling Shiraz



Pete Rawlins



Our second visit for Monday was to Raidis Estate for a tasting hosted by Steve and Emma Raidis followed by a Greek BBQ prepared and cooked by Steve's parents, Fran and Chris.

By way of background, the property was previously the Penola Strawberry Farm owned by Chris and Fran but the use of Terra Rossa soil to grow strawberries was considered sacrilege so about 20 years ago they removed the strawberry plants and replaced them with Cabernet Sauvignon vines. This "home block" vineyard is still the source of the fruit for Raidis "Billy" Cabernet Sauvignon. After Fran and Chris planted the "home block" Steve subsequently purchased land on the southern tip of the Coonawarra region about 6km from Penola and planted Cabernet Sauvignon, Melot, Riesling, Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blanc.



Now back to our visit ... Steve and Emma had prepared their wine storage room for our tasting with impressive black cloth-covered tables and contrasting individual stainless steel spittoons, pen, note paper and souvenir pouring foils. It was an impressive sight as we scurried in from the pouring rain and entered the room! They had prepared a thoughtful tasting program with the opportunity to compare current release with yet-to-be released vintages or barrel samples – 12 wines in total!

Steve and Emma have a strong belief that careful viticulture is a very important contributor to the quality of their finished wines. Interestingly, as part of the regime goats are used in vineyard weed control. Steve also emphasised that they believed that presenting their wines direct to the public through groups such as the Wine Guild and at events such as the Adelaide Cellar Door Festival rather than submitting to wine shows was the most successful approach for them.



The Riesling and Shiraz are made at Leconfield with all other wines made at Rymill. Bottling is done at Prowine in the Barossa Valley. Production is about 4,500 cases.

Wines tasted are summarised below:

2012 and 2013 The Kelpie Sauvignon Blanc: The grapes were harvested from vines about 10 years old. The vineyard has some low ridges and grapes from this part contribute tropical flavours to the wine and balance those from the grapes at lower levels. Not surprisingly the wine had a sensory profile clearly different from New Zealand and Adelaide Hills. Both vintages were well received (I preferred the 2013 vintage by a whisker).



2012 and 2013 The Kid Riesling: The grapes were harvested from vines about 12 years old. The 2012 vintage was voted the number three wine in South Australia by 'The Adelaide Review'. Crisp with a nice citrus finish but a clearly different style to Clare Riesling. It was a surprise to many that such good quality Rieslings could be produced from the region.

2012 and 2013 Cheeky Goat Pinot Gris: Oak treatment was in 5% new French barrels. Both vintages showed a clear blush. While this characteristic may not find favour with all wine judges Steve and Emma felt there were a number of positives such as a point of differentiation from most other Pinot Gris.

2010 and 2012 Mamma Goat Merlot: The 2010 was a finished, bottled wine and the 2012 a barrel sample. I think it's fair to say most if not all members found this comparative tasting fascinating. The barrel sample was not marked highly but Steve explained this was from a single barrel and that when blended with others he was confident the wine would compare favourably with the impressive finished 2010 vintage. It would certainly be interesting to taste the finished 2012 vintage when it is released.

2009 and 2010 Billy Cabernet Sauvignon: Both were well produced Coonawarra wines. The 2010 vintage was selected in the "Top 100 Australian Wines" and awarded 95 points by Huon Hooke. I must confess I struggled to detect any difference between the two vintages!

2012 Shiraz (Barrel Sample): This had spent 18 months in French oak (30% new) at the time of tasting. We were privileged to be the first to taste this wine. A typical example of a Coonawarra Shiraz with more finesse than the bolder McLaren Vale and Barossa styles. Bearing in mind the experience with the barrel sample of Merlot noted above members were pleasantly impressed with the quality of this wine. Steve explained that unlike the Merlot the Shiraz sample was a composite from a number of barrels and that this may well explain the difference.

2008 The Trip – premium blends of 97% Cabernet and 3% Merlot: This is Raidis' premium wine and we were indeed privileged to taste it. The wine spent 3 years in 60% new French Oak. An excellent example of Coonawarra Cabernet!!



As mentioned earlier, to cap off the day the tasting was followed by a delicious Greek BBQ of hand-made shashlicks (sprinkled with Chris' secret herbs), grilled pita bread, Greek rice, Greek salad and tzadziki prepared by Steve's parents accompanied by a glass of Raidis wine. We now know why Chris' Greek BBQ was so popular in Penola! There was plenty of time to socialise before we ventured the short distance to our accommodation to ready ourselves for the following day!

A sincere "thank you" to Steve, Emma, Chris and Fran for a wonderful experience. I am sure they have won many converts among Guild members.

Roger King



Tuesday

Tuesday morning and it had been raining all night. OK if you're in a motel, but not quite as nice if you're camping. The sky was grey and overcast and we had two more wineries to visit. Should make the effort I suppose – after all it's been great up to now. So after a coffee at the Penola bakery, we journeyed a few kilometres into the heart of the Coonawarra vineyards to one of the iconic wineries of the region – Rymill.



R Y M I L L
COONAWARRA

Assistant winemaker, Federico Zaina, who was born and had his initial winemaking education in Mendoza, Argentina, was on hand to introduce us to the philosophies of this company and his approaches to making the wines. He took us into the processing area of the winery and described the variety of techniques employed to make the different wines.

