



# BANNOCKBURN

## Over a barrel...

newsletter of Bannockburn Vineyards

What an interesting season 2011 turned out to be and what a contrast to what we have experienced over the last 5 vintages. After years of drought we finally had a season of good rainfall and having only ever experienced below average rainfall at Bannockburn it was a real learning and thinking vintage for me. I have heard many horror stories out there from vineyard managers and winemakers in other areas who were wrecked by disease before the harvest even began. I have to pay tribute to our vineyard manager, Lucas Grigsby, who kept the vineyard on track and disease at bay which resulted in our yields overall being slightly higher than average which, in a tough season, is a great achievement. The winemaking for me, although requiring a lot of thought, was a joy as the season felt more like my younger days in Nelson New Zealand making wine with my Dad.

It is still very early for discussion of the 2011 wines as they get on with their malolactic fermentations in barrel but they do have a purity, lift and charm which I associate with the milder kinder season. I suspect they will be fine and pure Bannockburn's...less attitude...more manners.

*So onto our latest offerings...*

### **2006 Shiraz**

2006 was my first vintage here at Bannockburn and I still regard the vintage as near perfect. It was a warm and dry vintage with ripening in an orderly and stress free fashion, quite a contrast to some of the conditions Mother Nature threw at us in following years.

In 2006 my aim with Shiraz was to pursue power and extract. I think we achieved that. This wine is a turbo-charged beastie that spent 2 years in about 50% new barriques and is full of coffee, cocoa and dark fruits. It is quite savoury and very powerful. Slow cooked foods through winter are required to assist with taming it. I suspect that it will evolve over quite a long time.

### **2007 Serré**

2007 was a very tough year for the vineyard. The season was hot and dry. We only received about half of our rainfall for the year which makes the dry grown vineyard philosophy a very scary proposition. I spent a number of sleepless nights trying to decide just how to make this wine. Following the success of the 2006 Stuart Pinot that used 100% whole bunches I wanted to use this technique on the Serré but due to the drought, the berries were tiny yet the stalks were a normal size. The ratio didn't seem right so we decided to use 50% whole bunches. We picked quite early to avoid raisining and 'cooked', 'dry red' flavours which the season threatened to impact upon us. The yield was a miniscule 210 g / vine! In other words, one bottle is the work of 7.5 vines! This is one of my favourite wines as much due to the glory out of adversity aspect. It is hard for me to be objective about this wine, I feel that it and I shared a trench together and weathered the storm that the season threw at us. Do not be deceived by its perfume and light colour....it is a seriously intense wine that will live for a very long time...I cannot wait to see its evolution.

### **2007 SRH**

Like the Serré, the 2007 SRH is one of the lowest yielding examples on record. Due to the hot conditions flavours did lag slightly behind sugar accumulation and we picked the fruit at slightly higher than expected b $\acute{e}$ . The fruit was whole bunch pressed and transferred the next day to two brand new puncheons for fermentation by indigenous (but reconciled) yeasts.



# BANNOCKBURN

In order to retain natural acidity we prevented malolactic fermentation from occurring with an early SO<sub>2</sub> addition. After 1 year in oak the wine was transferred with its lees to stainless steel tank for a further 12 months of maturation on lees. I feel that this time on lees is very important, particularly if the wine has an austere structure; it can help in filling the wine out as well as contributing to stability. This 2007 SRH is a wine of immense power. It is somewhat different to the other SRH Chardonnay's that I have made in that it has refused to be restrained and harnessed. It will live and mature for many years.

## **2007 Douglas**

You will note that our red blend has changed its name from Bruce to Douglas. Our friends at a certain Barossa Valley winery which shall remain nameless, obviously took the highland theme to heart and concluded that "there can only be one" and another Bruce from another place could not exist...so a quick scan through my Great Uncle Lord Inchcape's History of Scotland reveals that Robert the Bruce's right hand man was Sir James Douglas (aka The Black Douglas)...so Douglas it is... or Dougie as it is known here at the winery.

The 2007 season was very hot and very dry which meant we had to be very wary of not over extracting. We shortened maceration times and even controlled fermentation temperatures in order to retain fruit. The Cabernet Sauvignon tannins seemed quite fine and ripe with only two weeks time on skins. The blend for the 2007 Douglas was Cabernet Sauvignon 58%, Shiraz 33%, Merlot 8% and Pinot Noir 1%.

We only have limited quantities of this 2007 vintage available but the 2008 Douglas is shaping up to be an excellent follow-up release.

