

2015 – A Wine Odyssey

My wife Eileen and I were fortunate to accompany Lester and Adrienne Jesberg on the recent grand tour to honour and celebrate Winewise's 30th Anniversary. It is quite an achievement to successfully publish a magazine for that length of time without ever carrying any advertising, existing only on the articulated judgment and knowledge of the panel members and other contributors, and the earned goodwill of subscribers and vignerons - and it still keeps getting better!

What a tour! Lester has already commented on the notable wines. Here is a brief description of our wine highlights from my humble perspective.

Eileen and I had a little warm-up in Rutherglen before joining the Jesbergs in Beechworth - naturally to stock up on fortification for the cold nights ahead on the southern coast. We visited the national treasure-houses of Chambers, Stanton & Killeen, Buller and Morris, and assembled a magnificent mini-collection of rare and grand muscats.

Stand-out wine: Well, all of the rare muscats are of course fantastic and deserve a place among the world's best. However prices are rising, justifiably I guess, but **Morris Rare (aka Old Premium) Muscat** remains sensational value at a significantly lower price point. David Morris is a master of freshening the ancient material to just-perfect levels of yummy drinkability, balancing the decades of intense rich flavours.

Night out in Rutherglen: We enjoyed the fairly new Thousand Pound Wine Bar in the main street, which is a sort of outpost of All Saints, offering their wide selection of wines by the glass with tapas-style food from their winery restaurant. Many other good Australian and international wines are also available. Very modern interesting fit-out with an intriguing semi-dark "lovers' lane" down one side, all in sync with the Rutherglen heritage.

On with the tour! We meet at Bridge Road Brewers in beautiful Beechworth for great pizza and beer, then head out to iconic Giaconda for an afternoon chardonnay tasting with the affable genius Rick Kinzbrunner in his impressive hand (and dynamite)-made cave. The oldest chardonnay in the tasting is 1993. At 22 years old it's still remarkably taut and restrained, beautifully textured, and I'm picking up lime & orange peel, nuts & nougat, wafting honey & beeswax - no doubt about ageing ability here!

Stand-out wine: **2010 chardonnay** which is a Ferrari wine, lean and elegant body on a multi-faceted framework with a powerful, high-revving engine. The fruit shines through beautifully balanced matchstick complexity, restrained melon and lemon and refined oak characters. It's utterly charming and delicious now and will surely continue to shine well into the future.

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On to Curly Flat at Lancefield. We're warmly welcomed by the wonderful Jeni Kolkka and the winery cat Chewie who features on the cover of *Winery Cats* (the follow-up book to *Winery Dogs*). A tour of the vineyards reinforces my understanding of the on-going development and meticulous care that goes into this great site. The term *terroir* seems to be somewhat out of favour at the moment but I still like it and, to me, Curly Flat wines revel in it.



After an excellent casual lunch in the grand vintage hall which is Curly Flat's opulent and charming cellar door, we taste recent and 2005 vintages of chardonnay and pinot noir, all very good, and nice bubbly and pinot gris.

Stand-out wine: 2013 The Curly Pinot Noir - only recently bottled, but displaying incredible elegance and finely balanced fruit and tannin. Fragrant red fruits - particularly raspberry - with a hint of choc-mint. The mouthfeel is great. I confidently anticipate this wine building harmoniously over many years.

Next stop a big piece of Australian wine history - Seppelt Great Western. Senior winemaker Adam Carnaby takes us through an interesting selection of Drumborg wines, of which 2013 chardonnay and pinot noir look promising, but riesling is the star. The **2005 Drumborg Riesling** is drinking beautifully but still has a long way to go.

The **2014** looks like a classic in the making, pale and austere, reminiscent of Mosel, with a bit of residual sugar perfectly balanced by acid, loads of limey freshness to enjoy now, or wait the 15+ years to see how good it will probably get. Then we move onto shiraz, starting with **1985 Great Western Hermitage** which was getting a bit old, but is still delightful in context, and several St Peters shiraz.

Stand-out wine: 2012 St Peters Shiraz - rich purple colour, cloves and plums on the nose, voluptuous complete mouthfeel, lots of pepper and spice, great length - should age magnificently but give me a rib-on-the-bone and a glass now! We conclude with a **2004 Show Sparkling shiraz** - divine!



