

**BURGE FAMILY**  
**WINEMAKERS**  
 BAROSSA VALLEY



EST. 1928

# NEWSLETTER

Dear Subscriber,

As you read this I'll be 'winging' my way to Toronto, the first of four Canadian cities where I will be flying the BFW flag before returning home via Hong Kong and Singapore. It will be nice to be travelling again, and catching up with the many friends made over the years together with the restaurants and retailers who stock our range of wines. Since my last series of trips in 2007, much has changed in the world wine scene, and in particular Australia's standing on the world stage. The perception that we specialise in 'blockbuster' Shirazes and/or bottom-end 'critter' wines means that much work needs to be done to highlight the remarkable diversity of regional wine styles that exist in Australia. And, I don't think increased plantings of Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris/Grigio is going to be the answer.

It was in June 2007, while travelling on the New York subway during a day spent working with a rep. of our then NY agent, that he asked if I subscribed to a wine magazine called 'The World of Fine Wine'? I had to admit I hadn't even heard of it. He told me that it was a new publication and I could forget the other international wine magazines; this was the real deal for anyone serious about quality wine.

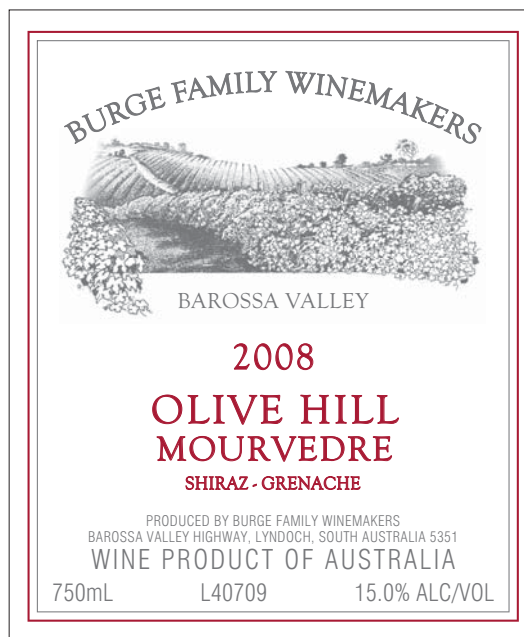
A few months after my return, I heeded his advice and took out a subscription - at £30 per copy - and after reading a few issues, I even purchased 4 back-issues, such was the quality of the publication. Fast-forward 2 years to June 2009, to a lovely lunch enjoyed at cellar-door with the highly regarded English wine writer Andrew Jefford, a contributor to the aforementioned magazine. It was a simple yet tasty meal of home-made mushroom soup - utilising mushrooms growing in the lawn surrounding the tasting room - together with a platter of local smallgoods and Barossa cheeses. He particularly liked our Semillons, so much so that he emailed me a few days later, saying he was going to feature the '02 vintage in his 'One Bottle' column in 'The World of Fine Wine'. Imagine the thrill on receiving the latest issue, and reading about our humble Olive Hill Semillon in the world's best wine magazine! Certainly the best tonic prior to an overseas trip, and to put a spring in one's step when visiting the many restaurants and bottle shops in the 6 cities to be visited. With permission from TWoFW, we've reproduced the article on the back page, and if you've still got any bottles of the '02 Semillon, you'll probably enjoy the article even more.

This newsletter announces four new wines being released. The **2009 Shiraz Rosé**, being slightly lighter and drier than the inaugural release, is an absolute cracker, and together with the **2007 Clochemerle**, will represent great drinking value over the coming summer months. And for the cellar, two very good reds from the '08 vintage. The **2008 Olive Hill Shiraz-Grenache-Mourvedre** - deeply coloured and long flavoured - will evolve beautifully with cellaring, as will the **2008 Olive Hill Mourvedre-Grenache-Shiraz**, our newest red blend from the Olive Hill block. Once again, they're offered in a **New Releases Dozen**, at attractive savings; further details overleaf. We've also continued the special price on the **Wilsford Fortifieds Dozen**, following the demand of this offer in the last newsletter. These lovely old fortifieds make perfect Christmas gifts, as they can be leisurely enjoyed over time after opening.

We trust you enjoy the newly released wines, and might I recommend some bottles of the Olive Hill Semillon!

