

NEWSLETTER



Steels Creek Estate

June 2010

Welcome

A warm hello to customers, friends and family from Simon and Joanne at Steels Creek Estate – we hope this Newsletter finds you well and enjoying fine wine and life. With all the “excitement” of last year we are both looking at a resumption of “normality” in our routine. In fact, we even finally managed to fit in a holiday this year, spending 11 days in New Zealand’s South Island, enjoying all the snow capped scenery and of course a glass or two of great wine. All that green and white made a restful change after looking at a blackened landscape for 12 months.

This Newsletter gives a summary of activities in and around Steels Creek Estate, of course, you are always welcome to visit and catch up on the details.

At the Cellar door

Cellar Door is open every weekend and public holidays and you are always most welcome to visit and have a chat about our wines or how the first vintage after the fires is going.

You have probably heard rumours that Chardonnay is coming back in fashion—for the discerning wine buyer it was never out. If you have not tried Chardonnay in a while come and taste for yourself. Everyone agrees that our **2005 Chardonnay** is a fabulous wine, many even say it is one of the best they have had. Our **2002 Estate Shiraz** is currently the most popular wine at cellar door and stocks are quickly running out. This year’s shortest lunch will be the last time this wine is served at cellar door unless we run out sooner!

Recent releases at Cellar Door

Our latest **Cabernet Sauvignon**, the **2003** vintage, was released in September 2009. Once again this was a drier year producing a more robust wine with good colour; powerful, fractionally hard-edged blackcurrant fruit allied with controlled oak. (James Halliday Wine Companion 2007 edition Rating 89 Drink 2013)

The **2008 Colombard** was released in December 2009 and continues the tradition of a wine that is zesty and refreshing. The bouquet has hints of lychee and is complemented with a well rounded palate. We recommend this wine as an accompaniment to light seafood dishes and freshly shucked oysters but can also be enjoyed chilled relaxing on the deck.

The **2005 Chardonnay** was released in January 2010 – The colour has a mid straw vibrancy, a bouquet with lifted aromas of white peach, honeysuckle, lime and melon complemented by honey and nutty characters and a finish that is long and succulent. “Bright green-yellow; highly aromatic; tangy melon/citrus fruit is the primary driver on a clear-cut palate; excellent length and acidity”. James Halliday Wine Companion 2008 edition Rating 93 Drink 2015

These wines may be ordered online at www.steelsckestate.com.au or you can simply call us to place your order. Remember, we offer discounts for

six pack and twelve pack purchases and free freight to the Melbourne metro area and excellent freight rates, courtesy of Australia Post, elsewhere in Australia.

Shortest Lunch

The Yarra Valley Smaller Wineries Shortest Lunch is on again, this is our 11th year. Come and join us on **19 and 20 June 2010 from 10:00am – 5:00pm** both days. Simon will be serving on the tasting table so this is a great opportunity to ask the winemaker any questions you have on the wines and viticulture.

Given the amount of “great food”, “best food” comments we received from shortest lunch customers last year Stephen from Red Kitchen will be joining us again. He will be serving a choice of slowly braised pasture fed Yarra Valley beef with a piquant caper sauce and creamy potato bake or a vegetarian and gluten free option of braised, spiced winter root vegetables with chestnut and roast onion pilaf. All are served with dressed rocket leaves. Our chef Stephen says this is perfect food to warm you through on a cold winter’s day! Stephen is passionate about food and wine and is always happy to answer any questions you have about the meals or food and wine in general.

Tastings and meals are all served in our cellar door/winery so you are well protected from the elements if the weather is inclement. Keep the chills of winter away and enjoy a glass of our estate wine with your meal. Full details of this year’s event are in the attached Shortest Lunch brochure.

A one off entry fee of \$5 will be collected at the first winery you visit where you will receive a souvenir tasting glass. Net proceeds go to the local CFA, in 2009 the shortest lunch raised over \$5000, which was shared by 2 local CFA brigades.

In the vineyard

Harvest is now well over and the vines are moving to their annual “sleep” mode. As mentioned in our February email Newsletter our 2010 crop was significantly reduced with yields ranging from as low as 25% (Chardonnay) to 37% (Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon) of our normal production. The one exception was Colombard which came in at our normal quantity of about 1 tonne. So this all unfortunately, exacerbates the zero production from 2009 due to the fires.

Generally, the vines have recovered well from the extensive reworking done in 2009 and with some more “TLC” this year we should see production levels improve in 2011 – but as we say viticulture, with its once a year crop, is in the “lap of the gods” when it comes to a successful crop! So many uncontrollable influences can have a large impact.

