



Written by
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Mornington - the two-trick pony



10 January 2019 *We're republishing this much-annotated article free in our Throwback Thursday series.*

23 December 2018 *An addition from Garry Crittenden of Crittenden Estate.*

Jancis, a footnote to your column last Friday about the dilemma facing the Mornington Peninsula.

In September 1982 I planted five acres of vines on my property at Dromana: four of Cabernet, half an acre of Merlot and a quarter each of Pinot and Chardonnay. In so doing I doubled the aggregated plantings of all the vineyard area on the Peninsula at the time from five to 10 acres. (Today there are 2,500 acres.)

They were collectively made up predominantly of Cabernet with a little Chardonnay at Baillieu Myer's Elgee Park, Nat White's Main Ridge (which also had a little Pinot), George Kefford's (Nina Caplan's uncle, I seem to recall) Merricks Estate and Brian Stonier's Stoniers.

I chose to plant Cabernet in particular because of the Cabernets I had seen made by the short-lived but legendary Stephen Hickinbotham from Elgee Park fruit, but also when I did a homoclimate study for my location from nearby long-recorded climatic data it clearly said 'Bordeaux', reinforced by the maritime climate as distinct from a Burgundian continental one.

All went along swimmingly, with James Halliday even choosing my second harvest 2005 Cabernet (with no Merlot blended in) to represent Australia in the Qantas Cup, a three-way competition between California, Australia and South Africa, where it performed admirably.

It's worth noting that I had chosen my site at 150 feet elevation based on a long assessment of Peninsula soils, elevations and aspects.

As the years passed and Peninsula plantings increased somewhat randomly, they gravitated towards the higher, cooler elevations where deep red volcanic soils predominate. But still people planted Cabernet, with Pinot just beginning to make some headway. The Cabernets from these locations were routinely picked, of necessity, under-ripe with aggressive tomato leaf and green capsicum characters brought about by the compound methoxypyrazine. This was due to being considerably cooler than the lowlands but also because of the shading of fruit in the canopy caused by uncontrolled vegetal growth.

Not surprisingly the wines were dismissed by the market and even a luminary such as James Halliday said the Peninsula is, quote: 'unsuited to Cabernet'. WHAT??

Our Cabernet sales gradually declined as a result of this mantra but we persevered until our last vintage in 2009, aptly labelled Les Adieux. Back label below.



We are now predominantly planted with Pinot and Chardonnay along with with the *rogue* Albarino/Savagnin and have just grafted the last of our Arneis to Chardonnay as well - but that's another story (told here). And don't get me wrong, happy to be so, but unsure what the long-

term effects of global warming hold.

I still delight in pulling out the occasional masked Cabernet from the 1990s for visiting wine trade and commentators only to be told. 'it's very kind of you to pour an old Bordeaux for us but were really here to see what you make from your own vineyard.'

Say no more.

Last week I pulled from my cellar a 2001 Shiraz I made from fruit from a nearby vineyard. Bloody delicious even if I do say so myself.

A couple of other non-related comments.

- In the days when I was a viticultural consultant I was approached by Rob Kirby of Village Roadshow asking if I knew of a suitable property he might purchase to grow grapes on the Peninsula. Oddly enough a 100-acre block almost entirely plantable had just come on the market to be auctioned. I had coveted this acreage for years even before I purchased my own modest farm 37 years ago and had long seen it as possibly the best block for grape growing down here. I told Rob about it, and the rest, as they say, is history. Welcome Yabby Lake.
- When I was on the board of Domaine Chandon I would occasionally be in Épernay and on one such occasion [Richard Geoffroy](#) asked if I would like to meet Dom Pérignon. I was escorted to the inner sanctum where the monk himself sat behind his desk in a cloistered room – a wax effigy that is. Richard took my photo with my arm around the Dom. Even to this day people ask me which one is DP and which one is me.

21 December 2018 *Some current releases from Victoria's answer to Burgundy.*

Mornington Peninsula's location is both a blessing and a curse. Just south of the cosmopolitan, affluent city of Melbourne – Australia's Edinburgh to the scruffier, more Glasgow-like Sydney – it is reliably cooled by breezes off the ocean shown above, so is a fine spot for the early-ripening Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, which it grows to the virtual exclusion of all other vine varieties.

