

Faber Vineyard

HERE COMES THE SUN

Winter is over - it only seemed to last about six weeks this year! We did manage to get all the pruning done and we have had very welcome rains - almost equal to the long term average, and the wettest Perth winter since 2000. And no frosts here at Faber. So we move into spring feeling confident of a good growing season, with vine growth supported by plentiful soil moisture. The pair of New Holland honeyeaters nesting outside our bedroom window share our confidence.

We have sprayed out the weeds under the vine rows and will shortly slash the grass between the rows - the recent rain and warm weather has seen it grow rapidly. Why is it always such a surprise when weeds grow crazy in spring? The vines have burst - even the late petit verdot is starting to green up - two weeks later than the verdelho. Colby and Sam have repaired any broken wires and the foliage wires will be raised to hold the shoots erect as soon as they are long enough. This helps protect the soft shoots from the early easterlies in late October - verdelho is particularly vulnerable - and places the leaves above the fruit, protecting it from sunburn whilst allowing diffuse light to reach the bunches. Too harsh sun will burn the grape skins, but not enough UV light will restrict flavour and colour (in the reds) development in the berries.

On the winery side we have been very busy - bottling last year's malbec and racking and checking both last year's and this vintage's Reserve Shiraz and Frankland Cabernet. This year's Riche Shiraz looks terrific. We will rack the 2011 malbec and a new wine - a Dwellingup mataro shortly. We have tiraged the 2011 sparkling Chardonnay, and the 2011 Dwellingup Chardonnay is resting on its lees in barrels in the cold room. Soon we will blend a new batch of muscat - blending together some of the older wines to make a sub-blend, and racking the younger wines.

We don't often mention wine show results but it was hard not to be excited on learning our Liqueur Muscat had won a gold medal at the recent Swan Valley wine show alongside the famous Talijancich and John Kosovich wines. We planted the grapes for this wine in 2000 and it is a blend of the wines made in 2003, 2004 and 2005. The wine has been aging in oak hogsheads until bottling a few months ago.

We have several new releases for the second half of 2011 - the 2009 Chardonnay Blanc de Blanc, the 2009 Riche Shiraz and 2010 Petit Verdot, and the new 2009 Millard Vineyard Shiraz. The 2010 Dwellingup Chardonnay and 2011 Swan Verdelho are not far off. So please come visit us and taste them for yourself.

This year the Valley-wide Spring in the Valley festival will not be held. Many of the smaller wineries have not been satisfied with the direction of the festival in recent years. This won't stop us from holding our annual Spring Long Table Lunch. This is a highlight of our event calendar and we look forward to seeing many of you here at Faber on either Saturday or Sunday 15th and 16th of October. With Jerry Fraser shucking oysters and Jane cooking a feast why not join us for a great day out on the winery lawn.

If you can't make the Long Table Lunch - and we certainly hope you can - do visit us any Sunday between 11 and 4 in our Cellar Door Studio and enjoy our new releases and old favourites. We look forward to seeing you in the sunny Swan Valley soon.

John Griffiths & Jane Micallef
Spring 2011

NEW RELEASES

2009 Chardonnay Blanc de Blanc

We hand harvested our chardonnay on 19 January, chilled overnight and tipped and squashed into the press the following morning. Whole bunch pressing – the fruit is not crushed just squeezed – produces the finest juice – which is what we seek for our Blanc de Blanc. The resulting wine was tiraged on 20 May 2009 over two years on lees before disgorging earlier this year.



The wine has a very pale straw colour. The nose shows bright golden delicious apple aromas with light nutty yeast characters. The palate is crisp and lively, bone dry, with a creamy consistency. It has excellent length with a fresh persistent finish.

This wine is typical of our style – zingy and fresh, excellent fruit, with just a hint of yeast influence. A terrific aperitif style

2009 Riche Shiraz

2009 was a great year for reds in the Swan Valley. A reasonably normal season weather wise followed good winter rains. This wine is a nearly equal blend of Faber's shiraz harvested on 14 February and Millard's shiraz harvested on the 18th. As usual the fruit was cold soaked then fermented on skins in 3 tonne open fermenters for 10 days prior to pressing. It was aged for nine months in a mix of new and one year old French and American hogsheads and bottled in January 2010.

The wine is a dark purple red. The nose displays intense inky plum skin and red berry aromas, with perfumed toasty oak. The palate is full and rich, warm and mouthfilling. It is crammed with thick plummy flavours, with a super length of sweet fruit finishing with a soft tannin grip.

An excellent example of Riche Shiraz – classic Swan Valley sweet fruit flavours and smoothness. Superb right now and likely to improve for at least 10 years in bottle.

