

A warm welcome to the very first [James Busby Travel](#) Yearbook

We often refer to those travellers who were on last year's trip as our James Busby "alumni" so when it came to writing an annual report for the Class of 2010 it made sense to call it a Yearbook

Since the inaugural trip last October many of our alumni have already graduated onto bigger and better positions in their careers, some of them assisted by experiences gained and connections made whilst in Australia. Here you will find their news as well as updates from the wineries who participated, the inside track on the 'challenging' V11 harvest as well as my guerilla report of the 2010 tour

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who supported us in our "freshman" year, especially those individual producers who took a leap of faith, without whom none of this would have been possible

I hope you enjoy our Yearbook, and I look forward to our 2011 tour this October being equally successful  
Cheers for now,

[Tim Wildman](#) MW, Director James Busby Travel



## First Alumni get-together, at the Natural Wine Fair May 2011...

We had our first “official” Alumni get-together in May at the UK Natural Wine Fair. (there have already been a number of “unofficial” ones in various pubs). Held at Borough Market in London, there were over a hundred growers, mainly from France and Italy, with Ron Laughton from Jasper Hill bravely flying the New World flag. The wines we tasted were on the whole delicious; unforced and easy to drink made with as little chemical addition or manipulation as possible. Only a small proportion displayed the “turbid and bretty” caricature of natural wine. After the tasting we decamped to the Rake pub for cold Coopers, to yarn about the trip and catch up on gossip.

[Click here](#) to read my full review of the day



Romain, Daniela, Christophe, Donald, John, Romy, Tim and Charlotte.

## Traveller news!



[Becky](#)...was our official tweeter and blogger on the trip, so while everyone else was snoozing at the back of the bus, she was toiling over a hot laptop. Becky's blog was carried on the [Majestic](#) intranet, and since returning she has been working on the Australian content for the Majestic i-phone app in her role as on-line development manager

Congratulations to Becky for passing her WSET Diploma last year

[Berenice](#)...has recently relocated from Coonawarra to take up a new position in the McLaren Vale as sales and marketing manager for the Leask Family wine company. Congratulations Ber! Read Berenice's blogs of the James Busby trip at [La Vigna Maltese](#)





Catharina...

As a second year MW student Catharina stood to benefit a huge amount from the detailed knowledge and "real life" examples she gained on the trip. Her role as group "scribe" was a great help to the others, as she could always be relied on to ask the pertinent and searching question. Catharina lives and teaches in The Netherlands at [www.gooischewijneeducatie.nl](http://www.gooischewijneeducatie.nl)

Christophe... was group photographer, and many of the better photos in this Yearbook are thanks to his camera skills. Since returning to the UK Christophe has moved up in the world - eight floors to be exact! and is now Sommelier at Oxo Tower Restaurant, that boasts a 250 foot terrace with spectacular views over the city of London. <http://www.harveynichols.com/oxo-tower-london>



Dani says...

I passed my WSET Diploma last year and have been doing my bit to promote Australia through my marketing role looking after Tahbilk in the UK. I recently took part in a tasting with Alister Purbrick for [Slurp.co.uk](http://Slurp.co.uk) and it was great to see the enthusiasm and interest that these unique Marsannes and Shirazes attract. It gives me more confidence to be able to talk about these wines as I visited the place - thanks to you.



David's "restaurant with rooms", Estbek House, on the Yorkshire coast has become something of a pilgrimage destination for visiting Australian winemakers. With his 100% Antipodean wine list David confounds and then delights his customers on a nightly basis, taking them out of their comfort zone and demanding, in his diplomatic way, that they engage with premium Australian wine. Give that man a knighthood, or at least a case of beer! [www.estbekhouse.co.uk](http://www.estbekhouse.co.uk)







Donald...

Enfant terrible and guardian of the group's mascot, Jancis le Sulphur Crested Cockatoo; since returning from Oz Donald has become gamekeeper turned poacher, and swapped his Sommelier trousers for a salesmans hat, working with dynamic outfit New Generation Wines, tasked with selling a portfolio that includes super premium Australian wine into the specialist retail and London on-trade markets

Gustavo...

