

# 2002 Vintage Report



## Whiskey Gully Wines Newsletter, May 2002

"Let us not live in France; let us quit all  
And give our vineyards to a barbarous people."

Shakespeare (King Henry V)

What a year for everyone on this lofty plateau. The best by far in anyone's memory and it is fitting that it should coincide with the declaration of the Granite Belt as an official wine region. We (the pleasant pluckers plus some hired labour) picked the Shiraz just before Easter (March 25) and half of the Cabernet Sauvignon a couple of days later with two inches of rain causing us to leave the rest. One week later (April 3) we (hired labour only, hence the reduced quality!) picked the remaining Cabernet. I would have left it longer but I was concerned about bird strike and botrytis following the rain. So picking was finished early April. That was about two weeks earlier than the previous year, by the way – a result of the sustained warm, predominantly dry weather.

The Shiraz arrived in the shed at a huge 14.2 Baume in perfect condition. The first load of Cabernet was 14.0 Baume and also in excellent condition while the second lot, after the rain, was 13.3 Baume. pH was a tad high for all three but excusable with those Baume figures, in that the winemakers have leeway to add acid without losing anything valuable.

After some heart fluttering moments for the winemakers trying to find room for everyone's wines - it was a huge vintage all round - they settled down to ferment. A month later, they are in barrel (the wines, not the winemakers) and starting the slow malolactic fermentation process. Actually, the winemakers were ecstatic just to survive the vintage. Who could blame them if they were to take a little Chardonnay bath to ease the aches and pains. Think about that the next time you sample your favourite Barossa quaffer.

"...we consider it was excess of wine that set him on;  
And on his more advice we pardon him."

Shakespeare (King Henry V)

The Cab. Sav. (un-bathed in) is very full and, surprisingly, a little green. It will be a good wine (our usual Cabernet – long and fruity with smooth tannins) but it remains to be seen whether it will have that special je ne sais quoi that separates it from the pack. The Shiraz, on the other hand, is what my winemakers describe as a "monster". It was fermented using a bleeding method which is a technique only used with good fruit because, in bleeding overflow from one tank to another it concentrates flavour and other characters, including bad ones. Fortunately, this Shiraz really didn't have any bad traits and the resulting wine is wonderfully dense, dark, olivey and spicy. Wow! In the barrel it is our best to date. The bleed from the ferment – a little (but not much) lighter - will form the basis of the next Republic Red along with the two or three tonnes of Cabernet Sauvignon we picked after the rain.

This one is also marginally lighter than its pre-rain counterpart but with some lovely and complex fruit tannins. It was the best forward planning we have yet managed to achieve for our Republic Red and the result will be, methinks, interesting.

"for it will come to pass that every braggart shall be found an  
ass."

Shakespeare (All's Well That Ends Well)

So, it augurs well. The best Shiraz is in a mixture of new and one-year old American oak. The best Cabernet is in new French and new American oak. The rest of everything is in old (1, 2 years and over) oak. Given the luxurious treatment of the best liquids, we may yet produce differentiated varieties. ie vintage and reserve vintages although we may choose to blend back. These decisions are integral to the winemakers' alchemy. It is quite possible we shall hold the best back for up to two years prior to release. I may yet buy in a little Petite Verdot and some Merlot (and maybe Cabernet Franc) to blend with some of the Cabernet to produce our first Bordeaux-style blend (called Blend de les Pluckers Pleasants, perhaps). The wooded Chardonnay from 2002 is settling down in a mixture of new French, new American and older oak of both types. Barrel samples are beautifully fruity and elegant. We will almost certainly create a vintage reserve and a vintage wine with this material and while the 2001 Beverley Chardonnay is a little beauty, signs are this could be even better. 2002 really has been an excellent year.

2nd murderer: "You shall have wine enough, my lord, anon."

Shakespeare, (King Richard III)

Thanks to all this year's dedicated troupe of Pleasant Pluckers. There were memorable moments through the haze. Most Consistent (Persistent) Plucker of the year award goes to Roger Jeffries who not only trod almost every row of the vineyard but managed to coerce several friends, now former friends, into doing the same. Most Out Of Pocket Plucker of the year award goes to Iain Meers who contributed a bottle of wine, half a finger and associated medical bills due to a bee sting, an automotive ignition system and an automatic transmission to the effort. Never mind, the Ford is back on the road now. Once again the Fastest Plucker of the Year award goes to Allan Robertson who is so quick that on one occasion I forgot he was actually there. My apologies, Allan, I blame the alcohol. My personal favourite pluckers this year, for reasons I cannot fully articulate, were the backpacking twenty year-old Swedish girls Charlotte and Elin. Sigh.

"Thy flatterers yet wear silk, drink wine, lie soft;"

Shakespeare (Timon Of Athens)

John Arlidge

