

Miceli Newsletter

Winter 2009

Opening Times:

We will be open for the Queen's Birthday Weekend- Sat, Sun, Mon June 6-8 11.00 - 5.00. On Sunday and Monday we will be serving food- Tony's Gourmet Terrines (Duck with Pinot Noir, Rabbit with Chardonnay, and Salmon with Pinot Grigio). We will also be at the Red Hill Showgrounds on Saturday, along with all the other wineries. Following this we will be open for tastings the second weekend in July (school holidays) then the first weekend of each month (but available, for sales only, almost every day).

Season Report:

When I wrote last, the harvest was getting close, but all is now over, (thankfully!), and it has been highly successful. All the wines are in tank or barrel and finished fermenting or nearly so. The crop level was lower than normal, but "only" by about 1/3, if we can somehow define what a "normal" crop is. There was enough rain in March (68mm) pre-harvest to keep the vines happy, and prevent any premature leaf fall. Despite popular perceptions, excessive drought does not increase flavours, but actually impedes ripening and flavour development by inhibiting photosynthesis (especially if leaves drop).

The harvest period was mild to cool with a fair bit of rain, but the grapes were all in perfect condition, the bunches loose, the berries tiny, and the colours and flavours intense. Despite having said this before, this may well prove to be our best vintage yet! The last grapes were picked by family and friends on Sun 3rd May, a fantastic sunny day and everyone had a great time.

We have had slightly above average April rain (113mm), slightly below average May rain (54mm), but overall the farm and the countryside are looking green and magnificent.

Of course we need more rain over Winter, and current predictions about this are worrying.

Vineyard:

The new vineyard finished the season with a burst of growth, a large number of vines right

up to the top wire (1.8m) , not bad in 4 months only. The rows have been cultivated and ryecorn planted to bind the soil and suppress the weeds over Winter, before it will be slashed to form a mulch over the soil for the growing season.

Drought management:

How well do grapevines cope with drought? In general terms, quite well, but it is not as simple as that when you look a little closer.

Grapevines have a root system that is like a tree, with a hierarchy of roots that branch only sparsely, and penetrate fairly deeply into the soil.

But how deeply? It depends, of course on the soil. Many soils have physical or chemical barriers to root growth. Soils that are too hard or have sharp boundary layers reduce or prevent root penetration. You will have seen soils where heavy, compact clay underlies sandy, lighter clay or silty surface soils. Much of eastern Melbourne has these barely "adequate" soils. There are also situations where increasing acidity of the soil at depth (high rainfall areas) or increasing lime or salinity at depth (low rainfall areas), can produce a barrier to roots that the eye does not see. Thus there is a practical limit to how deep roots can generally go in many soils.

Soils that have "effective depths" of less than 30 cm are generally unsuitable for grapes. Soils 30-50 cm deep are "adequate" (with irrigation), soils that are 50-100 cm deep are "suitable", and soils that are > 1 m deep are "ideal" for growth but tend to produce high vigour (unless water is limited).

Clay soils hold the most water, up to 250mm per metre depth, but only a quarter of this is "readily available" and less than half of this can be got at by grapevines before suffering severe damage. Also roots cannot go as deep, as in sandy soils, which hold only about 60mm per metre, but all of which is available.

The vast majority of the nutrients and organic matter are located in the top 20-30 cm of soil, particularly the nitrogen. Thus if the surface is dry vines have difficulty getting nutrients, though they may still have adequate water at depth.

To get back to drought, the ability of the grapevines to resist drought is reliant on a store of soil moisture that can be tapped for a long time after the last rain has fallen. This is not quite the same as desert plants such as mulga, which actually use very little water in the first place. In fact grapevines are very susceptible to competition from other plants, and extract water

from the soil at less than 1/10 the rate that grasses can. This is why you see vineyards in relatively dry areas all "clean cultivated" with no grass or weeds in between the rows. So grapevines actually survive drought by extracting water slowly from the soil, as long as nothing else extracts it first.

Of course there does have to be moisture to start with at some stage. Hopefully, more rain falls than evaporates over Winter, and soil moisture builds up, and can be used in Summer.