Double congratulations to Gustavo for not only passing his WSET Diploma last year but also landing an exiting new job as assistant wine buyer for Berkmann Wine Cellars. I've no doubt that he'll have the opportunity to put his recent Australian experience to good use in his new role, working alongside Alex Hunt MW, one of the brightest young talents in the UK trade



John says....

The Grape Store is now online at [www.thegrapestore.com](http://www.thegrapestore.com) and we have started spreading the word with regard to hand crafted, quality driven wines from Australia and around the world

Whilst the online part of the business will no doubt take time to catch on and grow, the feedback from tastings has been fantastic

There is currently an Australian bias to the list but that's hardly surprising after last year's amazing journey!



Lisa mails in her updates...

News from California...hot & heavy studying going on in these parts for the Unit 3 of WSET Diploma. Recent deep dive Down Under. Last week was whites...this Monday - hold your seats - something like 30 - 40 reds featuring Yabby Lake, Jim Barry, d'Arenberg, Spinifex, Torbreck, Yalumba....Super excited!

Best of luck with the exams Lisa, we'll be thinking of you





Michael...

When Mike missed out on the UK Wine Australia job (he'd have got my vote) he decided to make a return to the front line, taking over the wine buying at [Hotel du Vin Bristol](#), where he's already enjoying enthusing his team and customers about top drawer Australian wine

Romain has moved down to London from Edinburgh to oversee the openings of several new "Bistro du Vin's" in and around the city. Congratulations on a great new appointment. Not surprisingly, the Australian selection is strongly influenced by the wineries he visited [www.bistroduvinandbar.com](http://www.bistroduvinandbar.com)



Romy...has also moved jobs, from Maze to one of London's hottest new spots, chef Jason Atherton's [Pollen Street Social](#), where her Australian section showcases a number of our participating wineries

Tamsin...has been enjoying life down in Cornwall, making sure the good residents of Wadebridge are being seduced by the premium Australian wine she is buying for [Wadebridge Wines](#).



...what can I say about our group mascot, Jancis le Sulphur Crested Cockatoo? Purchased in Hamleys on London's Regent Street, a stowaway in my luggage to Australia, where upon losing the first weeks 'forfeits', Donald was tasked with sneaking Jancis into as many photographs as possible. After the trip I decided to release Jancis into her natural habitat, and she now resides very comfortably as the pet of two young girls called Ruby and Emma who live at a certain small winery in Victoria.....  
...and no, of course she doesn't have her own [facebook page](#)

# That Was the Trip That Was

## James Busby Travel Tour 2010

### Guerilla report

*plus Vintage "V11" News*



William Downie



#### William Downie, Gippsland

The tone for the trip was perfectly set with a visit to William Downie's farm in Gippsland, just over an hours drive east of Melbourne. Nothing could be further removed from Australia's stereotypical image of large scale, industrial winemaking.

Bill and his partner Rachel have established a couple of acres of close planted Pinot Noir, and planted a few hundreds of native trees. They have pigs and chickens running around and make their own salamis and cheeses. We enjoyed a fantastic open air BBQ, at the end of which Becky was presented with a birthday cake lovingly home baked by Bill's Mum. Most memorable wine of the day had to be "Stool on a Stool" (!)

Baby news! Bills writes:

Emerson was born on December 23. He was born at home on the farm and both he and Rachel are doing extremely well. Martha is very fond of her little brother

For more news visit [www.williamdownie.com.au](http://www.williamdownie.com.au)



#### Kooyong, Mornington Peninsula

Sandro Mosele very kindly acted as the "Regional Anchor" for our visit to The Mornington Peninsula. He met us at Arthurs Seat, the spectacular 314m lookout "up the hill" with views back up the Peninsula over Port Phillip Bay towards Melbourne, as well as the lower lying "down the hill" vineyards of Kooyong itself. We then drove a few hundred yards to a South West facing lookout, to be buffeted by the strong, cool winds blowing off the Bass Strait. It was then "down the hill" to the Kooyong vineyard, where were shown the diverse soil and drainage patterns that delineate the Meres, Farrago, Faultline, Haven and Ferrous vineyards while Sandro expounded on the mysteries (no more!) of bunch architecture. Tasting and lunch followed at the "architectural landmark" that is the recently opened Port Phillip Estate cellar door and restaurant. Standing at the imposing and fortress like front door waiting to be buzzed in, I couldn't help thinking I was missing a cloak, lightsaber and protocol droid.