## **2008 Chardonnay**

The 2008 growing season was a very deceptive one. It was probably not as cruel as 2007 but the rainfall was still below average and the vines were still doing it tough. The vintage was notable in particular for a blast of heat quite late in vintage that threw some of our organisation out of the window and we were forced to quickly pick shiraz and cabernet that literally ripened 'overnight'.

The 2008 Chardonnay is a good example of the continuing evolution of style as the winemaking continues to improve the breed and evolve as more is learnt about the fruit and the site. The basic template of what we are doing is the same, which is endeavouring to capture the vineyard in the best possible light. With time we get to know the vineyards more intimately and we are able to assess the varying strengths and weaknesses from season to season, or perhaps, what the 'terroir' actually is. It is only when we start to have an inkling of what the 'terroir' may be that we are really able to hone in on how best to convey it.

In 2008 the chardonnay was picked at lower bé than ever before. This results in a more 'mineral' flavour profile and plenty of natural acid. It is as if the lower bé restrains the varietal aspect of the wine, thus allowing the soil (and perhaps the season) to express itself more. The riper the fruit becomes, the more the intrinsic varietal fruit characters start to dominate the wine. With this increase in structural austerity and aromatic restraint we allowed 1/3 of the barrels to go through malolactic fermentation. The wine spent two years on lees in a combination of barriques, puncheons and stainless steel.

I think the wine feels far less forced and more 'natural' than previous chardonnay's.

## **2008 Pinot Noir**

This pinot has really blossomed in bottle and so it should if you know what is actually 'in' the bottle. This 2008 for example is made up of about 50% Serré vineyard material and 50% Olive Tree Hill material (Stuart Pinot is the single vineyard expression of this, our oldest, pinot noir planting). The average vine age of this release is over thirty years. There is plenty of firepower in the Bannockburn 'standard release'...and offers ridiculously good value!

The average amount of whole bunch inclusion in the 2008 Pinot Noir is somewhere around 40%. The wine spent between 12 and 24 months in 1/3 new barriques.

It is quite 'forward' and 'open' in comparison to my 2006 and 2007 Bannockburn pinot's which are far more restrained. It has got plenty of Bannockburn leaf litter and forest floor...no boring varietal fruit descriptors here and it is continuing to evolve!

## **2009 Stuart Pinot**

The 2009 vintage has a lot in common with 2007.....they were both seasons that experienced full-on drought conditions and resulted in our yields being down by over 2/3! We knew early on that it was going to be a hard season and so we went through the entire vineyard in November and thinned 50% of our crop as I knew the vines were going to struggle with ripening in such severe conditions. For our close planted Serré vineyard the conditions were just too tough and the 1.2 ha vineyard only yielded 760 kg! Consequently there will be no 2009 release of Serré. I have never experienced a vintage that has had such an aura of defeat and depression from the vineyard crew. For the entire vintage there hung a big black cloud over vineyard manager Lucas Grigsby's head. He had put a full year's work into the vineyard and instead of 100 tonnes of fruit there was only 33 tonnes and no Serré.....BUT....the big difference between 2007 and 2009 is that 2009 was mainly cool in comparison. This meant that flavours arrived incredibly early and in the reds some serious tannins were being synthesised in the grape skins. I refer to 2009 as the rainbow vintage because, although it was hard and yields were undoubtedly far from economic, the wines that were produced are truly mighty. They are wines of intensity, structure and class. They have a real touch of the best of Europe about them. The problem is that there is bugger all of them.

So, the Stuart Pinot was made from the lowest ever yield from the Olive Tree Hill vineyard that was planted in 1976. It was made using 100% whole bunches and spent two years in 1/3 new barriques.

It is a complex, savoury, meaty and smoky beast of a wine that really will live for a long time. I believe it to be a true 'vin de garde' and is one of only two Bannockburn wines (the other being 2010 Serré) that I have shed a tear over.

## **2010 Sauvignon Blanc**

The 2010 season was probably as close to perfection as I have experienced here. It was totally incident free. It was not until the wines had been in barrel for some months that I realised just how good they were. I suspect that ALL of the 2010 wines could be 'best ever' releases!

The Sauvignon Blanc is the first of the 2010's and for me it is a struggle to decide whether it is better than the 2009 or not? Once thing is certain and that is that the 2010 is totally different to any Bannockburn Sauvignon Blanc that has gone before.....and totally different to any Sauvignon Blanc from ANYWHERE for that matter.....no need for me to go on here about it just read the back label or my essay and that should assist with explaining it.

