

News from the Hen

No. 10 Spring 2011



Just Swanning Around



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Cup Weekend Music – A Change of Format

Since 2006 we have had a music day on Cup Weekend. The problem with this time of year is the weather, as those brave enough to come to last year's event will know.

So we are changing the format – to give some more flexibility. We are going to have a late afternoon – evening music event, with BYO food. For those who forget or can't organise their food, we will still do platters – but for those who can get organised, they can bring their own (and please take their rubbish home).

Date – Saturday 29th October

Time – 4:30pm to 7:30pm (if the weather is fine)

Music – Two bands – one confirmed (**BMX Beach**) and the other to be finalised.

BMX Beach – a home grown and Melbourne honed four piece playing their style of indie pop.

Food – Bring Your Own or buy something from the Purple Hen offering

Cover charge – \$5 for adults (children free).

Wine Glasses – If you are using our wine glasses they can be 'rented' for \$5, take them home or return them intact for refund of the \$5.

What if the weather is rubbish? If it rains, we cancel. The days of hiring marquees and puddling about in the rain and wondering if people will get stuck in the 'car park' are over. This event is on – if the weather is OK. If in doubt, phone us on the day (5956 9244)

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Swanning about

The photo on the first page shows the first cygnets hatched at Purple Hen. Two Black Swans arrived in May, evicted the Cape Barren Geese that had taken up residence and then proceeded to build a nest. In mid June they were sitting, but with all the rain and a rise of the water level this hatching failed.

They seemed to disappear and then one came back – or so we thought. Unbeknown to us they had built a new (more secret) nest and then one day in September we see two swans on the dam swimming with 5 cygnets. All very exciting.

The full year of a full dam has lead to an explosion of birds (and frogs). The Purple Swamphen have bred up and there are around 20 based around the dam. They now range more widely and we have begun to see them bob up in the vineyard.

This is all good, but the expanded wetland has also seen an increase in the number of snakes around the dam. All copperheads we are told – although some look more like black snakes to us.

Wine dinner - Inverloch

For those of you in reasonable proximity to Inverloch, the Manna Gum Restaurant at the Broadbeach Resort is holding a Purple Hen wine dinner on Thursday 6th October. The address of Broadbeach is 5 Lindsey Close, Inverloch.

Their phone number is 5674 1199 – ring to make a booking. As an added incentive we feature our recent Trophy winning Pinot Noir and offer pre-release sales for those attending.

Gippsland Wine Show

We have participated in the Gippsland Wine Show since we began showing our wines in 2006. Last year we had our most successful

show, taking out Wine of Show and Most Successful Exhibitor. We thought we had done as well as we could – but this year's Show turned out even better for us.

This year our wines won three class trophies. These were:
Trophy for Best Pinot Noir
Trophy for Best Shiraz
Trophy for Best Sparkling (the Blanc de Blanc)

The Shiraz went on to win the Trophy for Best Red Wine of Show and we again won the Trophy for Most Successful Exhibitor.

In addition to the Gold Medals/Trophies, the 2011 Sauvignon Blanc won a Silver Medal and the 2010 Cabernet Sauvignon a Bronze. The result for the Sauv. Blanc was very pleasing – Silver being our best result at this Show for this wine and the wine had only very recently been bottled. The 2011 is the first vintage of Sauv Blanc that we have been able to get the aromas of the wine in tank into the wine in bottle.

In past vintages we felt that the wine in tank was more lifted and aromatic than the final wine in bottle. This year's Sauv Blanc has aromas that fairly leap from the glass.

The 2011 Vintage

How did all the rain affect you? This is a pretty commonly asked question. The answer is not straight forward.

The vintage was cold and wet and long. As a result disease pressure was high. Quite a bit of fruit was left to the birds because of mildews and botrytis. In addition, the period from fruit set to the beginning of ripening was cool and cloudy – not good for phenolic development.

Despite, and in some cases because of all these things, some very good wines will be made. The one case where “calamity” turned out to be beneficial was the Riesling. This fruit was hit

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with botrytis mould and could not be used for the usual off-dry style. However, conditions conspired to cause the botrytis to be preservative rather than destructive – allowing a botrytised sweet Riesling to be produced. Not much of it (as yields are very low because of the botrytis) but quite spectacular.