Check out their new-look website at

[www.portphillipestate.com.au](http://www.portphillipestate.com.au)





## OCEAN EIGHT

### Ocean Eight, Mornington Peninsula

This family owned winery is named after a golf course.

We were met by Mike Aylward who "teed" off to a good start by offering us Sydney Rock oysters with his vintage methode champenoise fizz. We then 'clubbed' together in the small tasting room to enjoy his award winning Verve Chardonnay before "pitching" down to the cellar to taste his Pinot out of barrel, which certainly wasn't "green" or "course". (please can I stop now?)

Vintage news! Mike writes:

Best response would be "very glad this vintage is now locked down." A very stressful year.

Heavy rainfall over the picking season reduced the window of opportunity to pick and many times the date of picking was an absolute gamble. In most cases it was a case of 'the fruit is still maintaining good integrity - get it off now. A great year for quality and structure in all wines. We got away with 90 tonne out of a possible 100. Also to let you know, [Hallowed Ground](#) are now our exclusive importers into the UK.

Cheers, Mike

Thanks Mike, nicely "put"



### Tahbilk, Nagambie Lakes

We were met at the historic Tahbilk winery by Alister Purbrick (4th generation) with daughter Hailey (5th generation). Our visit started with an atmospheric river boat cruise at dusk of the Wetlands and Wildlife Reserve. Chilled Riesling was served as an antidote for seasickness, then once back on dry land we were press-ganged into the Wetlands Cafe by Captain Purbrick and his crew for a memorable sit down BBQ.



Earlier that evening a member of our group had been happily reunited with her luggage, misplaced by Qantas on the flight out two days earlier and delivered to our hotel. Our stalwart coach driver Wayne has sensibly added the errant bag to the luggage trailer of the coach, only for it to inexplicably fall out on the dirt track back from the winery at midnight. Luckily one of Tahbilk's night-watchman had almost driven over the suitcase on his way home, and a second, even more tearful reunion between bag and owner took place around 1am.



The next day we were shown around the historic cellars at Tahbilk, where the talk was of traditional winemaking techniques, fruit umbrellas, aging in large old wooden barrels and an emphasis on fruit flavour not oak. We were then treated to a masterclass tasting which demonstrated the ability of Marsanne and old vine Shiraz to age and improve over time. It is truly humbling to be at a tasting when a bottle of the 1968 was reported to be faulty and the reply came back 'Sorry, its the last one'.

In 2010 Tahbilk celebrated their 150 year anniversary. Events were held both in Australia and overseas, and a book "Vintage Stories - 150 year history of Tahbilk" was published to commemorate the occasion, a copy of which was very kindly sent to all our travellers on their return to the UK.

[www.tahbilk.com.au](http://www.tahbilk.com.au)



## De Bortoli, Yarra Valley

When Steve Webber suggested that instead of dining at their white table cloth Cellar Door restaurant (which would have been acceptable), we would sit out on the back deck of his house, sink a few beers and eat a bowl of pasta, I knew that he "got it" in terms of the James Busby vibe. The "bowl of pasta" turned out to be hand made gourmet pizzas cooked by two chefs in a wood fired oven right next to the deck, the "back deck" itself enjoys spectacular views over their Yarra Valley vineyards, and the "beers" were an array of single vineyard and innovative new wines, including a brace of Pinots under the *Riorret* label (you work it out).

