Eltham & District Winemakers Guild

Artisans of amateur grape and country winemaking

*Fellowship through home winemaking*

*Share, Learn, Enjoy!*

**Press Cuttings**
**September 2012**

| | | | | | |
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**The Guild encourages the responsible consumption of alcohol**

The Guild meets on the last Friday of each month (except December)
at the Eltham Living & Learning Centre at 7.45 pm
**Next meeting: 28 September 2012**

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# Next Meeting – 28 September

Our next meeting for 2012 will be held in the Pavilion at the Eltham Living and Learning Centre, commencing at 7.45 pm on Friday 31 August 2012.

**Guests checking out joining the Guild are welcome to our regular meetings, as always.**

# President's Press

*Bill Loughlin*

**NEW SPARKLING WINE CORKING MACHINE**

Steve Lamberti from "Home Make It", one of our existing sponsors, will provide a demonstration of a new sparkling wine corker which incorporates a wire fastener over the cork in one operation. This demonstration will take 15-20 minutes.

**MEDITERANNEAN STYLE WHITE WINES**

Danny Capellani will discuss the merits and attributes of a few Mediterranean white varietal wines, followed by a tasting of member Mediterranean whites, for comparison with some commercial varieties.

**Jo Illian Trophy**

We have allocated some time at this meeting for a pre-evaluation of your best Shiraz reds that you intend to submit for judging at the November Eltham Annual Wine Show with the objective of taking out the Jo Illian Trophy for the best Shiraz. There is time to prepare barrel samples and bottles for this tasting and comment.

**QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

Time permitting, the floor will be opened up for any questions on any country or grape wine issues.

# Open Cellars of Nillumbik Weekend – 20 and 21 October

**The Treasures amidst our Hills**

The Shire of Nillumbik is blessed with a wide and diverse range of local wineries, many of which are now decades old. These smaller wineries embrace a more relaxed way of life and reflect much of the original Eltham artistic and philosophical traditions. This area is, in fact, Melbourne's closest wine region.

The Nillumbik Tourist Association lists some 18 family owned wineries all with their own unique wine making styles, reflecting in part the diversity of soils and aspect or terroir, from the black volcanic soils of Kangaroo Ground, to the shallower, shaley soils further north.

Not all of the wineries have cellar door sales, but some can offer meals, cater for events and/or provide a venue for art shows. Many of our local pubs stock and promote these local wines.

A recent initiative from 6 of the smaller wineries began 3 years ago, with the Winter Wine Fest, a celebration of local wine, food and entertainment promoted as the Shortest Lunch for the weekend closest to the shortest day June 21st. The wineries involved in this event are Hildebrand Ridge Organic Winery, Redbox Vineyard, Lovegrove Vineyard and Winery, Panton Hill Vineyard and Winery, Shaws Road, and Yarrambat Estate Vineyard. All are within 10 minutes drive of each other.

Our local wineries main event is the Open Cellars of Nillumbik Weekend, this year on Saturday 20th and Sunday 21st October. Twelve local wineries will open for this event for wine tasting and food treats and music.

For further information phone: 1300 660 072 or www.opencellars.com.au

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# More Ph Difficulties

*George Wright*

Some may recall my horror (described in an earlier newsletter) when I found that neither the local medical centre nor the Chemist at Riddells Creek had a pH meter. I needed the check the pH of my juice but the probe on my meter had dried up in the move to my new location. Unfortunately, the story didn't end there.

To give the story a context, let me give my version of pH theory before I continue with the reality.

**The Theory**

When we ferment grape juice there are multitudes of organisms sitting on the grape skins and floating around in the air many of whom delight in dining on the juice goodies after we squash the grapes. The primary resource for them is the sugars, but they can consume other chemicals as well. Most yeasts will happily process the sugars but as the alcohol content increases only a few stains can cope with higher alcohol levels and we introduce commercial yeasts who can deal with this.

Even if we ferment to dryness there remains the other chemicals that are still fodder to micro-organisms, some of which will turn your maturing masterpiece into muck. For example, vinegar is good if you're cooking but not in a wine glass.

Amateurs generally have four techniques to try to stop these nasties from taking over:

- excluding air will stop those that require oxygen for metabolic processes;
- fermenting to dryness will exclude those that need sugar;
- adding sulphur dioxide (PMS) zaps most and continues to protect the wine; and,
- lowering the pH will prevent some versatile bugs from working.

