

of Red Hill Victoria
Mornington Peninsula
Product of Australia

ELDRIDGE ESTATE

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SPRING NEWSLETTER 2006



Welcome to the Spring 2006 Newsletter.

The vineyard looks a treat, so we invite you to visit us to taste our current releases and perhaps enjoy a cheese platter on the deck.

The Clone Ranger!

Why has David been nicknamed the Clone Ranger? (Jane Faulkner, The Age, 23/9/06)

It's all about different types (clones) of Pinot Noir. Our interest was fired up in 1990 when we met the Oregon State Viticulturist, Barney Watson, who had been researching clones, ripeness and flavours. We became entranced with the variation in flavours due to the clones. It was also clear that the flavours would vary according to whether the vines were in a cooler or warmer part of the state.

We began our clone selection program in 1996. Last year we released a limited number of sets of single clone wines to show others what was getting us so excited. There was great interest and some restaurants even asked if they could list single clones. We have received many requests for a repeat.

A small release of the clone sets from 2005 will occur in November. We are keeping the release small because although popular most were sold to fellow winemakers! We will again do the very popular barrel tastings of the clones in January (Bookings essential).

It is important to remember that we go to the trouble to show the clones individually so that you can see that the sum of the individuals gives a better result than the individual components of the mix.

The physical 'West Patch' of the vineyard has been 100% MV6, but now about 30% has been grafted over to clone 777. As a result, the West Patch label will be retired, releasing our 100% MV6 wine under an Estate Pinot label with MV6 clone symbol.

Visiting Vignerons

While visiting France in 2005 we met several Burgundian winemakers who asked if they could visit us over vintage.



The photograph is of Michel Mallard of Domaine Michel Mallard in Ladoix-Serrigny. It was great to see him and hear of his experiences working vintages in both hemispheres, Old World and New World.

The first comment he made about vintage at Eldridge Estate was how small our crusher was. We seem to recall he described it as being "Cute". Michel has worked at other domaines in France as well

as Blue Pyrenees in Central Victoria and Coldstream Hills in the Yarra Valley.

Michel represents the new generation of Burgundy producer, those who have a wide range of grape growing and winemaking experience before commencing duties at the family domaine. He has an excellent palate and tastes Pinot and Chardonnay from all over the world. Many of our pickers were astonished to see Michel throwing himself into all aspects of the day – net removal, picking fruit and then plunging. The latter being something that he gives an almost religious aura to.

It was a pleasure to have him visit.

Precision Viticulture

We began our own variation of the Scott Henry canopy management system many years ago.

Over the years it has become clear that ripeness is not a simple equation or set of numbers to watch for. It is our desire to produce excellent Chardonnay, Gamay and Pinot Noir from a cool climate. The Mornington Peninsula is a cool climate region but the closeness to the sea prevents the extremes.

The Eldridge Estate location in particular, takes two major inputs from the region and its soil.

- We are in a high rainfall area and the red duplex soil holds sufficient water to supply the grapes with water.
- The cool climate gives us a long 'hang time'. In some years we may be too cool but by the use of Precision Viticulture techniques we have found ways to get the best from our site.

We now make the initial pruning cuts very early which results in an early budburst. In turn the vines are exposed to more of the summer heat and the harvest itself is a little earlier.

In frost prone, warmer areas the opposite technique is used to make sure that the frost sensitive growth is unlikely to be bitten by early frosts.

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The final part of this technique is known as Berry Sensory Analysis (BSA) and one of our pickers, Erika Winter (pictured below) brought this technique to Australia – in fact she wrote a book on it. The result in 2006 was that we often picked smaller batches of grapes based on the ripeness of individual patches of the vineyard, right down to two barrel batches.



Erika Winter plunges in to harvest at Eldridge

Wine Reviews

We have received some excellent reviews over the past 12 months. But did you know one of the best sources of wine reviews is a website called www.winorama.com.au where you may 'meet' a familiar person.