Vintage news! Leanne writes:

After a very wet Spring with concern about the health of the vines and disease pressure, we were genuinely concerned but are happily surprised at the overall quality of vintage 2011. Some pundits have already been willing to write off vintage 2011 in the Yarra Valley but we ask that they don't be so hasty. Wait until you have tried some of the beauties from this year before making any decision. There are similarities between this year and the 2002 vintage (remembering back to the days before the drought and heat) when the Yarra valley was a very cool place to grow fruit. Cheers, Leanne De Bortoli

[www.debortoli.com.au](http://www.debortoli.com.au)

Other news, de Bortoli launched another WMD (website of mass drinking) onto the unsuspecting wine world earlier this year in the form of the Rose Revolution, a social media led assault on the status quo, that brings together a rainbow alliance of growers that includes Victorian, South Australian and New Zealand winemakers to celebrate the increasing popularity of dry, grown up rose styles, that are not meant to be taken too seriously <http://rosewinerevolution.com/>



## GIANT STEPS VIGNERONS "THE GENTLE SIDEWAYS"

### Giant Steps, Yarra Valley

Day two in the Yarra Valley began with a working brekky at The Innocent Bystander cafe, home also to Giant Steps wines. The Australian diet is famously healthy, a fact we contemplated whilst gorging on freshly baked muffins, corn fritters, croissants and french toast. Taking advantage of this rare period of silence, Phil Sexton provided us with a pithy summation of his business history so far, philosophy towards educating consumers about grape growers rather than alcohol manufacturers, the commercial realities of the Australian wine retail duopoly, a definition of cool climate viticulture and a bit about modern jazz. By this time we had finished our flat whites, so Phil led us on a tour of his winery followed by a fascinating vertical of Tarraford Vineyard Chardonnay, spanning six consecutive vintages and three different owners. Our intrepid coach driver Wayne off-roaded us up to the Sexton Vineyard then onto a meeting with the knowledgeable viticulturist Greg Liney at Tarraford Vineyard, neatly bringing our visit full circle.

Vintage news! Lingering and unpredictable but so worth it in the end...

Flammo's feedback from the past few months:

Best vintage 2011 moment? Filling OV1, our new oak vat, with whole bunch Chardonnay.

Most nervous vintage 2011 moment? Watching the weather radar (thank god for iPhone apps).

Most important piece of equipment in the winery? Rancilio coffee machine, followed by our grape sorting table. Number of plunges? Around 2500. Tonnes of fruit? 644.5. Number of barrels? 1015.

Approximate amount of coffee drunk by the winemaking team? = 30kg of IB house roast.

Approximate amount of beer drunk by the winemaking team? = 340L.

Lastly, the winemakers wine to watch?

The Chardonnay from Block 12 Mendoza at Sexton Vineyard was sensational. This will be in our Giant Steps Sexton Vineyard wine, but in fact all the Chardonnays are impressive. We have never had such sublime acidity, minerality and extraordinary citrus characters.

[www.innocentbystander.com.au](http://www.innocentbystander.com.au)





MAYER  
YARRA VALLEY



### Lunch with a view: **Timo Mayer, Luke Lambert & Mac Forbes, Yarra Valley**

An important part of the James Busby philosophy is to introduce our travellers to small, under-the-radar producers. Step forward Mac Forbes, Luke Lambert and Timo Mayer, who along with Bill Downie are all members of "Southpack", a loose alliance of young Victoria producers who share similar wine making philosophies, and who like to drink beer together. We had a fabulous BBQ lunch at Timo's place, high up on "The Bloody Hill", so called because, according to Timo, that's what you say when you're harvesting the grapes from his steep vineyard. The view was magnificent, as were the steak sandwiches, wines and trampolining.

Timo's wines are small batch and hand crafted to his own personal taste. As he says on his website, Bring back the funk!

Vintage news! Timo writes:

The motto of the vintage: "Twelve is the new Thirteen" (alcohol that is - ed). Had to spend more time than usual in the vineyard and on my beloved tractor. More shoot thinning, leaf plugging and crop thinning plus a stricter spray program.

Picking dates were back to pre drought years, starting in late March. Fruit had great acids and lower than usual sugars, hence the motto "Twelve is the new Thirteen". Fruit had to be sorted towards the end of the season as bot started to sneak up on us. Wines are looking great, more in the savoury Euro style. Cheers Timo

Not so much a website as a webpage [www.timomayer.com.au](http://www.timomayer.com.au)

Its a long



*Luke Lambert*



**Luke Lambert** has a cool hand when it comes to Syrah, producing ethereal, delicate, mineral wines of great charm and drinkability. Nebbiolo is his one, true love, and despite having worked numerous vintages in Piedmont, Luke says only his daughter Olive will make great Neb in the Yarra. And she's one year old.

