

News from an Australian insider - 2002

24 Nov 2004 by JR

Stealing a march on its rivals, the British supermarket chain Tesco have a fulltime member of its buying team, Master of Wine Phil Reedman, based in Adelaide, in charge of sourcing Australian and NZ wines for them. He's also a fine reporter, as this latest despatch attests.

Southcorp sale

Southcorp has sold the Hungerford Hill wine brand [the latest in a long line of sales by Australia's biggest and newly merged wine company] to, Chambourcin grower *extraordinaire*, Cassegrain Vineyards based in hot and humid Port Macquarie. For A\$2 million Cassegrain has secured the brand, inventory and goodwill plus the services of former Lindeman's winemaker Phillip John.

Foster's results

Foster's, proud owners of Beringer Blass wine group, revealed their half-year figures last week which showed a rise in net profit of over 20 per cent. Not all good news however as the A\$2.9m acquisition of Beringer seems to be hitting their cash flow harder than expected. The Fosters' theory on buying Beringer was that because most of the wine production is sub-contracted there would be little need for capital expenditure. Wrong, it seems; this six months it has cost them around A\$300m.

The USA is still home to many a Fosters' dream though. Looking long term Walt Klentz, the wine division MD, sees Kendall Jackson as a likely target but in the mean time is happy to content himself with smaller prey. Watch this space.

Vintage update

I'm highly confident that I'll have a clear picture of how vintage 2002 will look by say June. But in the meantime here's a partial round-up:

The Hunter, having survived the bushfires, has been rained on in the past week. Semillon harvested to date looks good and the odd early ripening Shiraz blocks look promising. Much depends on how long the current 'rain episode' lasts for. Mudgee and Cowra are also experiencing rain which is delaying harvest. The outlook doesn't look promising.

Powdery mildew is keeping growers in the Barossa fully occupied; up until a week or so ago the conditions were ideal for powdery growth. The last week has been hot and dry so the disease pressure is now lower. Some grapes have been picked in the Barossa and there is even a reliable report of some Sauvignon Blanc looking smart, which just goes to show what a cool season it has been.

The Riverland is looking good but the vintage is running very late. The good news is that colour in reds is looking extremely strong, flavours are excellent and the pH's and TA's [total acidity] are much closer to a cool climate region's figures than hot inland region's. A poor year for the tartaric acid salesman.

The South East of South Australia is looking 'interesting'. *Veraison* is under way and is so far fairly even. Interestingly for the winemakers, all varieties are going through *veraison* together so the vintage could be short and sharp.

Phylloxera in Central Otago.

Not content, it would seem, with having set Marlborough back by contaminating the vineyards with phylloxera, the Kiwis have done it again and Central Otago is now home to the louse. Less than half of the plantings in Central Otago are [grafted] on rootstocks. I'm trying to get more details and will update as soon as I have them.

See also my [NZ round-up](#).