So with winter pruning almost upon us there will be a lot of work retraining the vines that were cut back to the ground last year, including protection from those voracious rabbits! Some vines will have to be replaced and this will mean taking cuttings this year and planting in a nursery environment for subsequent planting in 2012.

In the Winery

Low yields have flowed into the winery with only very small quantities of both the Cabernet and Shiraz being processed. As a consequence of these small quantities we decided to adopt a slightly riskier and, dare we say "funkier" process this year. The primary ferments were all performed "wild" – that is, we allowed the natural yeast flora present in the vineyard and winery to do their own thing – no cultured yeast inoculation was undertaken. In addition, the grapes were only destemmed and hence whole berries were fermented. So far so good, both the ferments completed successfully without any dramas. The Shiraz and Cabernet are currently going through malolactic fermentation (where malic acid is converted to the softer lactic acid). The wines, to date, are showing promise of some really exceptional outcomes.

The Colombard has also completed fermentation and is now being prepared for bottling prior to the end of the year. Good sugar and acid levels at harvest have flowed through to the end product and enhanced by some lovely floral characteristics. The Chardonnay was such a small quantity we may decide to sell the grapes as opposed to receiving the wine this year – a pity as the quality was exceptional.

Gardens and Landscaping

Work in the vineyard and harvest is complete, the wine is in oak barrels to mature and we can finally get back to some landscaping before the vineyard beckons again with winter pruning. 12 months ago we replaced the burnt-out sleepers in the centre of the driveway roundabout with a dry-stone retaining wall. At last, we have returned to this project and are now paving the area in an intricate circular pattern. Simon has prepared the area digging out the required shapes, laying road base and screeding the sand. Joanne got the job of laying all the pavers, Simon says "you designed it; you have to make it work". We are both very sore from all the work but you will see this stage all but completed if you visit for the shortest lunch. The planting out of the garden with succulents will be the next stage.

We still have to replant the ornamental pear trees that were parallel to the driveway and reinstating the garden at the front gate. The other outstanding tasks from the fire are replacing the boundary and internal house fencing and replacing the burnt sleepers in the back garden and vegetable garden. 16 months on and we still have a list of tasks to reinstate the property. Sometimes we think we have not got very far until we remember all the things we have fixed in the vineyard plus all the seasonal tasks we had to bring in the 2010 vintage.

Other Events

In March this year the Yarra Valley Smaller Wineries hosted the inaugural Harvest Feast located at three venues across the Yarra Valley, with three to four wineries at each venue.

We participated with the group of wineries based in the Dixons Creek/Steels Creek region of the Yarra Valley and held our function at the Yarra Valley conference centre. Our guests enjoyed canapés and a sumptuous 3 course lunch matched with 12 wines-moderate servings of each, in a wonderful bushland setting. Entertainment from acclaimed Yarra Valley harpist and vocalist Barbara Jeffery completed a relaxing and memorable afternoon. We received a vote of thanks from those who attended the event plus a begging request that the event and more like it be added to the Smaller Wineries annual calendar. Watch this space for further developments!

Environmental recovery

Steady rainfall since last July (never below 50mm per month) has kept the countryside remarkably green and has given the native trees the best possible chance of recovery. Even so a few trees that reshot after the fire are now beginning to die off. A couple of the heavier falls of rain caused local flooding. The lack of vegetation on the hills meant higher runoff. Problems were also caused by dead trees washing down in gullies and blocking creeks causing damage to local bridges, roads, newly replaced fences and our local tennis court. Fire and flood, that just leaves pestilence and this summer saw Steels Creek along with many areas in the Yarra Valley suffering high numbers of European wasps. With such a small amount of fruit on the vine we had a battle on hands to minimise the amount of damage they could inflict.

Bird and kangaroo numbers are slowly increasing. We have good numbers of magpies, finches, swifts and lorikeets. We are very sad that kookaburra numbers are still very low. Different species have moved in to fill the gaps and this year we had wood swallows build a nest and raise their family in a Cabernet vine.

Our Shire council is currently making another pass through the neighbourhood to remove any dangerous dead trees along the roadside. This is their third pass to clear trees and as they balance the needs of wildlife with safety we imagine this job will be repeated a few more times. The dead trees are rapidly being replaced by a forest of 2m tall eucalypt and wattle saplings. The regrowth is so thick in places the council has had to mow it from the edge of roads so that we can see along the road.

Hope you enjoyed our little summary of events at Steels Creek Estate. We are always willing to elaborate further the next time you visit and so until then best wishes and regards,

Simon and Joanne



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