Until our new communiqué, cheers and best wishes

*Rick Burge*



**An exciting new cellaring red  
 from the Olive Hill block.**

# NEW RELEASES

## 2009 SHIRAZ ROSÉ



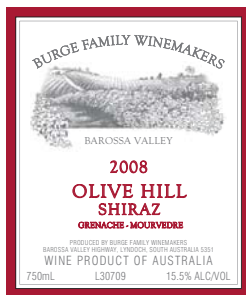
It's possibly somewhat of a luxury making a Rosé from quality, low-yielding Draycott Shiraz, however it's pedigree certainly shows in the resulting wine. Slightly drier and lighter in colour, as a result of picking a little earlier than in '08, but still voluminous varietal fruit on both the bouquet and palate. This fruit is balanced with a lovely 'zingy' acidity which gives a beautifully fresh mouthfeel and a crisp finish. Make sure you have a few bottles chilled at all times during the coming summer months - it's certainly a refreshing and entertaining wine style.

## 2007 CLOCHEMERLE SHIRAZ-GRENACHE-TOURIGA-SOUZAO

Even as a blend of four varieties, the total volume bottled of this wine was a little under 250 cases, such was the overall yields of the 2007 vintage. Non-existent rain during winter and spring, coupled with a dry summer, greatly reduced yields, necessitating this blend, and also the G3 blend of the Draycott, Olive Hill and Garnacha reds. Although dry, we were spared any summer heat spikes and the resulting wines shows no rubbery/prunish characters so common in drought years. What little fruit we did get was ripe, well filled out and of reasonable quality. Vintaged from Shiraz 34%, Grenache 29% and the Portuguese varieties Touriga 23% and Souzao 14% and matured in seasoned French oak, the wine shows attractive, spicy fruit and a flavoursome, medium-bodied palate. Putting aside its rather unusual 'breeding', it's nonetheless an attractive style that might surprise with a few years bottle-aging.



## 2008 OLIVE HILL SHIRAZ-GRENACHE-MOURVEDRE



Although dry throughout the ripening period, temperatures were moderate and we were able to harvest a good quality crop well before a significant heatwave endured towards the end of vintage. As with '08 Draycott, this wine was fermented using naturally occurring yeasts, and an immediately apparent feature of the wine is the lovely depth of colour exhibited. In the past, with cultured yeasts, we would normally allow a 24-36 hour 'cold-soak' before inoculation and a near immediate commencement of fermentation. When utilising 'wild' or indigenous yeasts the pre-ferment maceration is usually 60-70 hours, allowing more colour and water soluble flavour compounds to be extracted prior to fermentation activity.

The blend comprises Shiraz 76% - the highest Shiraz content for this label - Grenache 14% and Mourvedre 10%, all grown on our gently sloping Olive Hill block. As with all our reds, it was matured exclusively in tight-grained, French oak barriques (227L), 35% of which were new, with the remainder being second and third use barrels.

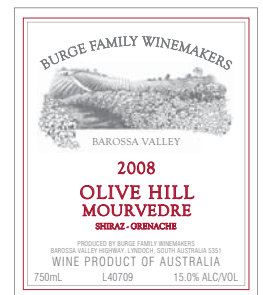
A rich, robust yet stylish red that will certainly benefit from cellaring, and develop into an elegant S.G.M. blend, typical of the reds from our Olive Hill block.

## 2008 OLIVE HILL MOURVEDRE-GRENACHE-SHIRAZ

We were pleased with both the quality and yield of the 2008 Mourvedre crop, so we decided to keep a parcel aside and to mature and bottle it as a separate, new red from the Olive Hill block. Mourvedre was known for many years in Australia as Mataro (an invalid synonym internationally) and is widely grown in the south of France, and in Spain where it is known as Monastrell. All our Mourvedre (and Grenache) is dry-grown, and the variety has thrived in the Barossa for over a century. My grandfather regarded it as an 'insurance' variety because its bud-burst is late, and often avoided damaging early spring frosts.

It has ended up as a blend, comprising 70% Mourvedre, Grenache 18% and Shiraz 12%, and prior to bottling in October 2009, spent 10 months maturing in 'newish' French oak barriques. As a varietal it was a pretty solid wine and we felt a little Grenache and Shiraz would lighten, soften and expand the flavour spectrum.

I've often described Mourvedre as the 'tar-and-spice' component of our Olive Hill S.G.M. blend, and as such, lends itself well to equally rich meat dishes - and char-grilled/barbequed offerings - as well as aged, hard cheeses. It's certainly not a blockbuster, rather a rich, spicy and very characterful red. Highly recommended.



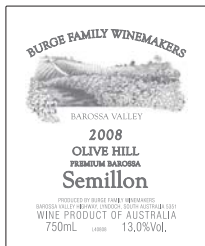
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# PREVIOUS RELEASES

## 2008 OLIVE HILL SEMILLON



The 2008 vintage was one of two parts, due to a rather savage 16 day heatwave; we were fortunate to have picked 90% of our crop before the heat. Harvested at optimum flavour and in perfect condition, the Semillon juice, after cold-settling, started fermentation conventionally in tank. Towards the end of ferment, we drew off 20% into new Allier (French) oak barriques where fermentation was completed. (The two portions were blended together prior to bottling.)