It is this latter aspect that is important in this story.

A pH below 3.6 is the magic level of acidity. More acid than this (i.e. a lower pH) will stop most nasty micro-organisms from working. Lesser acidic levels (higher than pH 3.6) will enable many to attack your maturing wine and spoil it.

If the grapes have been left on the wine for a long period (generally to enable the sugar levels to rise to a targeted level) the levels of acid in the grapes decreases. There may not be sufficient natural acid left to keep the pH below 3.6. Most processes don't change the pH much the juice ferments but some winemaking processes can increase the pH (lowering acidity). For example malo-lactic bacteria may increase the pH as much as 1.5 pH units which can startle you if your grapes started off with a pH within your target zone.

If the pH is too high you can add an acid, preferably one that naturally occurs in grapes. Tartaric acid is often chosen because it has lesser potential for adverse side effects than some others.

How much do you add? There is a simple rule-of-thumb but it's unfortunate that you can't always rely on it. It says that 1 gram of Tartaric acid per litre of wine will decrease the pH by 0.1.

Wine has a natural buffering effect when you add Tartaric. As you first add the acid the effect is pronounced, but after you keep adding the impact on the pH lessens, even of you are adding the same amount of Tartaric per litre.

So what? Why don't you just keep dumping in the Tartaric until the pH meter comes to the magic figure of 3.6? Another bit of theory must be understood to answer this question. It requires a nice (meaning exact) answer and I'm not sure I can properly do this but I'll try to do it in my own words. If you a chemist, please skip the next few paragraphs. Better still, read them and provide corrections.

There are two measures of acidity in general use. The pH is a measure of the reactivity of hydrogen ions (charged hydrogen atoms) in the wine. Another measure is the Total Acidity which relates to the amount of acid in the wine. While the pH may impact on the capability of a micro-organism to metabolise the wine, the total acidity is the feature that our taste buds react to. The sensation of acidity in wine (how tart or how flabby) relates to total acidity, not to pH.

If we keep adding Tartaric acid to bring down the pH, the initial drop in pH is large. However as we continue to add, the drop in pH becomes less and less. All the time, the total acidity (measures in grams per litre) continues to climb. We may reach the magic pH 3.6 but by that time the wine may be so tart that it consumption becomes an exercise in drinking battery acid.

One demonstration of this can be observed commercially. Grapes grown in hot climates often have high sugar but low acid levels. They are a favourite of cask wine manufacturers because they are a cheap resource. (High in sugars gives high alcohol) Typically such wines need a good injection of Tartaric acid and the amounts they need to add for stability often give the wine a hard 'metallic' taste. This is the reason why we need to add a minimum of Tartaric acid. And this is also a reason why we should purchase grapes with a good balance between sugar and acid levels.

**The Reality**

As indicated above, in this year's vintage of Shiraz grapes my expensive pH meter was broken. I had tried the chemist and doctor to no avail. I found a battery for another pocket pH meter which started it up, but my wine still gave very high readings.

I asked for help. Ken King (at Kings of Kangaroo Ground winery) is always very helpful to wine amateurs, being a life member of the Guild. His meter required adjustment but he took my sample and relayed his measurements to me by email. My pH was 3.95. Disaster! He had adjusted his meter and tested it against known standards.

Forget climate change, I was born a sceptic and I wasn't convinced. The wine didn't taste that flabby. It was inky in colour. I sought another opinion at another vineyard. This one gave a pH reading of 3.75. That sounded better, but not great. But a stray comment from the wine-maker made me distrust this measurement. He said that when he calibrated his pH meter the standard pH7 calibration always gave a reading of 7.6 while the standard ph 4 always came out at 4. He always took the pH of the wine and subtracted 0.6. (The reason for calibration is to derive a regression line that the meter is programmed to use to give an accurate pH whatever it is.) Obviously I could not trust this reading.

The next winemaker I approached readily obliged (winemakers are very helpful people). He had calibrated his meter recently and gave my wine a pH of 3.85. Perhaps this was more like it. But as I left he said, '*I never trust my meter. I always get my wine professionally tested.*' Damn. What does this mean?