Spring/Summer on the deck

Come and enjoy the view from the deck of the new tasting room with a glass of EE wine (wine sold by the glass, but you'll want to stay for a bottle!).



North American Viticulture

We visited the Okanogan Valley wine producing region in Canada in June.

Liquor licensing laws in Canada make it nearly impossible to get samples sent to Australia, so we had little knowledge of the wine regions before we arrived.

We found a stunning location that is several hundred kilometres long. At one end, near the border with Washington, it is desert like and warm enough to produce Shiraz and even Cabernet. At the other end, near Kelowna, lovely Pinot Noirs and Chardonnay were produced. This is a slight generalisation because we did find some excellent Pinot Noirs near the warmer end but the ones we liked the most, such as Quails Gate, were from the cooler end.

The trip allowed David to spend quite a bit of time investigating Californian and Oregon producers too.



The legendary Bob Cabral of the legendary Williams Selyem shows us a barrel washer.

American Pinot Noir production was a whole new way of life for us. It is amazing to see many labels that come from VIRTUAL wineries (ie. made by people without vineyards or a winery). Indeed, the most popular Pinot Noir in the US comes from a very famous maker who uses a 'Custom crush facility' and grapes from about 20 growers.

The main thrust is exclusivity and marketing. The business plans used tend to provide capital that will cover all their needs from fruit to sales. We were often questioned about our market and the American growers were amazed at our TINY scale and that despite a good reputation, our average sale is 3 bottles. They find that Americans buy by the case and often in multiple cases.

The key point that we took away from the visit is that although their set up is very different, they use their own version of Precision Viticulture. There is usually one person of the partnership devoted to managing the vineyards, even though the grapes are contracted. They are comfortable to irrigate and they have the sunshine to crop at 3 to 4 tonnes per acre yet every shoot is positioned within a centimetre of perfection.

The vineyard owners don't do this themselves; they use teams of 'Mexicans' who we observed to be fantastic farmers. The fruit sells for US\$3,000 to \$4,000 per tonne which is very different to the A\$800 to \$1,500 from 2 tonnes per acre that we see in Australia. It is all reflected in the prices of their wines, which sit at around US\$40 to \$80 mark.

They do have cheaper Pinots, but we are talking about their quality wines at these prices. The distribution chain chews up the margin that in Australia would be taken by the various taxes on wine.

International Pinot Noir Celebration (IPNC)

This is the oldest Pinot Noir event in the world and 2006 was their 20th event – with David as a guest speaker.

It is a fantastic three days of wine and food held at the beautiful campus of Lindfield College, McMinnville, Oregon. Eldridge Estate was asked to be the 14th guest Australian Pinot Producer ever asked to show their wines, quite an honour. David was also asked to be one of the four guest speakers. The two most common questions asked by Americans were

- How can you grow Pinot Noir in a HOT place like Australia?
- Where can we buy your wine?

We also felt very honoured when one of the visiting Burgundians (Michel Gros) told us that he thought our wine was elegant like those of his region.

Learn more about this event and view including hundreds of pictures at: www.ipnc.org or our own pics at www.flickr.com/photos/pinotrules



David introduces clone MV6 to an Oregonian

Why so small?

At a total production of between 800 and 1,000 cases, Eldridge Estate is a small scale producer.

On the recent trip to California, David was told by one producer who did not know our scale that he was a small producer and did most of the work himself. How many tonnes do you crush we asked, "Oh, about 150" was the response (EE crushes just 10 tonnes).

A question often asked by our American friends who make Pinot is "Why are you so small?" The answer relates to a belief that our site is unique and that we want to get the best from it. We produce about 10 tonnes a year from 7 acres of vines.

In theory we could double that. However, Precision Viticulture suggests that to get the best from our location and its cool climate, a crop of about 10 tonnes is the target. At this scale we can do everything ourselves, from managing the grapes through to keeping the website up to date. We have a loyal following across Australia and sell all we produce. We rarely run out of wine early unless we have a tiny vintage such as 2002.