But, unlike the much more extensive Yarra Valley to the north east of the city, land prices in this Melbournian playground are almost prohibitively high so the region will never produce cheap wine. The potential for vineyard expansion is extremely limited, and it can be very difficult to buy grapes. So while the Yarra has become an exciting place for younger wine producers to experiment (admittedly with phylloxera present and necessitating considerable replanting), Mornington is pretty set in its ways. You can see the evidence of the coolness of the climate there below.



Not that those ways are remotely bad. As I wrote in [Mornington Peninsula's delicate Pinots](#) after visiting there in 2009, the area is producing some really very fine examples of the two famous grapes of Burgundy. But I think the producers are currently feeling a little overlooked in the UK. Last September a few of the more notable ones came en masse to London to show off their wares.

Perhaps the highest-profile of them is the award-winning Tom Carson of Yabby Lake, who conducted a special tasting of his 2016s and some of his 2012. But his personal project, [Serrat](#), is a slightly Viognier-influenced Shiraz – in the Yarra. This is a really exciting wine, as well it might be at A\$200 a bottle and up.

Carson reported that vintage in Mornington is now a full four weeks earlier than it used to be. It has gone from early May to late March at Yabby Lake. Some sites are now harvested as early as late February now, and 2016 was a hot vintage that was picked particularly early. Acid additions were fairly common for 2016 Pinot Noir, although Mornington Chardonnay very rarely needs acidification. Many producers are using a certain degree of whole-bunch fermentation to add zest to their Pinots. This was initially tried in the 1990s that were fairly cold and wet, so some were put off the technique altogether. Carson expressed concern that Mornington might eventually become too warm for Pinot 'so we'll all have to make Shiraz'.

One exciting exception to Mornington's varietal duopoly is mentioned below. The Crittendens got caught in the [Albariño-that-turned-out-to-be-Savagnin](#) saga, and instead of ripping out their Savagnin, or grafting it over to a more familiar variety, they have been researching the wines of the Jura and have been making a very creditable version of Savagnin aged under flor. See this [wine of the week](#). The latest version is also very impressive.

The 29 tasting notes below are grouped by colour and then listed in alphabetical order of producer name but you can change this.

Order by ▼

WHITES

- [Crittenden, Cri de Coeur Sous Voile Savagnin 2015 Mornington Peninsula](#) *This was the second vintage of this wine; there was none in 2014. Picked at 13% and 15.4% and given more than three years under flor. They bottle on taste. Not released yet.*
Deep gold. Nutty and not too demanding. Exciting wine. Notably richer and riper than the 2013. Drink 2017-2020
17
- [Crittenden, Zumma Chardonnay 2015 Mornington Peninsula](#) *From two blocks of Chardonnay planted in late 1980s with the I10 clone so the wine is quite tropical and fruit-driven but vine age helps. Rollo C: 'We have to work quite hard in the winery with the solids to add texture to the wine.' 11 months on gross lees. 20% new oak.*
Relatively rich. Bigger rather than austere. 13.1% Drink 2017-2022
16.5
- [Crittenden Chardonnay 2011 Mornington Peninsula](#) *Very difficult vintage with lots of rain. Picked a full four weeks late but with excellent results for the Chardonnays.*
Hint of reductive matchstick on the nose but then much richer than expected on the palate. Lots to chew on. Very much a wine for food. Butterscotch and citrus. 13.1% Drink 2015-2020
16