For us, the vintage turned out to be a very good one for the whites. We are really pleased with the whites bottled to date (Sauv Blanc and Pinot Gris) and with those still in development (Chardonnay and Viognier). We are in the process of preparing the Viognier for bottling and we feel this is our best to date. The decision to use 100% barrel ferment for this variety appears to have been the right one.

The situation for the reds was more mixed. Some of the Pinot Noir was lacking in phenolics (colour and tannin). Attaining sugar ripeness was not a problem but in some cases the wines looked pretty good during fermentation but were lacking in colour and structure in the barrel.

We decided that you had to be cruel to be kind so the offending batches were dispatched to the paddock. The remaining batches are looking promising – perhaps witnessing what happens to non-performers has spurred them on.

Counter-intuitively, the mid and late season reds performed much better than the Pinot Noir (the early ripening variety). In a cool and wet vintage the reverse would normally be the case, but not this year. Shiraz, Cabernet and Merlot are all looking good and this year we will have enough Shiraz to send some to sparkling production.

So all in all a very difficult and costly vintage (higher picking costs and fruit left in the field) but one that will see some good reds and some cracking whites.

Wine comings & goings

New season whites have come on a bit earlier this year – couldn't wait until Cup Weekend.

2011 Sauvignon Blanc We had been out of Sauvignon Blanc for some time so the 2011 was released pretty quickly after bottling. As evident from the Silver Medal, the wine was up to an early release. This year's Sauv Blanc is a cracker – fantastic aromas of passionfruit and gooseberry.

2011 Pinot Gris We are very happy with this year's Gris. It is quite varietal and the palate has a lovely texture. As in the past, the grapes come from Lionel and Lynn's vineyard near San Remo – so we have recognised this on the label as "Silverwaters Vineyard Pinot Gris".

Viognier – the 2009 is finished and there was not a 2010. We do not anticipate releasing the 2011 Viognier until the middle of 2012.

Off Dry Riesling – the 2010 is **nearing the end**, we will be out before December. We were not able to make a version of this wine in 2011 because of botrytis. To fill this gap we made an Off Dry Sauvignon Blanc.

The 2008 Sparkling Shiraz is about to run out. There will be no replacement for some time. We are making a 2011 Sparkling Shiraz, but this will not be ready until the end of 2012 at the earliest.

Pinot Noir – We are currently running with the **2009 Estate** and the **2008 Clonal Selection**. Both have enough stock to run until the end of the year and then we will swing over to the 2010 – the Trophy winner at Gippsland Wine Show. In 2010 we made only one version of Pinot Noir – so when the Clonal Selection finishes it will not have a replacement vintage.

Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot – since the last Newsletter we have swung over to the 2009

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vintage. In the case of Cabernet 2009 was a fairly small production run and we are into our last 60 cases.

The new season to date

Heavy winter rain kept the dam and the soil profile full. Then in late July the tap was turned off and the period from then until the end of September has been relatively dry. While the farmers around are a bit concerned at this 'drying off', we are pretty relaxed. Drier conditions have let us get into the vineyards to do some tractor work (e.g. begin the spraying program) and we have dams full of water and hence know that we will get by should things turn to dry.

The Bureau of Met is calling the balance of probabilities toward a hotter summer than normal. This presents a conundrum for us.

On the basis of the season to date (cool) and last year's season – we should do more leaf plucking and do it earlier than we have in the past. But if the season turns hot – some extra foliage to protect the fruit can be beneficial. Well as the bookies say - Who bets? It's all a matter of taking a punt.

What's in a name – what happened to the competition?

Those of you with degrees in ancient history will remember our last newsletter (we aren't getting any better at this). In it Rick promised two competitions – one for picking the composition of the Classic White and another for the better name for the wine. Rick promised – but didn't deliver.

Well the competition for what's in the Classic White is dead as pretty early on the beans were spilled – it is 25% Sauvignon Blanc, 15% Viognier and 60% Chardonnay (unwooded).

But we can still run the – better name competition. For those who come and taste the Classic White and like it, we will have a competition for the best name. How will the best name be determined? By our panel of judges – that is, everyone working at Purple Hen.

Why is the competition only for those who like the wine? Because the prize is a case of Classic White with half a case for the runner up.