Rymill has two vineyards in the Coonawarra region – Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet and Merlot from the southern vineyard (20km south of the winery); and Cabernet, Shiraz and Gewürztraminer from the vines surrounding the stunning cellar door and winery. Usually the crush from these vineyards is about 1200 tonnes, but this year was particularly busy with 2000 tonnes to crush and process along with contract crushing for some other wineries.

They produce several ranges of wine. The first is to "enjoy with a meal, friends and have a sip more". They aim to preserve the fruit in this wine to increase its appeal as an early drinking wine. The sweet



varieties can stay on the skins and stems for 24hrs at 5-8°C to impart extra flavour. The low temperature restricts growth of unwanted enzymes. Cultured yeasts are then added to the pressed juice (whites) in order to gain the required characteristics in the wine. Fermentation occurs at 15-18°C. The red wine grapes are left intact with fermentation of the whole fruit (at 20-25°C) happening in 20 tonne rotary fermenting tanks. Compressed air is fed into the ferment tanks to help break the dry cap.



This also mixes and aerates the juice. The fermenters are rotated to improve the extraction from the grapes. Co-inoculation with malo-lactic bacteria usually occurs after a few days so that all fermentation is finished in a comparatively short time. After “racking” or cross-flow filtration (which was found to reduce bottle shock as well as clean the wine), the wine can get various barrel treatments depending on the desired end product. For example some of the red wines, depending on the quality, go into French (90%) or American (10%) barrels. This could be for 30 months, but there is constant testing and tasting to select the optimum blending and bottling time. Rymill bottles their products at Yalumba winery in the Barossa Valley.

There was considerable discussion about the differences between wine production in Argentina and in Australia. Grapes, mostly Malbec, are usually handpicked because labour costs \$1-\$2/hour. Large rivers and channel systems allow extensive irrigation so yields are usually high and the region can produce up to a million bottles per day to supply large export markets like Russia.

Discussion had to be curtailed at this point to allow time to taste some wines. We were fortunate at this stage to be joined by Sandrine Gimon, the chief winemaker. Sandrine comes from the Champagne Region of France, so it was not surprising that she was enthusiastic about the excellent sparkling white 2011 Coonawarra Brut (Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meuniere) which we tried first. Both Sandrine and Federico, with help from Josie and Kristy, would like to have led us through a tasting of the complete range of their wines, but we had to restrict ourselves to their 2012 Chardonnay (fermented with wild yeast in French oak puncheons), the 2012 gt (Gewürztraminer), followed by the very popular 2010 mc². This is a Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc blend, which may vary from year to year, but Rymill strive to maintain the style of “drink now but cellar for up to 10 years if you can”. We then tasted the 2010 Shiraz, 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon (just won gold at the 2013 Adelaide wine show) and the wonderful dark-red, big and elegant 2005 Maturation Release Cabernet Sauvignon. It was a great example of the grape variety for which the region is renowned.



It only remained to thank our hosts, make our purchases and get a quick lunch before moving on to the last winery on this trip – Majella.



Here we were greeted by Brian (Prof) Lynn from the Lynn family who own the winery with about 60 hectares of vines and still run a sheep farm southeast of Penola. Brian introduced winemaker Bruce Gregory. In 1991, Bruce made wine using Majella grapes when he was at Brands “Laira” winery. This was the first commercial vintage, and preceded the building of the winery in its current position in 1995-6.

The vineyard is on the eastern/hilly side of the Coonawarra region and according to Brian “it’s the best place, so we make the best wines”. The only variable in Majella wines is the weather as the only grapes used for their wines are grown in their vineyard. All the wines are made from four varieties of grape.



Bruce led us through a tasting of their range of wines, starting with a sparkling white (called Minuet) made from Riesling grapes in the “méthode traditionnelle”. This wine was introduced so that the “girls in the office” had a Majella wine to drink after work instead of another brand. We went on to try the straight 2012 Riesling, to drink now or to cellar if you like older Rieslings, followed by the 2013 Rosé (Melody). We then worked our way through twelve red wines, including different vintages of the same wine, under the expert eye of the winemaker, and with appropriate comments by Brian. The wines were 2011 and 2012 Musician (an always well regarded Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz blend); the 2010 and 2012 Merlot, which is not made every year as it suffers a lot from uneven ripeness; the 2009, 2010 and 2011 vintages of Cabernet Sauvignon (it was interesting to see people’s preferences for the different vintages); 2009 and 2010 Shiraz; 2008 and 2009 vintages of

the premium Majella wine “The Mallea” (this was a wine made from targeted parcels of grapes, and is “culled” throughout the process and maturation to result in a very limited production of 500 dozen, bottled under cork. – so, as long as the cork

lasts it has enormous cellaring potential); and finally the 2007 Sparkling Shiraz (again made using “méthode traditionnelle” – this is “the ultimate wine to have with everything” (Brian L)).



The visit proved both educational and entertaining. We were indeed fortunate to be in the company of two enthusiastic wine entrepreneurs and to taste such a variety of wine.

Some Tuesday Quotes:

- “micro-oxygenation can produce good wine but it can also produce very good vinegar” – Federico Zaina
- “I have a husband who looks good, but doesn’t cook” – Sandrine Gimon
- “anyone who drinks Sav Blanc should be shot at dawn, or leave the country” – Brian Lynn
- “Pinot is the grape you grow when you can’t get one of the real varieties to grow” – Brian Lynn

Paul Rogers