Coffin Sally

We take a short break from wineries to enjoy the delights of the Great Ocean Road and the Warrnambool racing carnival. Two excellent but diverse dinners in Port Fairy - brilliant modern fare at the Stag Hotel <http://seacombehouse.com.au/stag-restaurant/> and great pizza with atmosphere at Coffin Sally <http://www.coffinsally.com.au/> - are noteworthy.

En route to the Twelve Apostles we have an enjoyable lunch at the Timboon Railway Shed Distillery, and naturally try their whisky. Only one was available - Timboon Port Expression distilled 7/7/2011 bottled 22/4/2015 ABV 44%. Somewhat curious nose of vanilla, cut flowers and lemon rind, but followed by a good mouthful of spicy orange marmalade and a long finish featuring honey and perhaps butterscotch essence. Pretty good, but I was disappointed that none of their famous 70% blockbusters were available.

Refreshed by the coastal sojourn, we head into South Australia, to Wynns in Coonawarra to meet with winemakers Sue Hodder and Sarah Pidgeon and extraordinary viticulturist Allen Jenkins. Before a welcoming lunch in the winery provided by the nearby Coonawarra store (yes, there is a Coonawarra township, but don't blink as you pass through), we tour the vineyards and take a privileged look at the topography and undulations from Allen's expert perspective. It's truly fascinating and informative, and it changes my view of Coonawarra (it ain't flat!). Wynns have been releasing single vineyard wines to reinforce the vineyard individuality mantra - soon out will be cabernet from Childs vineyard on historic V&A Lane - **2012 Childs Cabernet Sauvignon** is vibrant and rich in every aspect, wonderfully perfumed, but also elegant, with fine powdery tannins and a lick of seamlessly integrated oak.

Stand-out wine: Although the Childs is undoubtedly drinking better at this stage, I'm going for the flagship **2012 John Riddoch Cabernet Sauvignon** - it's a long-haul wine, and probably needs 20 years for the dense concentrated black fruits and prominent oak and dusty tannins to merge completely, but the power and depth of fruit is commanding.

From Coonawarra we head to Kingston SE and Robe in search of fresh crayfish. The Kingston co-op had just closed for the season but Sky Seafoods in Robe deliver the goods with a superb 2 kg cray.

From the crayfish coast we drive along the Coorong which looks prettier and more accessible than I've seen before, catch the car-ferry across the mouth of the Murray and soon arrive in Langhorne Creek and our next destination, Bleasdale wines. Bleasdale was established in 1850, so history abounds here.



A must-see is a huge lever-press constructed in 1892 with a 10 metre gum tree log as the pivotal lever. The press is actually operated on ceremonial occasions. Senior winemaker Paul Hotker put on an excellent selection of current Bleasdale wines for us, and a much-enjoyed casual lunch of local produce. I like the weight of Langhorne Creek wines, shiraz sitting comfortably mid-way between cool-climate and big Barossa, making them very useful food companions. This tasting confirmed that, and the general high standard of Bleasdale wines.

Stand-out wine: 2013 The Powder Monkey shiraz - plenty of spice and herbs, great array of red and black fruits with a delightful chocolate hit on the middle palate, fine tannins, peppery and savoury - needs food to show its wares properly. Also striking is the **2014 Old Vine Verdelho** – from vines planted in 1930, which were formerly used for fortifieds but now reworked as a fine dry table wine vineyard - wonderful texture and grip, and fruit power that I think will see it age like a great semillon.

We spend a couple of days catching up with friends and enjoying the many delights of the Adelaide Hills before heading off to meet the big guns of the Barossa.

After an excellent lunch at Artisans of the Barossa, <http://www.artisansofbarossa.com/pages/tasting-room/harvest-kitchen.php> first up is Orlando, er, sorry, Jacob's Creek - whatever - a rose by any name, and the rose here is of course riesling. We're taken down to a beautiful tasting room adjacent to founder Johann Gramp's original cottage and vineyard, and it is a slice of riesling heaven, as laid out before us is a great selection of their prodigious range with master-maker Don Young to take us through them.

We have Jacob's Creek 2002, 2012 & 2014;
Jacob's Creek Reserve 2009 & 2012;
Richmond Grove Limited Release Watervale 2005, 2008, 2012 & 2013;
St Helga Eden Valley 2012 & 2014;
Steingarten 2002, 2006, 2012, 2013 & 2014.