2010 Petit Verdot

A blend of two thirds Faber Vineyard fruit picked on 16 February and one third Dwellingup fruit harvested on 30 March. This hot vintage produced quite full flavoured and sweet fruited wines. The hot temperatures made gauging the correct date to pick very difficult, however we believe we got the petit verdot right! The wine was fermented in open fermenters before pressing and racking to one year old French hogsheads for nine months, followed by bottling in January 2011.

The colour is bright purple red. It has a scented aroma of cherries and violets – the typical varietal characteristic of petit verdot – with hints of cedary oak. On the palate the wine is concentrated and intense, with flavours that mirror the nose. It has delicious drying grainy tannins with good length and a savory finish.

We didn't make a 2009 Petit Verdot, and despite this wine's youth at release it is a beauty, drinking very well. It follows the Faber style to a tee with the distinctive character of Petit Verdot strongly evident. This wine will undoubtedly continue to open up and improve for five years or more.

2009 Millard Vineyard Shiraz see the back page



SPRING LONG TABLE LUNCH

Spring and Autumn are the best times to visit the Valley - generally the weather is at its most gracious. In spring everything is still green and fresh, and hopefully there is warmth in the sun. The vines around the Valley are emerald green and growing like crazy.

As has become our tradition we are holding our Long Table Lunch in the first half of October, over Saturday and Sunday the 15th & 16th.

What better way to start a delightful day of indulgence than Jerry Fraser's freshly shucked oysters and a glass of our new 2009 Blanc de Blanc on the winery terrace. From there we will move to the lawn under the canopies to enjoy Jane's picking plate with a glass or two of delicious verdelho and chardonnay. Then a rich Swan Valley shiraz or petit verdot with barbequed lamb fillets and a chance to taste the new Millard Vineyard Shiraz as the sun swings over the trees. Almost sated there is no better end to the day than Jane's crumbling chocolate brownies and a few swirls of our luscious Liqueur Muscat.

Always a great day out - bring your friends along and come and enjoy some Swan Valley hospitality

WHEN *Saturday & Sunday 15th & 16th October 2011*
WHERE *Faber Vineyard*
TIME *11 am*
COST *\$65 per head which includes*
 4 course meal, all wines, and coffee
RSVP *ASAP to avoid disappointment on 9296 0209 or john@fabervineyard.com.au*

PS If you are vegetarian or have special dietary requirements please let us know when you book, otherwise we may be unable to cater for your requirements on the day.

IN THE PIPELINE

Coming events:

Saturday evening 3rd December
Saturday 28th January 2012

Wine Lovers & Friends Xmas BBQ
Australia Day Seafood Picnic

THE SWAN VALLEY

The Swan Valley has historically been a source of sustenance. The Swan Valley was a bountiful location for the aboriginal tribes of the coastal plain prior to the British colonisation. The British expedition of 1827 recognised the Swan Valley as having superior soils and a general abundance of fresh water, with the advantage of an open state with less “than 10 trees to an acre” allowing immediate culture, and water carriage to the settlers door. The expedition’s leader Captain Stirling described the scenery... as beautiful as any thing of the kind.

The Swan River Settlement was established in 1829. Before settlement the Swan Valley was well stocked with wildfowl, kangaroos and other marsupials. There were yams and other native crops. Early settlers grew crops of wheat and corn, oats and barley and potatoes and raised cattle, sheep and pigs. They planted fruit trees and vines and vegetables. They produced their own food and traded their excess. They too hunted and fished to supplement their supplies. However the spread of agriculture and domestic animals scared away much of the wildlife, and the river flats where the aborigines collected traditional foods were changed by cultivation.

The colony quickly out grew the Swan Valley, and land over the scarp in the Avon Valley was opened up for pasture. Never the less the narrow band of rich alluvial soils along the river flats continued to produce healthy crops. The land grants in the Swan Valley were in the order of several thousand acres and these had been taken up by well to do gentlemen farmers. The difficulties suffered by the colonists over their first thirty years slowly lead to the breaking up of some of the large estates with smaller properties being purchased or leased by working class men. Many of the wealthier landowners took up larger properties further inland that were better suited to pasture and grazing. The working class farmers relied on mixed farming and proved to be quite productive. Small vineyards had been planted as early as 1830, and by the 1860s substantial vineyards had been developed and the suitability of the valley for viticulture was well established.

As the opportunities created in the goldfields by the gold rushes in the 1880s and 1890s subsided, the population of Perth grew dramatically prior to the first world war. There was further subdivision of large properties to create many small farms of between 10 and 40 acres right through into the 1920s. After the war many ex-servicemen settled on the new subdivisions in the Swan Valley. Many southern European immigrants gravitated to regions such as the Swan Valley with its opportunity to develop small family farms with which they were experienced, and could escape the life of the casual labourer.



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Vineyards were extensively planted – primarily sultanas, muscats, and currents for drying. Fresh table grapes and grapes for wine and distillation were also produced. Large areas of remnant virgin bush were cleared and tracks and roads were formed to provide access to the small farms throughout the twenties and thirties.

