Landmark Australia - Day 5

5 Jun 2009 by Julia Harding MW

See indomitable Julia's reports on Day 1, Day 2 , Day 3 and *Day 4.*

At last night's dinner, fatigue was starting to show among the participants and the tutors and so the usual commentary on the wines by the evening's guests went by the board and the kitchen seemed to take pity on us with a slightly lighter (less meat-heavy) menu. Try as I might, I couldn't quite muster the strength to make worthy notes on the last five reds (though the last two were particularly tannic) and I left the table before the Stanton and Killeen Vintage port-style wine. It was all just getting too much of a good thing. However, I did very much enjoy the Rieslings and the Pinots. KT and the Falcon's Peglidis was as pure and more steely (and drier) than the Melva the previous evening and caused a spirited debate between myself and Frank Kämmer, the only German in the group and a very experienced sommelier, as to whether the Peglidis was closer to a Saar Riesling (me) or to a wine from the western Rheingau (him). I yielded to his superior knowledge of German Riesling and greater firepower but didn't change my mind!

The Main Ridge Pinot was delicious, as was Brian Croser's 2008 from Foggy Hill, though in quite different styles and at very different stages of evolution.

With dinner:
2006 Petaluma Croser Pinot Noir/Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills
2008 KT and The Falcon Peglidis Vineyard Riesling, Clare Valley
2005 Radford Wines Riesling, Eden Valley
2007 The Lane Beginning Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills
2006 Savaterre Chardonnay, Beechworth
2007 Tapanappa Foggy Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir, Fleurieu Peninsula
2008 Tapanappa Foggy Hill Vineyard Pinot Noir, Fleurieu Peninsula
2004 Main Ridge Estate Half Acre Pinot Noir, Mornington Peninsula
2006 Mitchelton Crescent Shiraz/Mourvèdre/Grenache, Nagambie Lakes
2005 Mitchelton Crescent Shiraz/Mourvèdre/Grenache, Nagambie Lakes
2007 The Yard Riversdale Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Frankland River, Great Southern
2007 Cherubino Cabernet Sauvignon, Margaret River
1998 Wirra Wirra The Angelus (Dead Ringer) Cabernet Sauvignon, McLaren Vale
2006 Wirra Wirra Dead Ringer Cabernet Sauvignon, McLaren Vale
2004 Wirra Wirra Dead Ringer Cabernet Sauvignon, McLaren Vale
2005 Stanton and Killeen Vintage, Rutherglen

Had to start ultra early this morning (Friday), to get packed and checked out before the first session. Today was even more of a military exercise than usual as there was no slack in the lunch start time - we were due at Peter Lehmann's fine cellar door for lunch with winemakers and press and had to fit the sparkling and fortified sessions in before that. And the inevitable group photo.

Talking of photos, the most astonishing sight of the week was all the wines we had tasted lined up along the wall of the hotel courtyard. With only a press-button camera, I couldn't do it justice (see pictures above and below) but it highlighted what a remarkable and intense week it has been. But I am getting ahead of myself.

The sparkling wine session was led jointly by Ed Carr, Group Sparkling Winemaker for Constellation Australia, and Dr Tony Jordan, who until recently held various senior positions with Moët Hennessy at home and around the world, ending up as CEO of Domaine Chandon Australia, Cape Mentelle and Cloudy Bay. He told me he was hoping to work a little less than in the past but it didn't sound very likely, given everything he had lined up. (He also makes his own Spear Valley wine at Spear Valley.)

It was unfortunate that the tight schedule meant we had to race through these traditional-method sparklers, all made from Chardonnay or Pinot Noir or a blend, and the occasional contribution of Pinot Meunier. There was a strong diversity of styles, depending very much on the varieties, the sweetness level, the use or non-use of oak in the making of the base wines, and the period of ageing on the lees, etc, as you would expect for a wine that is so dependent on its handling in the winery. I particularly liked the House of Arras 'Grand Vintage' Chardonnay/Pinot Noir and the Domaine Chandon Brut Rosé Pinot Noir, which was handy since the former was made by Ed Carr and the latter by Tony Jordan!