All are good to very good, but the older Steingartens are **stand-outs** for me - **2002** is on an excellent development track, with a long way still to go, showing nuances of honey and grapefruit with some background ginger, lovely viscous slide over the tongue, plenty of acid yet to work through; **2006** has a delightful spicy-floral nose, big and rich but harmoniously so, good structure, plenty of fruit and acid for further ageing but I like it now; **2012** has a very delicate floral nose which doesn't really prepare you for the wow palate grip, with great intensity of lemon/lime and acid in lineal harmony that stays in your mouth for a long time - great ageing potential.

Dinner that night at FermentAsian <http://fermentasian.com.au/> in Tanunda is brilliant. Next day is our final day of the grand tour with Lester & Adrienne, and what a day it is.

First up immediately after breakfast we're off to Penfolds - at the immaculately restored Kalimna homestead, one of the early Penfold homes, on a hill in the northern Barossa with breathtaking views back over the valley. We settle down in the old dining room with a marvellous array of Penfold's premium wines and the gracious informed company of senior white winemaker Kym Schroeter and red winemaker Stephanie Dutton. **2012 Yattarna Chardonnay** is the star white. Refined and tightly wound, it's all about intensity and ageing to release the latent power. It should be brilliant in 5+ years.

Stand-out wine: No surprise it's the **2010 Grange** - I can smell rich chocolate on ripe plums and blackberries, then in the mouth an intense integration of fruit and tannin with silky texture - an enormously powerful wine but superbly balanced, drinkable now and possibly forever. **2008 Grange**, although clearly eclipsed by the 2010, is also a wonderful display of seamlessly integrated fruit and tannin. Special mention also to the **2012 Magill Shiraz** - the beautiful lifted nose giving me scents of fresh and preserved cherries crossing over with salami. Fabulous substantial mouthful with a lively mid-palate; very drinkable now and should age gracefully for many years.

Then we head down the valley to the magnificent cellar door of **Peter Lehmann** where chief winemaker and welcoming and entertaining host Ian Hongell has lined up **2006 to 2010 Wigan Rieslings** for us, as well as a selection of 2013 limited release reds, accompanied by platters of fabulous Barossa produce. It's a great lunch, during which we're entertained by tales of Ian's and Lester's show-judging exploits. Wigan, named after Ian's predecessor and mentor Andrew Wigan, is from their finest parcels of riesling, released after five years' maturation.

Stand-out wine: **2006 Wigan riesling** - an intriguing explosion of almost-candied fruits on nose and palate, but still very fresh and lively, with lots of acid and fruit still to work through. A lovely drink now and likely to be for many years to come. **2010 Wigan** is restrained, with loads of rich juicy lemon waiting to burst out. Great potential.

Well, if you start the day with Grange, naturally you have to end it with Hill of Grace hey! So in the afternoon we head across to the Eden Valley and iconic Henschke.



We enthusiastically accept the offer of a tour of the famous Hill of Grace vineyard which is of course a spiritual place in more ways than one - looking down the rows from the 1860s grandfather vines to the old church is indeed uplifting. Back to the beautiful old winery via Mt Edelstone vineyard, we settle in an atmospheric small room to taste all the current releases.

Stand-out wine: Again no surprise, the **2010 Hill of Grace** has a powerful, lifted five-spice nose with plenty of rich plum and pepper. Entirely sumptuous fine tannins meld brilliantly with plenty of red and black fruits. Fabulous wine! It seems weightless, with immense power. **2012 Mt Edelstone** is also a cracker - big lifted nose of plums through to strawberries, with soft spice and pepper, great palate weight, displaying elegance and finesse. Balanced and enjoyable now but structured for long ageing.

Sadly that's the end of the magnificent official tour, as our friends Lester and Adrienne depart for home (Canberra) in the morning. However Eileen and I are still a long way from home (Brisbane) so we determine to soldier on.

Before leaving the Barossa we visit some of the most important sites in the Australian wine story - Seppeltsfield, Chateau Tanunda and Yalumba - just to soak up the ambience, history and grandeur. Also a quick look at pretty Chateau Yaldara evokes pleasant memories of early wine-buying.