Texture, length and exotic aromas and flavours sums it up.



# BANNOCKBURN

## A Sauvignon Blanc Saga

### Chapter 1

Coming from Nelson in New Zealand undoubtedly predisposes me to being somewhat “anti Marlborough”. As a young road cyclist with a good ability at climbing hills (this was 25 years and over 25 kgs ago!) a visit to race on the flat and often windy roads of the Wairau River plains in Marlborough would usually result in victory for a big fat lazy sprinter...a far from satisfactory outcome for a pure climber.

Returning to New Zealand regularly over the past two decades would always find me frustrated and bewildered by the lack of evolution of the Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc style template (surely a fat sprinting wine style if ever there was one!). My tastings of the ever increasing number of labels would reveal Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc seemed stuck in the rut of its own business success, unable to evolve and mature into something at which its prodigious juvenile talent hinted.

Meanwhile tucked away in the hamlet of Upper Moutere in Nelson, my Father was doing all sorts of interesting things with his own dry grown and low yielding Sauvignon Blanc. Because the site was of quite low capacity and he was not growing big green hydroponic Marlborough Triffids, he was achieving very different flavour profiles and textures in his fruit and resulting wines. He knew that his site was unique and that there was nothing to be gained in copying the wine style of the profiteers that lay over the mountains in Marlborough. This gave him the confidence to explore oak, lees and even skin contact almost twenty years ago. Needless to say this was being done and not a single U.K supermarket wine buyer in sight.

This was my beginning.

### Chapter 11

The 2001 vintage found me working at a winery in Tasmania's Tamar Valley, with the vineyard's first crop of Sauvignon Blanc grapes. The fruit flavours were wonderful with lemon, flint, green apple and blackcurrant and lots of zingy acidity. I was struck at how unique it seemed and how very “un-Marlborough” the flavour profile was, I was excited until I received instructions from management:

“Make it look like Marlborough”

I spent four vintages making Tamar Valley Sauvignon Blanc like “Marlborough” whilst surreptitiously exploring the role of lees, oak and even a bit of botrytis. To me it seems obvious – if you grow Sauvignon Blanc in Tasmania, it might be a good idea to try and make a Tasmanian Sauvignon Blanc. We know what Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc tastes like so let's explore what Tasmania tastes like...all wine roads will eventually lead to the wine temple that is terroir!

### Chapter 111

2001 was also the year of my first vintage in the northern hemisphere and I am in the cellar of Bruno De Conciliis in the hills above the fishing town of Agropoli in the Campania region of Italy. I am watching Bruno ferment the Italian white variety Fiano on skins.

“...but you cannot do that” I said to him.

“...but why not?” was the typically Italian reply. I interrogated him further trying to find an “old world” flaw in his wines and in his philosophy

“...so you are doing it this way because it is the traditional way here in Campania?”

“No...it is MY WAY!”

Bruno was determined to make wine that respected and reflected the terrain that he and the vine were from but he was adamant that this was to be achieved in a unique and individual way. He had no desire to follow in the footsteps of others. The Fiano made by Bruno De Conciliis was wonderful. It was lemony, toasty, flinty and saline with great weight, acid drive and length. I felt that I was in the presence of not just a good wine but a great wine.

I realise how short-sighted and blinkered my Australian trained winemaking eyes were.

### Chapter 1V

In August 2005, I started as the new winemaker at Bannockburn Vineyards. Upon arriving I was impressed by the Bannockburn 2004 Sauvignon Blanc because it was varietal without being excessive. It had a degree of restraint. There were bits of it that reminded me of the Loire Valley and other bits of it that made me think of Graves....it never made me think of Marlborough! It was obvious that it had “something”.

So, in 2006 I began exploring the boundaries to re-invent and re-energise Bannockburn Sauvignon Blanc. Over the next few years I explored the role of barriques, puncheons, indigenous yeasts, solids, oxidative juice handling, high fermentation temperatures, late sulphur additions and malolactic fermentation. In 2010 I investigated the presumed madness of fermentation on skins! What could possibly follow for 2011? How about Italian coopered puncheons made not from oak but acacia which is supposed to deliver a subtle flowery, honey aroma! The quest continues....

I am very excited about this 2010 expression. I think the wine has evolved and morphed into its own being. I think it has shrugged off being merely “varietal” and now stands as a serious white wine able to rub shoulders with all-comers. It has its own voice and is unique.

It is more than Sauvignon Blanc; it is Bannockburn Sauvignon Blanc and is like no other.

*The End.*