Many growers struggled through the depression, relying on sharing equipment with neighbours and helping each other with harvest. Peaches, oranges, mandarins and melons supplanted the income from grapes. Everyone – men, women and children - were required to work on the farm to ensure the countless tasks were achieved and the family got by. Markets for grapes and other fruit, often packed and distributed by co-operatives, fluctuated, but gradually the small farmers flourished. By the fifties grapegrowing dominated and there were over 6000 acres of vines spread right across the valley. There were several large commercial wineries in the valley, led by Houghton and Valencia. A few small family wineries, generally catering for the local Croatian and Italian communities also flourished.

From the seventies the grape industries suffered from increasing competition. New technology allowed Asian buyers of fresh grapes to source their fruit from further afield. And cheaper European dried fruits started to infiltrate our markets, whilst the British market dried up. The development of the wine industry in the south west attracted attention away from the wines of the Swan Valley, although a few boutique wineries such as Jane Brook were founded and some older style winemakers such as John Kosovich adapted to meet consumers' changing tastes. Over supply of grapes in the 1980s and again in the 2000s has slugged the wine grape farmers. And the ageing farmers' children, having enjoyed a full education were seeking more comfortable secure jobs in the region or well paid careers in the city. Many farmers slowly reduced production to manageable levels, or they retired and sold off their farms to be converted to lifestyle or equestrian properties.

As lifestyles have changed the Swan Valley has become a significant attraction to the people of Perth and their visitors. The Swan Valley is characterised by its small farms and vineyards and offers an attractive rural experience on the edge of the suburbs. It boasts a strong cultural heritage linking Perth to its colonial origins, as well as the natural resources of the Swan River and the forested foothills of the Darling Scarp. Protection from further subdivision has created a small but dynamic wine industry made up of some new and some multigenerational family wineries. These wineries, embracing modern winemaking and styles are now enhancing the valley's appeal and again demonstrating the valley's ability to generate outstanding produce.

There is something special about the Swan Valley. It's not the ravishing beauty of the south west. It's hotter and drier and windier than the coastal strip. It's not as bountiful as the equally hot inland irrigated regions of the Murray Darling basin. The Swan Valley is a pocket handkerchief sized wine region of barely 300 hectares – the smallest in Australia. There isn't a village let alone a town in the Swan Valley. The Swan River Settlement was the poor colony that almost floundered in its early days and has known struggle ever since.

The Swan Valley isn't fashionable, it's an underdog. The soils are mainly tough ironstone gravel or swathes of sand – on each side of the rich river flats. The hot easterlies off the plateau blast it every night in summer and autumn. It's on the wrong side of town, it's weather beaten, the river dries up in summer. The council wants to subdivide all around and it is choked with the trucks of the resource boom funneling through it to the north.

The grapes of the Swan Valley - for wine or for table – have always been special. The wines are the most readily drinkable in the state – rich and warm and flavoursome and smooth. The Swan is a great community, full of pioneers and ghosts of pioneers. It's a great home. The river which flows out of the Darling Scarp, created by the waugal as it travelled down from the hills to the ocean, has brought abundance to the valley, with its history of struggle and provision and triumph.

CURRENT RELEASES

2010 Swan Verdelho

Verdelho is our signature white wine. We believe it has a special affinity for the Swan Valley and well made is an exceptional wine. We take our verdelho very seriously!

Whilst 2010 was a hot vintage verdelho is an early ripening variety and thus it was exposed to less of the February heat than other fruit. That said the fruit was picked quite ripe to ensure full varietal flavour. All the fruit was hand picked - from our vineyard on 22nd January and the Caversham fruit on 5th February. The fruit was chilled over night and crushed and pressed the next morning. We taste the juice as it flows from the press and collect it. As soon as the juice starts to show skins character and loses freshness we direct this to a separate tank. Only the fresh green free run juice is then used to make this wine. This juice is settled for 3 days and the bright clear juice racked off the lees. This juice is fermented then fined, stabilised and filtered for bottling. We bottled this wine on the 10th of June.

The wine is pale straw and brilliant in appearance. The nose has a lifted enveloping aroma of sweet ripe nectarines. The palate is fresh and thick and very flavoursome. Honeysuckle and nectarine and sherbet flavours jump out. It has crisp acidity and excellent length. The wine finishes rich and warm and clean.

This wine is a classic Swan Valley verdelho - fragrant, crisp and full. Delicious!

2009 Dwellingup Chardonnay

We have great faith in the quality of chardonnay fruit grown on Orondo Farm at Dwellingup. Chardonnay naturally lends itself to a complex range of winemaking options, and we are continuing to explore these in making this wine. The fruit was hand picked and whole bunch pressed. The juice was entirely fermented in French oak hogsheads - a mix of new and one and two years old. The wine lees were regularly stirred whilst the wine matured for eight months in the barrels prior to bottling in December 2009.