On to Adelaide for a few days - plenty of good restaurants and wine-bars there of course. We enjoy Peel St, Kenji, Bistro Dom and Clever Little Tailor, as well as the marvellous Adelaide Markets. I have a special fondness for the old Exeter Hotel where we have a down-to-earth lunch of fresh-from-the-oven lamb pies and glasses of Rockford rosé.

Back on the wine trail! We head to McLaren Vale and visit seven interesting producers on spec. (and have a fabulous lunch at the Salopian Inn <http://salopian.com.au/>).

S C Pannell - Steve Pannell has settled in a nice part of McLaren Vale with an impressive modern winery and elegant cellar door facility - tapas on the deck certainly suit his food-friendly savoury wines.

Wine to watch: Steve's new home incorporates a 1970-planted shiraz vineyard gently sloping to the west down from the cellar door to Olivers Rd. The first release from the vineyard is **2013 Field St Shiraz** showing an elegant savoury mix of ripe red and black fruits and spicy salami - good drinking with food now and should age nicely. Field St is likely to become a regular single-vineyard release, and with the Pannell Midas touch may evolve into something quite special.

Graham Stevens - Graham is a life-long part of the McLaren Vale landscape, previously making wine with Coriole and Cambrai, now operating under his own name, with daughter Carolyn running a welcoming cellar door.

Stand-out wine: **2013 Cabernet Sauvignon** - brilliant but not over-done expression of cabernet; perfectly ripe fruit integrated nicely with new French oak - very good.



Coriole

Coriole - The view, buildings and flowers combine to make this a very attractive place to drink wine, and the Italian-variety collection makes it even more attractive to me.

Stand-out wine: **2015 Fiano** follows a nice development path for this variety at Coriole, with spicy and nutty flavours showing the benefit of vine age, while retaining up-front freshness and lift. The food matches for this wine are getting even wider, making it very useful.

Kay Bros - Beautifully situated on a ridge with views to rival their photogenic neighbour Coriole. Nice wines and old-worldy charm.

Stand-out wine: **2011 Block 6 Shiraz** - classic McLaren Vale shiraz from vines planted in 1892. Herbs through to plums, lovely and rich in the mouth but not heavy; great balance of fruit and tannin. Many vintages of the famous Block 6 are available at the cellar door.



Samuels Gorge - Another scenic site on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Onkaparinga River National Park. Nothing modern here apart from the switched-on people running the place. It's an 1850s shed and wines are open-fermented in ancient slate vats. Everybody in the Vale seems to be talking about Samuels Gorge, so their different look and approach is working well. The wines are rich and savoury, certainly mouth-filling. The whole thing brings a smile to your face.

Stand-out wine: 2014 Tempranillo - I get a bit of Spain and a bit of Aussie out of this, rich and savoury. Bring on the tapas!

Olivers Taranga - McLaren Vale seems to be getting more Italian all the time, and a little bit Spanish, and I'll drink to that. Nowhere more so than Olivers who are not only making the Italian varietals but also promoting the lifestyle with porchetta parties and the like. Molto buono. Their "traditional" varieties are also good.

Stand-out wine: 2011 Sagrantino - I've spent a bit of time in Umbria studying sagrantino and this is the best I've tasted outside of its homeland. The flavour profile is spot-on. Sagrantino at its best is a big rich red that displays loads of black fruits and tannin in a relatively high-alcohol package that can be surprisingly contained and elegant. More vine age and this one looks like it'll get there.

Then for something completely different we visit **Mollydooker**, beloved of *Wine Spectator* and American fans of big blockbuster reds. To be honest, it's much better than I anticipated. Very pleasant tasting format where a "host" takes you around a table of their wines. The reds are indeed big - about 18% - they're not for long-term cellaring - drink now and start dancing! However in that ripe spectrum, they generally provide rich, satisfactory drinking (especially if you're left-handed...like me).

Back to Adelaide briefly then it's time to head home - but luckily we're going via Clare so we have a few very pleasant stops there.



Sevenhill

Sevenhill - We have the luck of the Irish at our first Clare stop, in meeting the lovely cellar-door manager Sue McKee, daughter of Clare legend Jim Barry. Sue not only provides us with an excellent tasting but also good advice on where to stay (Clare Valley Motor Inn) and eat (Sevenhill Hotel <http://www.sevenhillhotel.com.au/> - we dined in the cellar of the atmospheric old pub. It was great!). Sevenhill winery is part of the eponymous historic Jesuit spiritual centre and of course home of legendary winemaker Brother John May, now retired, but still very much the beaming face of Sevenhill wine. I notice a solemn group eagerly but quietly tasting riesling and discover that they're on retreat in the spiritual centre. Wine tasting is built into the retreat! How good is that!

