

summer 2010

Greetings fellow Oenophiles.

I had hoped by the time I wrote this newsletter I could give you some definitive information on the sale of the business. Not so. But by the time you receive this newsletter, it may be sold.

In which case this is probably my last newsletter (#21) to you good folk. Some of you loyal customers have been with us pretty well from the beginning. Amazing, and thank you to all of you for your support over the years. It has been an interesting ride and I hope the journey has been worthwhile for you also. The new owners (pending the sale completing) intend for me to continue assisting with the winemaking for a while to ease themselves in. So, unlikely there will be any drastic changes short term, and hopefully you will be able to derive the same pleasure from the wines as previous.

Vintage 09 gave us some great fruit. But we did suffer yet another spring frost (2008) which wiped out a lot of our Gewurztraminer and Chardonnay. We never suffered a damaging frost in all our years here, until after yr 2000. And now we seem destined to be pummeled by them. A massive snow dump in mid October really put things on edge this spring, but we managed to escape any significant damage.

We managed to salvage enough 2009 Old Vine Gewurz and Chardonnay to make a couple of fantastic looking wines, and the reds look superb. Because we were so short of fruit, and our good friend Kim Salenius in the Esk Valley had more than he needed, a deal was done. More on that later.

Recently bottled the 2008 Syrah and it looks like one of our best yet, although feelings about the 2008 vintage in general are a bit mixed. Coming off the back of the great 2007 that was bound to happen.

Earlier this year, not knowing what the future holds, I thought I should give some of our earliest wines a send off. We are down to our last bottles of these wines so decided they needed to be shared – for better or worse. I made no particular effort to nominate vintages etc, in fact tried to include anything on the endangered list, and the earliest bottlings we made, through to recent releases, ie haphazard vertical tastings of all the wines.

Sam Kim, one of the writers who was present, very kindly wrote up a comprehensive set of notes. I have posted these on the web site www.stonecroft.co.nz. Have a look in View News stories – Review of Museum stock 6/09.

A few highlights are copied below;

5* for the 2006 and 2007 OV Chardonnay

Gewurztraminer 2008Stonecroft's Gewurztraminer has been New Zealand's best example for many years and this one is quite possibly the best one made to date in New Zealand.

Gewurztraminer 1988 (our first)..... Stunning.

Syrah 2008 (barrel sample), 2007 and 2002; 5* (A 2008 barrel sample lot in this year's charity wine auction fetched a record price of \$15,000 for a magnum)

Syrah 1995.Very Northern Rhone like. Lovely drinking now. 5*

Syrah 1989 (our first) An awe inspiring wine and this is drinking history. 4.5*

Ruhanui 2007 5*

Ruhanui 1995..lovely poise and balance with fine, supple tannins. It's beautiful drinking now. 4.5*

Cabernet Sauvignon 1988 ... A fascinating look at a 20 year old Hawkes Bay red from a disastrous year yet this wine is still holding up. 3*

More good news just received on US Wine Advocate (Parker) reviews. I have just been informed our 2007 Syrah scored 92 points (classing it as outstanding). Then I find out the 2006 also had scored the same a year earlier. Then I find out the 2002 scored 94 points earlier again. Better late than never I suppose. Syrah 2007 ".....Pure black cherries and plums. Beautifully crafted. Wonderful". Full notes on website above the Sam Kim review.

The 2007 Zin also had several 5* reviews, and the 2008 Gewurz was nominated as Best of the Best (P Saunders).

Then in December a series of nominations for Best wine of the year came out from KIWIWINEFANCLUB. We got best Syrah for 2009 (2007) and runner up for best Gewurztraminer (2008) and best Chardonnay (Old Vine 2007).

Te Mata got best Bordeaux and Sauvignon Blanc. No, not all the awards went to HB. I presented the NZ view on Gewurztraminer (along with Nick Nobilo – Vinoptima) at an international aromatics seminar in Nelson Feb 2010..Enough.

Just a note on the state of the industry currently. It is going through a tough period with a lot of wine being discounted to unsustainable prices. Consequently many wineries are going through a very trying period. This is caused by a number of factors – Global meltdown, Marlborough meltdown (Savylanch), the curse of the NZ \$ etc.

Here are a few names, by NO means exhaustive, off the top of my head; Te Mata, Trinity, Pask, Ngatarawa, Kemblefield, Dry River, Millton, Neudorf, Escarpment, Alan Scott, Muddy Water, Pegasus, Quartz Reef, Carrick. What have they in common? They were not the greedy ones or the opportunistic feeders who exacerbated this situation. They and others like them are the soul of the industry – the risk takers, the pioneers, the ones who push the boundaries so others can see the possibilities. In total, these and the other small wineries would constitute about 10% of the national crush. They did not start the Savylanch or the massive discounting. So, if you are choosing where your support for the industry goes, consider this tier of the industry. Everybody gets caught up in this mess, and some deserve to do better than others if we still want a vibrant industry. Just my thoughts on the current issue. Anecdotally, as far as I can gather, Stonecroft seems to be weathering the situation better than many.

And we have some excellent wines in this release.

Enjoy them please. This is the last release I will probably have had a full hand in producing and many of these wines are amongst our best. The culmination of around 25 vintages – most of it with the same fruit. Unfortunately I am not able to share the 2009 Old Vine Chardonnay with you at this point – we hold it back for another year and is still in barrel at moment. Looking like the best Chardonnay I have made.

Grand-daughter still fills our life with laughter each day. School girl now, and just experienced first wiggly tooth. Very traumatic, until realised there was monetary compensation at the end of the trauma (ACC have much to answer for). The Tooth Fairy had to be texted her precise location, and the cost of a very small tooth (only slightly used, and in good nick) is now \$2.40 apparently. Only 40 or so more teeth to go.

Best regards to all of you, and thanks for the memories and shared experiences of this vinous world.

Alan

