



NEWSLETTER

February 2003

Edition 7

*"were we not wean'd 'til then?
But suck'd on country pleasures, childishy?"*
Donne, *The Good Morrow*

This week ranged from settling twelve new weaner Aberdeen Angus cattle to making an idiot of myself on national television as the Singing Chef (capitals deserved) with Sami Lukis, Channel Nine's shapely weather girl; not half as shapely as the model who posed for the Nude Food and Wine segment of whom viewers and yours truly saw the back 'though that was enough - a Tom Roberts' canvass, thick with mist and bush flavour - yet not an activity one would try during a Granite Belt winter (one of the longest sentences I have ever attempted in a newsletter and surprising that the grammar checker has not cacked it. Oh, there it goes.)

*"The quality of mercy is not strain'd.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven"*
Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

We got an inch of rain in half an hour the other day when this missive began and another 11mm in the following six hours. This was welcome, as you may imagine, for while those to the north, west, east and south got buckets, the Granite Belt, until now, had scored eight millimetres in a fortnight; just enough to put our whites in peril of botrytis, otherwise known as bunch rot. We have checked since and thus far they are clear.

The Chardonnay, at 13 Baume a week ago and green, has not increased sugar content but is less green. Interestingly, it is picking up the fig aromas that characterised our 2002 Chardonnay (mental pictures of that model for some reason). Given the vagaries of the weather we think we shall do a test again on Friday and almost certainly pick on Tuesday (18th February).

*"Poetic Justice, with her lifted scale,
Where, in nice balance, truth with gold she weighs,
And solid pudding against empty praise."*
Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*

One little thing that could spike the pudding is that if we do get the dreaded botrytis and have to spray to kill it, then we will not pick the Chardonnay for another week.

We had a Vintage Banquet last Saturday night. In addition to the food (menu at:

<http://newwww.halenet.com.au/~tmm/f&w02.html>) we had a vertical tasting of all of our Beverley Chardonnays, including the 1999 of which just 300 bottles were made.

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We also tasted side by side all three 2000 vintage reds, two of which won trophies and gold medals. The 2000 Republic Red, a Cab Sav Shiraz blend that was never entered in any competitions and, thus, won no medals, drank beautifully and was a match for the Upper House Cab Sav and the Black Rod Shiraz. If anyone has any of the 2000 Rep Red left in cellar, save it for a special occasion.

"Come up and see me sometime."
Mae West, *Diamond 'Lil*

The Meers brothers attended as did Dave and Judy Thorburn, the Cross family and Terry and Beverley Ryan who have stayed at our cottages a number of times. The Courier Mail's wine writer Mike Frost came with his wife Denise who threatened to write a Mills and Boon novel based on the WGW newsletters. "Good grief," I responded, gazing into her onyx eyes spellbound by her dazzling smile. Imperceptibly, she moved towards me and I caught my breath... Well, you know the rest.

We joined Mike and Denise the night before at the First Sip function in the new open air Stanthorpe Piazza to launch both the two week Granite Belt Food & Wine Affair and the new Granite Belt Wine Dozens in one of which our 2001 Upper House Cab Sav stars. There was a bit of country pageantry and speeches through a scratchy microphone (testing twooo, twooo, twooo). Mike and Andrew Corrigan (MW) spoke well and briefly about wine matters and most people drank too much.

"Something is rotten in the state of Denmark."
Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Such occasions always remind me of what a rotten little borough the Granite Belt can be when left to unscrutinised devices. It is amusing to observe except that from time to time, by-standing innocents get hurt. The local council's political philosophy is rooted in the Country Party's agrarian socialism of last century and lots of things get done or don't get done on nods and winks. Politics here has an arrogance of which the participants appear blissfully unaware; it is about making ends justify means. The latest outrage involves selling sewerage outfall to one of the district's largest vegetable growers who happens to operate north of town and, thus, uphill of the treatment plant. Consequently ratepayers are subsidising the considerable pumping costs. If they had piped it to downhill farms the shire could have turned a tidy profit.





N E W S L E T T E R

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Look out for our winter accommodation and wine specials. Coming soon.

Yet come election time a donkey could get up as long as it was the incumbent councillor. It is titillating to watch the ebb and flow of political allegiances – they appear as undercurrents at these formal functions and establish the pecking order.

*Whanne that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote.*

Chaucer, Canterbury Tales

One local councillor (more pecked than pecking) who is also a moderately large-scale vegetable grower and not a bad bloke, has always been dismissive of my water supply which is underground and, thus, invisible to the naked eye, unlike his extensive dam. "How's that little well of yours going?" he asked, somewhat patronisingly, I thought, so I said: "How's your big dam?" "It's empty," he said. "Well, my little well isn't." But I digress. My favourite councillor thanked me for my newsletters that night but I don't think she actually reads them. This should flush it out one way or the other. Anyway, it was a lovely night.

Denise Frost had a great idea. I told her and Mike that I was concerned about the Block 5 Cab Sav – it has been a tough year for young vines and the fruit is suffering - I suggested that if it was not up to scratch we might bulk it up and sell it off in carboys. "Why don't you make a rosé?" Denise chimed in. It is a splendid idea and I think we may do that. We shall call it Frosty's Rosé and, as Mike suggested, we will put it in a frosted bottle. Chill before serving, perhaps?

"They're a ravenous horde

Gilbert, Iolanthe

Anyway, after tasting some lovely wines, including Alex Harslett's new Fox Bar Faces Cab Sav Merlot, we trooped off to the art gallery for the opening of a new show and drank (for free!) Mark Ravenscroft's superb 1999 Raven Wines Semillon.

To the present: we have had an excellent response from pluckers and are in danger of being over subscribed for the Chardonnay harvest. With about three tonnes on the vines, we shall need six bodies in addition to yours truly and Angelo Cutuli, the vineyard manager. Certain starters are Iain and Peter Meers; Derek Churchill is a probable; possibles are Tony Bilbrough, John and Kerry van Pelt; plus Roger Jeffries has nominated himself, Griff Hodges and Ray Pople.

Murray Bladwell has threatened to bring a nubile Brazilian Rotary Exchange student along. I suggested he save her for Carnivale in the Cab Sav.

We shall have to rationalise the pluckers somehow (rationalising pluckers sounds as unconvincing as military intelligence). We shall sort it out at the Beefsteak and Burgundy luncheon on Thursday. There will be at least four separate picks this year, so there will be plenty of opportunity.

"I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude"

Milton, Lycidas

Sad to say that if we do need extras, Charlotte and Elin, our Swedish backpackers, are now unavailable, having returned to Stockholm. Sami is unavoidably detained by a warm front and the model was so unutterably beautiful I forgot to ask her name. However, a couple of likely lasses from Cheshire in the UK called around the other day and, naturally, I accepted their mobile number as television personalities do.

Again she moved towards him. "I think," he thought, "she is going to kiss me." The luminous, fleshy lips held him spellbound. They came ever closer. His heart thumped and a lump formed in his throat. He could feel her warm breath on his cheek. She whiskered huskily: "We're crossing live in two seconds and your fly is undone, bozo." It was, he would later ruefully reflect, one of morning television's finest moments.

John Arlidge

pleasant pluckers' wine club

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