Get netted

We thought that giving him a platform in the last newsletter would let him get it off his chest. But no, there's more - he's still going on about the arduous process of mending nets and the insufficient acknowledgement of the netter's role in the pantheon of winemaking. So here is the final piece from Michael the netter (we should rotate him onto other tasks – but he is a good netter.)

*"It's a mighty rough net that my poor hands have patched
My shoulders are aching, my fingers all scratched.
Thru forests of cobwebs and wet grass I stroll
The sun it would blind and the wind it was cold."
[apologies to Woody/Cisco]*

For those of you who think that mending nets is just like doing emergency wardrobe maintenance on supermodels, down on your knees on a soft carpet and your only problem is keeping your concentration, then let me disabuse you. It is only like that sometimes. A lot of the time it is like standing in the sun on a green sand dune with your arms above your head.

No one really knows how birds manage to locate food. Is it by sight, smell, word of mouth, by guessing from a batch of clues, by memory, or simply by being in the right place at the right time? Well, we can rule the last one out. The birds do not find the grapes a few days before harvest by accident. Whatever it is which guides them it never fails and they arrive just when the grapes are ready and filled with energy and flavour. Day one, one bird. Day two, a few. Day three, thousands. Day four, no more.

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It's not only birds who are attracted to ripe grapes. Expert winemakers can identify the several predators. Wallabies nibble at hip height, leaving the higher bunches alone. Possums will eat a bunch here, a bunch nearby, a bunch from another row. Hares can only reach low hanging fruit. Walking around with a winemaker is like being taken for a bushwalk by an aboriginal tracker. "See. That's possum". "That one there - young wallaby". It's quite an education mending nets. Holes at grass level the size of grapefruit in the net are made by hares, probably because the net has blocked their traditional path to somewhere else. Ragged holes the size of a watermelon, a bit above the grass, are made by possums. Holes in the canopy are not natural and are mainly artefacts of the process of retrieval. These can be quite large tears if the net manages to snag itself on one of the vineyard poles.

With supermodels it is easy to decide which little problem to fix first. You have to correct anything which may lead straight to the front page of a tabloid and then you can attend to those minor imperfections which only a bride's mother would detect.

With grapes it is not so easy to decide - start with the holes at grass level, the tears in the canopy, or the big ones half way up the side net? Which animal would choose which hole, and are you dealing with a loner or with a pathfinder for the dozens of cousins?

Human artefacts - holes - made during net deployment or retrieval can be fixed and generally speaking they stay fixed. Natural holes - caused by nature - can be mended but the animal can return, or exit, and a new hole will appear. What can be done about natural holes? The traditional remedy is the vineyard dog. There are books for those interested about vineyard dogs. Keen eyed, sleek, purposeful looking dogs whose joy in life is turning furball into furburger, or at the very least giving the fur the fright of its life.

Purple Hen has a dog. However this dog is a Buddhist who eats nothing but protein-enriched biscuits, drinks only water, and who gives and receives love. He is the Dalai Labrador of dogs. He will chase a thrown stick but only to lick it tenderly and to remove it from harm's way so it cannot be further mistreated. If he could, it is certain that he would prefer to suckle hares, possums and wallabies rather than upset them with barking and

feint attacks. Grape eating birds will approach him on foot to have a close look. He has delegated border protection to his masters.

Spiders love vineyards. The vines attract insects, the leaves provide shelter and the rows serve as a windbreak. Strolling thru a vineyard is like being in a fairyland of gossamer garments which is the sort of thing which leads to thoughts of supermodels. Normally a spider's web is spun vertical to the ground but a truly magic thing happens in vineyards. It could be the grape juice but some webs are spun parallel to the ground. You come across a perfectly round web, with all its concentric circles and ribs but it is flat, not vertical.

Yes, mending nets is a lot of fun if you can crack the pain barrier. Volunteers are always welcome.

Editor's Note – Taj is not the pacifist portrayed in the above. Birds are his mortal enemies and he would love to get his teeth into rabbits, hares and possums – it's just that they are too fast. In his mind Taj is a mighty hunter, at a physical level – he is a sleepy slow old rogue.

Order form

The web site Order Form has been updated.

Cheers from all at Purple Hen