A dry white of great style and complexity, and well worthy of up to 10 years cellaring.

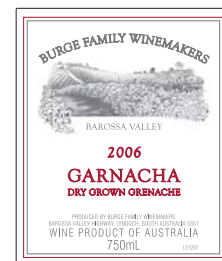
## 2006 GARNACHA DRY GROWN GRENACHE

The old, dry-grown Grenache vines that are responsible for the backbone of this wine certainly enjoyed the three above-average quality years '04, '05 and '06. Good winter rains, ideal ripening weather together with a little early summer rain has resulted in Grenache of great colour, flavour and rustic varietal spice so typical of low-yielding, mature Grenache vines.

Prior to bottling in December '07, the wine spent approx. 12 months maturing in aged, French oak barriques; where it developed further complexity yet negligible oak influence.

Cellar 2-4 years, for increased flavour complexity.

Consistently reviewed nationally and internationally, as a top example of the variety



## 2007 G3 SHIRAZ-MOURVEDRE-GRENACHE



*"A beautifully balanced and composed blend of great character, depth and expression that speaks eloquently of its regional origins. Dark, meaty aromas of brambly black and red cherries and plums backed by spicy, earthy undertones and nuances of licorice, while its deeply flavoured and generously weighted palate of ripe, juicy, dark and briary fruit is underpinned by a firm chassis of fine, bony tannin. It finishes with lingering spicy dark fruit, licorice and a refreshingly bright acidity."*

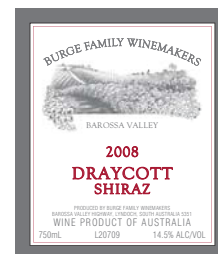
**94 points, Jeremy Oliver**

NB: This red is starting to throw a substantial crust so resting upright, prior to decanting, is recommended.

## 2008 DRAYCOTT SHIRAZ

In between the difficult 2007 and 2009 vintages, we were blessed with the modest yet quality 2008 vintage. The earlier ripening nature of the southern Barossa region worked to our advantage in '08 in that over 90% of our crop was harvested before the severe heatwave experienced late in vintage. (In 2009, we weren't so lucky. The heatwave struck early, when verasion was starting and a lot of our varieties suffered varying degrees of burning, the worst being the Semillon, where not a bunch was picked. The later-ripening northern Barossa was much less affected because of greener fruit with harder skins).

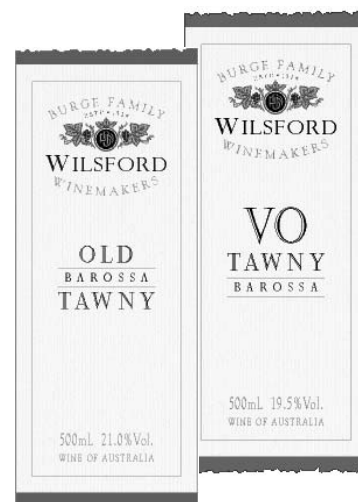
In 2008 we did away with commercial, cultured yeasts and relied only upon naturally occurring 'wild' yeasts. While ferments took longer to get started, the extended cold-soak resulted in an increased colour and flavour extraction at lower temperatures, together with well integrated, fine-grained tannins. This wine is noticeably tighter and firmer than previous, but with an attractive and more refined flavour profile, and consequently will benefit greatly from cellaring. We confidently predict a top wine will result.



## WILSFORD FORTIFIEDS



A quartet of desert wines that have for many years quietly matured to become mellow, luscious after-dinner treats. The **Old Sweet White** is predominantly Muscadelle (Tokay) with a little Pedro Ximinez and aged for many years in quarter-casks. The **Old Muscat**, vintaged from estate-grown Muscat Frontignan, likewise has seen many years in oak, and shows the unique, lusciousness of this distinct grape. The **Old Tawny** and **VO Tawny** have Grenache as their base, together with a little Shiraz, and aged initially in hogheads (300L) and later moved to 2000L casks. All four wines have been matured and freshened in a modified solera system of fractional blending. ( Bottle prices as marked, special dozen price represents a 20% saving.)



(one bottle)

2002 BURGE FAMILY WINEMAKERS OLIVE HILL SEMILLON

# A plump and splendid rotter

PERHAPS IT'S YOU. Perhaps someone you know. All the same, I suspect not. I've searched long and hard enough to know that those whose favorite grape variety is Semillon are rare birds.