How much water do vines need then? In full irrigation areas, such as Mildura, with flood irrigation large crops have been produced with 10 MI (megalitres) per hectare (equal to 1000 mm rainfall). With drip systems and "deficit irrigation" slightly lower crops are produced at 3-4 MI (equal to 300-400 mm). Plus rainfall of 100-200 mm.

Our soils are mostly extremely deep (the red medium clay soils 2-3 metres, the grey sandy clay soils about 1 metre), and so can store effectively 100-300 mm of relatively available water. So if we have enough rain to keep the soil moist up to November we then will have enough stores to get us through to March and a small amount more of rain (or irrigation) can get us right through to harvest. This is what the situation has been for 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2006. In 2005 and 2008 and 2009 we had some good falls of rain in Summer. The 2007 vintage (2006 Winter) was of course the driest season, with the soil not even being properly moist at the beginning of Spring. Keeping the grass short reduces its water usage this was a major factor, as well as a certain amount of rain through Summer, which was just enough to keep going.

Our new dam does give us some greater water supply, but still limited, when applied over an area of about 3 Ha this is only the equivalent of 50mm of rain, so only supplementary.

New Releases:

The Lucy's Choice Pinot Noir 2006 is being released this weekend.

The 2006 season was superb for us, good Spring rain, dry and warm from early Summer, but cool in January, with a long dry ripening period into late April. This wine is much bigger in body, but still delicate in structure with the silky tannins and flavours characteristic of Pinot Noir. A fabulous wine.

Newsletter Special:

For the Winter Wine Weekend only (until 12/6 to allow for post), we are offering 25% off the new release Lucy's Choice Pinot Noir 2006,

and 2004 Michael Brut! for purchases of 6 bottles or more. We still have a few cases of the 2005 Lucy's Choice at 25% off until finished. Be quick.

Tasting Notes:

Iolanda Pinot Grigio 2008

A distinctive, dry, flavoursome white wine with clean acid finish.

Pale greenish yellow. Full-bodied, but fine, with typical Pinot Grigio characters- mineral/flinty, brown pear, lemon, honey and floral. The palate is fresh and clean, and it has great persistence of flavour.

Alc 13.5%

Olivia's Chardonnay 2005

An elegant wine with depth and power.

Brilliant pale greenish yellow. Peach, cashew, citrus, "struck match" and superbly integrated vanillan oak..

Smooth mouthfeel and fine acid balance, with great intensity and length of flavour. Alc 13.5%

6 Bronze

Dry Pinot Rose 2006

This is a serious rose, totally dry, with great depth of fruit and a clean acid finish.

Brilliant strawberry pink, with plum, strawberry and a hint of vanillan oak. Intense and full bodied with palate freshness, smooth mouthfeel, good acid and great length of flavour. Wine Wise Highly

Recommended (Best of Category) Alc 13.5%

Lucy's Choice Pinot Noir 2006

Serious pinot noir, a medium bodied red with elegance, richness, and complexity

Brilliant deep red. Rich dark cherries, coffee, spice, and fragrant oak. Savoury, with great length and silky tannins, a wine with body, complexity, and depth.

Alc 14.0 %

Michael Brut 2004

Aperitif style- dry, fine, flavoursome, complex with refreshing acid finish.

The flavours are "fine" and intense, with toasty/vegemite yeast, strawberry and hints of melon, pear and honey. The palate is very creamy, long, with cleansing acid and a fresh dry finish. AL 11.0% 1 Gold

Rose Methode Champenoise 2001

A flavoursome, delicate, and complex dry sparkling rose, with a fine bead.

Brilliant pale salmon pink. The palate is rich and flavoursome, with creamy and toasty yeast, strawberry pinot noir fruit, great length, and a clean dry finish. 12.5 % alc./vol 1 Gold 2 Silver 4 Halliday*

Satisfaction Guarantee:

Any wine that is spoiled will be credited or replaced. Any wine that you wish to return that has been well looked after and still in saleable condition will be refunded.

Pauline & Anthony Miceli