2005 Domaine Chandon Z*D Vintage Blanc de Blancs Chardonnay, Yarra Valley
2004 Yarra Burn Blanc de Blancs Chardonnay, Yarra Valley
2004 Josef Chromy Wines Pinot Noir/Chardonnay, Tasmania
2004 Brown Brothers Patricia Pinot Noir/Chardonnay/Pinot Meunier, King Valley
2003 House of Arras, Arras 'Grand Vintage', Chardonnay/Pinot Noir, Tasmania
2002 Domaine Chandon Vintage Brut Late Disgorged Chardonnay/ Pinot Noir/Pinot Meunier, Yarra Valley
2001 Jansz Late Disgorged Chardonnay/Pinot Noir, Tasmania
2000 Hardys Sir James Tumbarumba Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Meunier, Tumbarumba
1998 Petaluma Croser Proprietor's Reserve Pinot Noir/Chardonnay, Adelaide Hills
1998 House of Arras, Arras Late Disgorged, Chardonnay/Pinot Noir, Tasmania
NV Hanging Rock Cuvee VIII Macedon Late Disgorged Pinot Noir/Chardonnay, Macedon Ranges
MV Bay of Fires Rosé Pinot Noir/Chardonnay, Tasmania
2005 Domaine Chandon Brut Rosé, Pinot Noir, Yarra Valley
1994 Seppelt Show Sparkling Shiraz, Grampian

The fortified session did not disappoint, despite the big build up these wines had been given all week. These were treasures, many rare, and wines to sip and reflect on rather than speeding along but the intensity of flavours in all these wines was show-stopping nonetheless. The tutor for this last session of the week, James Godfrey, is one of the most experienced and committed fortified wine makers in Australia and has just completed his 32nd vintage at Seppeltsfield. Some of the greatest wines in the Seppeltsfield cellar, such as the 100-year old 1909 Para, now thickly viscous and tasting of an astonishing array of coffee, dark chocolate, fruit cake and cloves, were made well before his time, but he takes ultra seriously his role as custodian of these rare dark gems.

Most of the group were particularly besotted by these thick, dark, tooth-rotting elixirs. Although I thought they were stunning, I was very taken by the first two wines in the tasting, the Amontillado and the Oloroso. The former had become fantastically concentrated after more than 40 years in the solera casks but was still delicate on the nose with aromas of nuts and deeply caramelised oranges, even a whiff of iodine. The latter looked and tasted like dark walnuts but still showed finesse and a long tangy finish.

We tasted:
Morris, Show Amontillado, Rutherglen
Seppeltsfield, Museum Oloroso DP104, Rutherglen
Seppeltsfield 2005 Vintage, Barossa Valley
Seppeltsfield, DP90 Rare Tawny, Barossa Valley
Grant Burge, 30 year old Tawny, Barossa Valley
Penfolds, Great Grandfather Series 1, Barossa Valley
Campbells, Isabella Rare Topaque Muscadelle, Rutherglen
Seppeltsfield, Paramount Rare Topaque Muscadelle, Rutherglen
Morris, Old Premium Liqueur Topaque Muscadelle, Rutherglen
McWilliams, Show Reserve Muscat, Hunter
Morris, Old Premium Liqueur Muscat, Rutherglen
Campbells, Merchant Prince Rare Muscat, Rutherglen
Chambers, Rare Muscadelle, Rutherglen
Morris, 1928 Morris Liqueur Muscat, Rutherglen
Seppeltsfield, 1909 100-year-old Para, Barossa Valley

Then straight off to the press/trade lunch and our chance to give feedback on the week, meet more producers and sip a little instead of assiduously spitting. My brief comments were in appreciation of the highly nuanced fine wines I had tasted throughout the week and a suggestion that boredom and security are finely divided when it comes to wine consumption; whereas boredom derives from everything tasting the same, security comes from knowing that everything would taste good.

And now I have my feet up in the spacious Peter Lehmann guest house, with the rain tipping down outside, and don't have to rush off to dinner. Hurray! In fact I am looking forward to a bowl of cereal or a piece of toast in front of a DVD (though quite a few of the selection look rather patriotic) and then an early night.

Although the Landmark Tutorial is now wrapped up, I still have a full programme of visits in the Eden, Barossa and Clare Valleys over the next three days and then a day at the Australian Wine Research Institute before I fly back on Wednesday, thoroughly exhausted.

[I think she deserves some time off, don't you? But apparently the choice of DVDs is *Proof* with Russell Crowe, *Bushfire Summer, Ten Canoes, Walkabout, Cricket in the '60s, The Story of the Murray Riverboats* and *Seven Wonders of the Industrial World*. Makes emails seem rather riveting. - JR]

For all related articles and tasting notes, see Landmark Australia - a guide.