- Moorooduc, Estate Chardonnay 2015 Mornington Peninsula *Probably about 20% new oak.* Fresh and lively and not too austere. Pretty and well balanced. Very straightforward.12.5% Drink 2018-2022
16.5
- Moorooduc, Estate Chardonnay 2011 Mornington Peninsula Very pale. Delicate and lively. Long, and fresh. Great balance – on a tightrope but very successfully so. Excellent freshness. Nice now. 12.5% Drink 2015-2020
16.5
- Nazaaray, Single Vineyard Chardonnay 2017 Mornington Peninsula Deep straw. Crisp and yet with sufficient undertow of ripe fruit and a little lees influence. Overall a satisfying whole. Fresh and well balanced with no obvious sweetness or oak substance there.13.8% Drink 2018-2021
16
- Ocean Eight, Verve Chardonnay 2011 Mornington Peninsula *This was the notoriously wet south-eastern Australian vintage with a bit of botrytis.* Despite the vintage, the wine now tastes very lively and burgundian. One of the producer's favourite Chardonnay vintages!Drink 2015-2020
16.5
- Ocean Eight, Verve Chardonnay 2015 Mornington Peninsula Low-key nose and lightly vegetal on the nose with marked acidity and some breadth on the palate.Drink 2017-2021
16
- Paringa, Estate Chardonnay 2013 Mornington Peninsula Rather unusually rich nose. Nice now – delicate and fresh. Long and well balanced.Drink 2017-2021
16.5
- Polperro, Single Vineyard Mill Hill Chardonnay 2015 Mornington Peninsula *I10 and V5 clones. No sulphur until bottling. 12 months in barrel and six months in tank. They are selling the 2016 before the 2015.* Restrained nose. Then quite a bit of weight on the palate – almost old-fashioned Meursault style. Tastes like cough sweets. Lots of character. Restrained.13% Drink 2019-2024
16.5+
- Polperro, Single Vineyard Mill Hill Chardonnay 2010 Mornington Peninsula Cheesy nose and excitement. Lots of development. Still lots to chew on but this has gained a bit of breadth too.Drink 2014-2020
16.5
- Ten Minutes by Tractor, Judd Vineyard Chardonnay 2015 Mornington Peninsula *100% P58, the Penfolds clone. They are now picking earlier to get freshness and drive. Malo? It depends on the year.* Vegy nose – not unpleasant. Very good balance. Lime streak and very saline and fresh. Very good.Drink 2018-2023
16.5+
- Ten Minutes by Tractor, Willis Chardonnay 2011 Mornington Peninsula *They normally have 45 tractor-days in a vintage but in 2011 they had 90.* This didn't smell absolutely pure. A bit jagged and chunky.13% Drink 2014-2018
15.5
- Yabby Lake, Single Vineyard Chardonnay 2016 Mornington Peninsula More depth to this wine than the Red Claw 2016 and a bit more lees character. It's also tighter and less ready. Lots to chew on. Fine and tight and really rather like Chablis.Drink 2019-2025
£40 RRP Swig 17
- Yabby Lake, Red Claw Chardonnay 2016 Mornington Peninsula *Tom Carson's second label. The earliest vintage ever; a warm year.*

Green-fruited nose and lovely texture. Good, aperitif-style Chardonnay. Drink 2018-2022
£20 RRP Swig 16.5

- Yabby Lake, Block 1 Chardonnay 2012 Mornington Peninsula One of Tom Carson's favourite Chardonnays. This has hardly aged at all! Greenish tinge and real grip on the palate. Still masses of acidity. Ageing as fast as a glacier? Drink 2017-2027
16.5