Farm labour is relatively expensive so our system enables us to manage the whole place by ourselves with ongoing help from Russell and our recently-retired, long-suffering friend Neil. We feel this process will even take a step up at the end of 2006, when Wendy retires from teaching to be full time on the property.



In the last newsletter David foreshadowed using oak fermenters so here is the proof.

AT THE CELLAR DOOR

Current Estate Releases

Recipients of this newsletter will receive a 5% discount on 6 pack orders and 10% discount for dozen orders.

Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2006 \$20

Classic gooseberry fruit with the Semillon adding a bit of breadth and length to the palate.

North Patch Chardonnay 2005 \$25

Citrus and melon notes plus a little stone fruit. On the palate it shows a slightly nutty, leesy character, not heavy with nicely integrated oak.

Chardonnay 2004 \$35

Our premium chardonnay from five patches and five clones. This wine has minimal winemaking input, going straight from the press to the barrel for ferment. It has citrus and melon notes, buttery touches and a hint of earthiness/matchstick that David likes to call "Funky nuances". It is a complex and rich wine that has been selected as one of the finest Chardonnays in the country by James Halliday in his Top 100 wine selection.

Gamay 2005 \$35

A very rare grape in Australia that produces wine with flavours and texture close to Pinot Noir but with an added touch of spice. This wine has a lovely regal red colour and aromas of cherry, plums, pepper and cinnamon. The palate is rich with a tighter acid finish than found in Pinot Noir. It can take a little chilling and is a great wine for Summer months.

West Patch Pinot Noir 2004 \$30

As mentioned earlier in the newsletter this will be the last release of this wine. The aromas have enticing cherry with a little white pepper and a hint of cinnamon. The palate shows soft, velvety tannins as the cherry flavours roll around with great length.

Pinot Noir 2004 \$39

A blend of all five clones on the property. It starts with a delicate bouquet, a whiff of cloves and vanillin smoky oak with muted cherry notes. On the palate the fresh fruit builds with a tangy/juicy almost citrus note. The palate builds, great length with cherry notes on the finish.

Clone packs HURRY!

A limited number of clone packs will be available again at \$300 per pack.

Euroa Creeks

Euroa Creeks Reserve Shiraz '05 \$55

Note: This wine is NOT from our vineyard but we do have exclusive use of the vineyard and work very closely with the owners to produce very special fruit.

Very dense red colour. It looks imposing but the aromas need a little time to breathe up. In time, blackberry and a hint of raspberry ooze out of the glass.

On the palate, the rich fruit is wrapped in a nice layer of oak which seamlessly blends with the fruit to give a chocolate like edge. It has power and length and is definitely a carnivores wine.

Only 100 cases were made from the 7 acre vineyard. We made more in 2006, but the 2007 will be tiny because the recent frosts in the area wiped out all the new shoot growth on the vines. We await the appearance of the secondary buds with some trepidation, as they are normally less fruitful.

Barrel tastings

In January 2006 many groups took advantage of our offer to hold tutored tastings in the barrel room. David will run these sessions again in 2007. Tastings will take place on Sunday mornings at 10am in January and early February. Minimum group size is 8 people and the maximum number is 12 people. The cost is \$20 per person.

Bookings are essential and the session will be cancelled if we have less than 8 people booked. Sessions will be confirmed the Thursday before the tasting

Super special

EEophytes Six Pack

*\$170 including freight to Melbourne, Sydney or Adelaide metro areas.

- 1 Sauvignon Blanc Semillon
- 1 North Patch 2005
- 1 Chardonnay 2004
- 1 West Patch 2004
- 1 PN 2004
- 1 Euroa Creeks Reserve Shiraz 2005

Do the math! Great value!

Subsequent orders of 6 or 12 bottles of any of these wines will also receive free freight to Melbourne, Sydney or Adelaide metro areas. Enquire for other areas.