They may even be—like the great auk and the passenger pigeon—extinct. Testament from the vineyards is disheartening. The variety's global plantings are on the slide: decimated from its 19th-century heyday in South Africa; retreating fast in Bordeaux; ebbing ceaselessly in South America. It's hard not to see it as a victim of fashion—part of that lost world where weight was a desirable quality; where a fellow could eat a couple of partridges and a plum pudding for lunch and wash the whole lot down with a bottle of wine whose rich gold shone like autumn sunlight in the decanter's chiseled glass.

If you'll forgive a little varietal anthropomorphism, Semillon probably views Sauvignon Blanc with jealous contempt. The two were once almost inseparable, Semillon usually the dominant partner, in a number of grand enterprises. Sauvignon now finds itself a global celebrity, slaying the varietal opposition wherever it can flaunt its often specious green charms, while its former partner looks uncomfortably stodgy and undemonstrative alongside it. The pair consort less often than they once did. Tongues will wag.

As long as Sauternes continues to exist, of course, Semillon will be with us; hard, too, to see the linen-textured charms of great dry Pessac-Léognan ever slipping from view. Semillon is a splendid rotter. Botrytis-corrupted, oak-lavished, and sugar-supported, the variety tips every scale for unctiousness and fat. No other wine, moreover, can match its visceral lanolin pull. The fact that acidity plays such a minor role in the exercise, though, means that Riesling is generally preferred in botrytis-prone locations.

Australia is the exception to this generally gloomy picture for the portly white grape. Plantings there have actually been increasing, albeit modestly: There were 6,752ha (16,685 acres) in 2007, up by 8.3 percent on 2005. Back in



Andrew Jefford

1990, there were only 2,713ha (6,704 acres) of it. Most plantings are in the hot, irrigated, inland regions, but in three quality regions it is courted for flavor rather than fecundity: the Hunter Valley, Margaret River, and Barossa Valley.

Hunter Valley Semillon makes a fair bid to be the strangest wine in one of the world's oddest wine regions. It's picked unripe and early, before the reliably rainy summer can do its drenching worst and annihilate the grape's thin skins. Young, it's no more interesting than any other wine made from unripe, early-picked fruit. Like Madeira, though, age is said to work a metamorphosis on the pale, taciturn youth, bringing richness, articulacy, and wisdom. But does the change constitute beauty or just interest? For the time being, I'm unsure; further study required. Margaret River, meanwhile, has remained faithful to the Semillon/Sauvignon partnership, though few ever rhapsodize about these blends in the way they do about the region's Cabernets or Chardonnays.

The Australian location where this variety seems to me to perform most convincingly is the one where its future is probably most in jeopardy: the Barossa. A rash of white Rhône-variety plantings on the one hand and a flurry of Spanish and Italian exotica on the other win headlines and reviews with far more ease than does a bottle of familiar old



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Semillon. The fact that some producers ape the Hunter style of Semillon, without the same need to harvest before untimely rains trash the vineyard, looks misguided to me. Strenuously early picking may produce something saleable and analytically correct, but it doesn't produce fine wine. The knotty charm of old-vine trunks may stay the executioner's hand, but only for a while.

This is what makes wines such as this one so precious. Rick Burge is a passionate Barossan traditionalist who believes that "the varietal has killed the regional." What he wants his varieties to do, therefore, is tell Barossa's regional story. And the subregional story, too—which for Rick means the often-slighted Lyndoch, in the earlier-ripening, lower part of the valley to the south. His Olive Hill vineyard is full of the typically deep weathered loam of the Barossa, seasoned with quartz and shading away to sand at the bottom. "We actually let our Semillon ripen," he confirms, in the hope that it will then express the place more than the grape. I didn't quite burst into tears when I tried his 2002, but it did feel like a sort of journey's end—to a place that I had sensed must exist without knowing where it was. I'm sure Rick can do better in the future—post-biodynamics (on which he has embarked), and with further steps toward respect for his ripe raw materials. But it made a convincing case for keeping the portly one in this warm valley of billowing sediments.

I bought a bottle of the 2002. This was a cool vintage, and the wine is a little lighter than usual—but it's still golden and rich, and it smells of the inside of hayricks, summer dusks, and bloomy peach skins. In the mouth, it's full, contoured and textured, with a relaxed balance that allows the latent (and, in Semillon's case, always lazy) perfumes of the wine to lift without any dictatorial acid burn. This vineyard was once planted with apricots; the wine seems to remember them. The finish is graceful, generous, languid without being torpid. Will Semillon ever be my favorite grape? Probably not—but this might just be my favorite dry Semillon. ■