REDS

- Crittenden, Cri de Coeur Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula *Fourth vintage of this bottling from vines planted 35 years ago. Rollo Crittenden: We weren't rejuvenating soils so we had to chase flavour which resulted in too much sugar and not enough acid, so we've spent the last 10 years eliminating synthetic chemicals and composting and green mulching with great results for soil health. 50% whole bunch because this wine is designed to age. The most expensive of their three Pinots. Three kilometres east of Port Phillip Bay on one of the warmer sites. Fermented in old puncheons. Aged in two used barriques and a new puncheon.* Mid to pale crimson. Pretty robust and emphatic with a bit of oak tightness on the end. Full-on and muscular and very obviously made to age. 13.3% Drink 2020-2028
16.5+
- Moorooduc, McIntyre Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula *Northerly site, fairly sandy ('ancient seabed') and only 50 m elevation, next to Yabby Lake and Kooyong.* The nose is a bit simpler than most. Sweet start and a little soft. Less focused than some. Easy-peasy and early maturing. 13.5% Drink 2018-2022
16
- Nazaaray, Bangles Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula *Named after a tigress cub. Made on the same site as the grapes were grown which Nazaaray claim is unusual in Mornington. Clones MV16, 114, 115 and 777.* Already quite ruby. Transparent with a very pale rim. Looks quite evolved. Sweet nose with very marked acidity on the palate. A hint of coffee with the fruit not quite the freshest. Fades a little fast. 13.7% Drink 2017-2020
RRP AU\$45 16-
- Ocean Eight Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula *Warmer vintage (than 2017).* Floral note. Very clean, pure fruit. Lively and pure. Accessible. Very well balanced with fruit but no uncomfortable candy or sweetness. Drink 2019-2024
16.5
- Paringa, Peninsula Pinot Noir 2017 Mornington Peninsula *Paringa Estate owns 60 acres and also buys in. Small yield. This entry-level wine got a gold in a Pinot challenge apparently!* Aromatic and pleasing. Very fresh, leafy nose. Violets. Drink 2018-2023
16.5
- Polperro, Single Vineyard Mill Hill Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula *Seeking organic certification. Waxed top. Highest vineyard in the area at 270m. Volcanic red clay over granite, this vineyard is sometimes picked well into April. Exclusively the MV6 clone, planted in 1992. All destemmed but whole berries retained, first third fermented as carbonic. 60% new oak. 16 months in French oak, 60% new.* Pale ruby. Aromatic and fruity in Beaune idiom. Good grunty wine with layers of flavour. Long and subtle. Some sweetness. Lots going on here. Admirably persistent. 14% Drink 2018-2024
Different UK importers 17
- Ten Minutes by Tractor, Willis Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula *Single vineyard on a long-term lease at 170m. Fairly low but it gets lots of ocean influence so it's picked at the*

same time as the McCutcheon vineyard. Planted in 1994. MV6. Earliest vintage ever. Warm rather than hot (cf 2013).

Quite dark garnet. Damp hemp nose. Racy and energetic. Tastes almost as though there were some dissolved carbonic in here. Lots of juicy appeal. 13.5% Drink 2018-2023

16.5

- **Yabby Lake, Block 1 Pinot Noir 2015 Mornington Peninsula** Mid garnet. Much more intense on the nose than the other Pinots from Yabby Lake. Lovely purity. Seamless texture. Really very smart indeed. This does remind me of a beautifully balanced Beaune. A little bit of appetising light tannin on the end. Really juicy. Drink 2018-2026
17.5+
- **Yabby Lake, Block 1 Pinot Noir 2012 Mornington Peninsula** *Jimmy Watson winner.* Still with firm ruby colour. Serious damp-leaf evolution on the nose. Great fine texture and grip with lovely pure flavours. Surely the 2015 will be every bit as good as this? Very fine with a line and appetising structure. Tannins make their presence felt. Drink 2015-2021
17.5
- **Yabby Lake, Single Vineyard Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula** Very pale garnet. Extremely pure and haunting nose. Cool, fresh and super-fruity. There's a little hint of New Zealand in this – is it the Abel clone and its greens? Or is it the 20% whole bunch?! Lots of texture and a light touch – though not at all burgundian. Lovely delicate winemaking and its own style. Super-clean, fresh finish. Drink 2018-2023
16.5+
- **Yabby Lake, Single Vineyard Pinot Noir 2013 Mornington Peninsula** Mid garnet – deeper than the 2016. Vegy, leafy nose. Interesting! Very delicate, non pushy, almost reticent fruit but very savoury and appetising. Very light grainy tannins on the end. Fresh, almost like a forest in spring. Drink 2016-2021
16.5
- **Yabby Lake, Red Claw Pinot Noir 2012 Mornington Peninsula** *Very good vintage.* Nicely evolved nose. Firm and fine. Quite savoury with a very marked backbone. A little more severe than the average Pinot Noir. Definitely not Côte de Beaune – definitely got its own (Mornington?) style. Drink 2015-2020
16.5
- **Yabby Lake, Red Claw Pinot Noir 2016 Mornington Peninsula** Transparent garnet. Pure, spicy and fruity nose. Grainy tannins on the chewy finish. At the moment it's pretty unintegrated though it's certainly recognisable cool-climate Pinot Noir. Drink 2019-2023
£20 RRP Swig 16