Stand-out wine: **2009 Brother John May Reserve Release Shiraz** (naturally named after Br John who happily autographs a bottle for me) - striking colour of deep bright magenta, black fruits through to chocolate and licorice, smooth chewy tannins, complex and elegant lifted palate, long finish. Very good now but I think great in another five years. **2012 St Ignatius** (cabernet, merlot, malbec, cab franc) is also very good. Great colour, full rich palate, pleasantly mid-weighted, reminiscent of young Bordeaux.



Paulett - Picture-postcard spot overlooking the Polish Hill River. Great place to taste, and when we were there they were just completing a restaurant fit-out which should create a very pleasant place for lunch.

Stand-out wine: **2013 Antonina Riesling** – A hand-picked single-vineyard wine that is presently shy and reserved but instantly teleports you into the future where you know it will be a star - linear and long, torrents of zippy acid, wonderfully balanced.

Tim Adams - Very enjoyable tasting and chat with Tim's partner Pam. Great range here - though it's hard to admit for a Hunter semillon fanatic like me. Tim's deft application of oak to the **2012 semillon** is pretty good and I think the wine is destined for long positive development.

Stand-out wine: **2012 Aberfeldy Shiraz** - Intensity! Loads of rich flavours - plums, cherries, chocolate, etc. Fairly firm tannins, so really needs some ageing to come together, but I'm confident that will happen. It's the sort of wine you need to drink through a case, one every 18 months, over about 20 years.

I also like the **2012 Fergus** (grenache, tempranillo & malbec) - up-front grenache sweetness followed by savoury tempranillo, and malbec adding a bit of mid-palate weight - all as designed I guess. It adds up to a very pleasant savoury drink which could match a plethora of foods and has the structure to age gracefully.

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O'Leary Walker - Beautiful modern cellar door on the main road at Leasingham south of Clare, with friendly welcoming staff.

Stand-out wine: 2014 Last Cut Riesling - A very nice sticky, stacks of rich marmalade and concentrated lime flavours, not sugary, just intense fruit-driven sweetness, would handle serious blue cheese, but great with desserts also; wonderful texture and mouthfeel. This is the end of the line! - It's the ultimate cane cut riesling as it's a product of the vines being cut very low prior to clearing for replanting!

Greg Cooley - The experience here is the man himself, a dynamo of bonhomie who makes a wide range of eminently enjoyable wines, all of which are named after people who have influenced and/or inspired him. Greg is on a mission to provide good wine and happy times to as wide an audience as possible, and you've got to applaud that!

Wine to look out for: 2012 Glynn & Pini Merlot-Cabernet Franc – It's a nice drink, but Greg was talking to me about philosophy at the time - I think - so I didn't note the finer points, but it is, I must disclose, named after two guys who are also my mates and who I can envisage as fine expressions of their respective grapes.

On that note, it's now really time to head for home. We have an arduous but interesting and trouble-free drive through serious Aussie outback, via Broken Hill, Bourke, Moree and Goondiwindi. A notable surprising dinner at Cobar, of all places! I'm a pizza fanatic - our front patio is often transformed into Roberto's Pizzeria – and the Great Western Hotel at Cobar serves some of the best pizza ever, with icy cold beer and adequate wine. How about that!

Now that I've come to the end of this record, which turned out to be longer than I anticipated. Many thanks for journeying with me if you're still here. I'm struck by the number of historical wine sites we've visited, and become part of their story, and how it's entwined with the history of Winewise.

Check out the Australian wine history roll-call in the "official" tour with Lester & Adrienne -

Seppelt, Wynns, Bleasdale, Orlando, Penfolds, Peter Lehmann, Henschke plus relatively new stars that have grown up with Winewise – Giaconda and Curly Flat.. Throw in the famous Rutherglen families - Morris, Chambers, Stanton & Killeen, Buller and the stack of our wonderful old and new friends in McLaren Vale and Clare.

That's a great wine tour!!

HAPPY 30th BIRTHDAY WINEWISE! Roll on 40! (Not too quickly! L)

Bob Clancy