The colour is pale straw. The wine has a lifted nose of almost floral stonefruit aromas with yeasty and toasty characters evident. The palate is crisp, vibrant and minerally. It brims with pear and quince flavours, hints of lemon zest, and oaky notes. It has lovely length of flavour with a smooth yet fresh finish.

This wine is still very young and taut and should blossom deliciously over two or three years.

2009 El Sol Semillon

Our 2009 El Sol is a reprise of our inaugural 2008 vintage. It tastes almost identical! Super ripe semillon was hand picked from Valenti's Middle Swan vineyard on the 19th February, chilled and dejuiced. The free run juice was fermented very cold and the ferment stopped with about 60 grams per litre of sugar remaining - giving a low alcohol of around 11 percent.

The colour is pale yellow. The wine has an intense aroma of fresh lemons and lemon blossom. It has a gorgeous grapey palate of juicy, sweet lemon butter with mandarin and honey notes, balanced with tingling acidity. There is excellent length and it finishes vibrantly fresh and clean.



This beautiful wine shows the intense fruit one achieves with such ripe grapes. It is very sweet, but in a juicy, crisp way. This wine is absolutely delicious with fruit - Jane served it with pear, ricotta and honey and melon and prosciutto as a first course at our Harvest Breakfast and it was stunning.

2009 Dwellingup Malbec

Malbec has proved the most interesting red grape at Orondo Farm in Dwellingup. Each year since 2006 we have made quite distinctive wines. We believe this wine, from fruit picked on the 24th of March, is the most typical Malbec we have made, displaying excellent varietal characteristics - plummy and soft with an excellent rounded palate. Just under a tonne of fruit was picked. It was crushed, fermented in a small open fermenter and then matured in new American oak hogsheads until bottling in late June 2010.

The wine is deep purple. It has an inky sweet nose of plums and rolling tobacco, with notes of dusty oak. The palate is immediately soft and sweet fruited, with thick plum and tobacco flavours following through from the nose. In fact the palate appears almost luscious. Gentle tannins follow on a long soft finish.

This wine is drinking beautifully as a young wine, and will retain its youthful appeal for another two or three years. It should develop into a very interesting wine after that.

Swan Valley Liqueur Muscat

After twelve years of effort we are thrilled to release our first Liqueur Muscat. We took cuttings of brown muscat in 1999 and after a year in the nursery we planted the rootlings in spring of 2000 with our first crop in late summer 2003. Our muscat has met all of our expectations. We have been able to achieve extremely ripe fruit allowing us to achieve the intense raisin characters and lusciousness we seek. We have kept each vintage separate in old small oak barrels until we blended this wine in late 2010 using a third each of 2003, 2004 and 2005 vintages - giving the wine an average age of seven years.

The wine is a golden tawny colour. The nose combines the raisin and distinctive rose petal notes of semi-dried muscat with a fresh clean spirit lift and the slightly dusty notes from maturation in small oak casks. The palate is intensely sweet and viscous, bursting with raisin, honey, dried fig, candied peel and Xmas pudding flavours. The lusciousness of the wine is balanced by the warm spirit, and the long palate finishes dry and clean leaving intense lingering flavour in one's mouth.

This wine is but the start. Incredibly delicious now, our blend will continue to mature as our stocks age. We trust you keep some handy to enjoy and fortify you through the cooler months.

2009 Millard Vineyard Shiraz

Gary Millard planted his vineyard at the same time as Faber, using the same source of rootlings as us – Houghton’s Frankland River vineyard. Located just 800 metres further up the slope from us we have always considered that Gary’s fruit should be comparable to ours. Since 2005 we have blended his fruit into our Riche Shiraz, and from the outstanding 2009 vintage we expected the best portion to make the Reserve Shiraz blend. Strangely, the best portions from Faber and Millard’s were very different – despite identical winemaking! So rather than blend this wine into the Reserve we bottled it separately and here it is!

The wine is a deep burgundy red. It displays pungent spice, roast herbs, mint and cedar aromas. It is dense and concentrated with intense meshing flavours of spice and roast lamb and herbs. It has a wonderful depth of fine grained tannins which frame the superb length of flavour. Finishes soft yet powerfully, with rich fruit and oak flavours and gentle tannins.

An absolutely delicious wine, a total contrast to the Reserve Shiraz – much more spice than plum fruit, elegant and gentle. From the beginning this wine displayed white pepper and spice aromas and flavours we have never before seen in Swan Valley shiraz. As different as it is, it is hard to predict how it will develop in the cellar. Undoubtedly it will continue to improve for many years to come.

Nine vintages of Reserve Shiraz at this year’s Winter Benchmark Tasting