I decided to attempt to lower the pH by dumping in 2gm Tartaric/litre (aiming for a reduction of 0.2 pH units). This is the maximum advised to be added in any one attempt. I knew it probably wouldn't achieve 3.6 and I'd have to live with whatever pH eventuated because I have an aversion to battery acid.

My fellow winemakers and I racked off the barrels after a month or so. The colour of the Shiraz had lost its inky-black colour and had turned crimson but it still tasted OK. But I still felt guilty about not knowing a basic fact about my wine.

Another life –member of the Guild is the professional, Karen Coulston who has now restricted her winemaking consultancy to testing wines and lecturing. She offered to test my wine and my pH meter against her more-modern accurate meter.

To cut a long story short, she found the wine was close enough to 3.6 to keep me happy. However, the testing of my meter gave me the greatest surprise. Karen rejuvenated my old (once-expensive) meter that I had been preparing to use as a boat anchor. And my pen-pH meter was within the bounds of acceptability for pocket-handy tests. The real problem emerged as Karen tested further. It was how I used my meters.

Modern meters often have temperature compensating devices and I had assumed that I didn't have to bother about this refinement. Sorry George, wrong again. I needed to measure the temperature of the wine and then adjust the pH meter accordingly and then take out the temperature wire so that the pH meter ignored the subsequent measurement. Then the PH was measured accurately.

If you are having difficulties with your meter, as most of us do from time to time, this may be an avenue to explore further.

A big thank you to Karen……and to Ken and the other two winemakers, as well as the medical centre and the chemist in Riddells Creek. I think we'll call the label for our Shiraz, 'An Inconvenient Truth'.

# Every Bottle Tells a Story

Source: Epicure Age

Jane Faulkner joins a historic tasting at Magill Estate, home of the inspirational Australian winemaker.

Penfolds' chief winemaker Peter Gago samples a drop or two. *Photo: Richard Humphrys*

WHEN it comes to Australian wine, Penfolds needs no introduction. It is everywhere. Global. The ubiquitous red cap, the distinctive font on its labels and its most famous wine is simply known by one powerful word: Grange.

But, as with any highly successful company, the marketing hype can be distracting. The latest centred on 12 objets d'art - hand-blown glass ampoules, decorated with sterling silver and each stored in its own jarrah cabinet, containing the rare 2004 Kalimna Block 42 cabernet sauvignon. Oh, and an asking price of $168,000.

*In the rarefied world of fine wine, Penfolds is our most celebrated.*

Penfolds kept one; the rest sold. The ampoules attracted plenty of attention along with snide comments and guffaws, understandably. Yet if a champagne house or Bordeaux chateau had released a wine in the same elite packaging, no one would have batted an eyelid. In the rarefied world of fine wine, Penfolds is our most celebrated.

"It is a brand with the most astonishing history," says master of wine, author and fine-wine auctioneer Andrew Caillard, "and having travelled to Bordeaux and recently having access to beautiful wines, I can honestly say Penfolds has one of the best stories about wine anywhere in the world. It's something to be amazingly proud of as Australians."

Advertisement

Caillard has worked with Penfolds for about 25 years, auctioning its wines on the secondary market but also as author of *The Rewards of Patience*, an independent assessment and guide for investors and aficionados. A book to gauge, for example, how Grange, the most sought-after luxury wine, or Bin 389, Australia's most cellared wine, are ageing. It is updated every five years with input from experienced wine writers.

A few weeks ago, the final tastings incorporating the beautiful 2010 vintage were completed in preparation for the seventh edition, to be released late next year. I took part in this historic, inspiring tasting of about 250 wines, held over three days at Magill Estate, the spiritual birthplace of Penfolds and Grange.

The line-up was incredibly diverse, comprising verticals of Bin 389 cabernet shiraz from 1961 through to 2010, Magill Estate shiraz starting with its first, the 1983, plus Bin 407 and Bin 28.

There were three thrilling brackets of chardonnay in Yattarna, Reserve Bin A and Bin 311. And then there were the rare jewels in between. Think 1956 Magill burgundy, as it was known then, and Bin 60A 1962 Coonawarra cabernet Kalimna shiraz, without doubt one of finest wines ever produced in Australia and a sheer joy to taste - no way was I spitting that one out with its incredibly lively palate of sweet fruit and silky, supple tannins. It opened to reveal an astonishing fragrance of dried rose petals, earth with intriguing smoky sarsaparilla nuances. A magnificent wine of great depth, plus that '04 Kalimna Block 42 cabernet sauvignon - not the ampoule, just a bottle. A wine as fragrant as a souk spice market, luscious with super-fine tannins and the epitome of what a Penfolds Special Bin wine should be. After all, it is made from the world's oldest continuously producing cabernet vines, planted about 1888.

It was an emotional tasting, not because of the overall value of the wines or rarity, rather their place in history: in each bottle there is a story.

Penfolds and its indefatigable chief winemaker, Peter Gago, are acutely aware of such a legacy.

It is worth noting that for the first time, Gago decided to take elements of the *Rewards of Patience* tasting outside Australia. There was a day in Beijing to take in half a century of Bin 707 cabernet sauvignon, a day in Berlin for St Henri to be assessed, and then New York for the line-up of Grange. Aside from these top-tier labels, more-accessible wines such as Koonunga Hill were also scrutinised.

As Caillard notes, there is no other winery in the world that opens its museum cellar and allows an independent assessment of its wines. Gago says: "There are no absolutes with wine, and great wines that we had written off in previous editions [as being oxidised or past their prime] have come back and are looking great again for this edition. It's nice to be wrong when you think a wine has gone. You never quite know."

So back to Magill Estate, the historic, protected property that takes in 5.2 hectares of shiraz: the original grenache vines planted in the mid-19th century are long gone and so, too, the original 120 hectares that have been swallowed up into suburbia. Aside from being a monopole, the Magill Estate vineyard is one of the few remaining single vineyards within a city's boundaries - it is on the outskirts of Adelaide. The vineyard is where chief winemaker Max Schubert sourced fruit for the first Grange, and every one since has a splash in it - the DNA of Penfolds.

Magill Estate is where English medico Dr Christopher Rawson Penfold and his wife Mary established their home and vineyard in 1844. He brought those grenache vines with him, believing in wine's medicinal properties, while Mary was instrumental in the winemaking, setting the foundations for what is now one of our most successful and oldest producers.

From humble beginnings, Penfolds now straddles the fine-wine market while remaining true to its core and accessible wines such as Bin 389. While its price has edged upwards in recent years, Bin 389 still represents good value at $55, or Bin 128 shiraz about $32, both in terms of their cellaring potential and drinkability at current release.

With Grange, Schubert had foresight and plenty of grit. "We in Australia are capable of producing wines equal to the best in the world," he wrote in 1979. "But we must not be afraid to put into effect the strength of our own convictions, continue to use our imagination in winemaking generally and be prepared to experiment in order to gain something extra, different and unique in the world of wine."

It is exactly what Peter Gago would say.

**Source: Epicure**

Read more: http://www.theage.com.au/entertainment/restaurants-and-bars/every-bottle-tells-a-story-20120903-259k9.html#ixzz26QQuqgc4

# Wine Quotes and News

**Articles wanted**

Articles of interest, whether they are quotes or newsworthy, are requested from members. If you have a draft version or need some assistance, I'm happy to assist for its inclusion.
(Ed.)

### Wine Quotes

*"It is well to remember that there are five reasons for drinking: the arrival of a friend, one's present or future thirst, the excellence of the wine, or any other reason."*

Latin Proverb

# Trading Barrel

***BUY / SELL SERVICE FOR MEMBERS -*** *Ads need to be lodged with the editor by the 14th of the month to be included in the next Newsletter.*

# Sponsors Corner

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## Costante Imports

## Cellar Plus

Cellar Plus also has now in stock Accuvin wine test kits from the USA , which are a low cost way for testing every thing from Free $SO_2$ sulphur in wine, your pH or malic acid to see MLF ferments are complete. It could be a cheaper and simpler option, for those who are unable to leave samples at the Cellar Plus store, for their more analytical laboratory testing service which is still available with results returned usually within 24-72 hrs.

**Cellar Plus has moved** its Epping retail / trade Showroom from Yale St just around the corner on to the main road at 218 Cooper St (near the Medical Centre), with an expanded display space which allows the wine enthusiast an improved opportunity to roam around the many tanks, pumps, presses on display, and not to mention an internal cool room with ample yeast for all us winemakers and plenty of hops styles to please the advanced brewers.

## Home Make It

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