News! Luke will be making a flying visit to London the first week of August 2011.

Those travellers who think they might owe Luke a drink or four following the late night sofa session at Melbourne's Supper Club, now might be the perfect opportunity. [www.lukelambertwines.com.au](http://www.lukelambertwines.com.au)



macforbes

**Mac Forbes** is a man with a plan, or more specifically, a man with a map.

Mac's elegant wines are an attempt to reflect the unique characteristics and variations of the sub-regional districts he has identified on his map of the Yarra Valley. Dixons Creek, Gruyere and Woori Yallock may sound like an Australian soap opera, a hard yellow cheese and an explosion in a Scrabble factory, but if Mac has anything to do with it, they'll be house hold names within his lifetime.

[www.macforbes.com](http://www.macforbes.com)

(more) Baby news!

Monty Lachlan Forbes was born to Mac and Nina on January 4th 2011 weighing 3.64 kilos



## All Saints, Rutherglen



Leaving the Yarra Valley behind us, our valiant coach driver Wayne steered us over three hours north to the very edge of Victoria's state boundary with New South Wales, to Rutherglen, home to the worlds richest wine; which must be true because they've erected a sign on the outskirts of town that tells you just that.

Unfortunately our itinerary didn't allow us time for the traditional All Saints welcome, which apparently is to float down the local river on an enormous inflatable tyre whilst drinking chilled Moscato. And besides, my company insurance doesn't cover that sort of thing. So we settled for the drier, but hardly less dangerous alternative, of an All Saints winery BBQ. The sizzle was provided by the blonde Brown sisters (see picture) flipping steaks on the barby, whilst the danger was provided by the small square of astroturf on the back deck that serves as a driving range, where those fueled up on Durif and beer and (Mike) can smash golf balls into the vines. Midnight and AC/DC was put on the winery ipod so I decided it was time to round up the troops for a dignified retreat.



The next day Nick Brown and winemaker Dan Crane lead us on a fascinating journey through their range of fortified Muscats and Muscadelles, as well as a once-in-a-lifetime barrel tasting through their "modified" solera system.

News! Eliza Brown and Marco Hall were at the LIWF in May to launch the arrival of their Marsanne and Durif to the UK market. One journalist was heard to comment 'Where the hell have you been all this time?' [www.prbwines.com.au](http://www.prbwines.com.au)



### Campbells, Rutherglen

Colin Campbell (4th generation) and daughter Susie (5th) provided the group with one of the most memorable tastings of the trip, for some of their professional life. A masterclass in aged Rutherglen Muscat's and Muscadelles.

Colin explained that just two weeks prior to our visit, fortified Muscadelle from Rutherglen, which had hitherto been known as Tokay, was granted its new name of Topaque, thereby resulting in a successful bid to fend off an invasion of litigious Hungarian sweet white wine makers who were preparing to drop *puttonyos* of botrytic lawyers onto the tin shed roofs of Rutherglen.



Rutherglen is almost unique in the wine regions of the world in that its building architecture plays a role in wine style (I'm also thinking here of Champagnes chalk caves). Under those famous tin roofs, the slumbering Muscat is heated up and evaporates at the rate of 5% every year, exponentially concentrating both wine, sugars and acidity. The wines are classified into four levels; Rutherglen Muscat, Classic, Grand and Rare. This classification is based solely on a qualitative assessment, and self regulated by the wine maker and their peer group of fellow Rutherglen producers. Colin's masterclass gave us not only an opportunity to taste and compare these various styles and ages, but also to create a "bench blend" ourselves, using a pipette, our palates and a healthy dose of luck over judgement.

### Australia's First Families of Wine (AFFW)

Campbells are one of twelve Australian wineries that make up the Australian First Families of Wine. Formed in 2009 as a response to challenging export conditions, as well as deteriorating perceptions of Australian wine on overseas markets. The groups main aim is to showcase a representative and diverse range of Australian wine with a focus on regional heroes and iconic wines. On the course of our trip we visited eight of the twelve family members:

Tahbilk, de Bortoli, Campbells, d'Arenberg, Wakefield (Taylors), Jim Barry, Yalumba and Henschke

[www.australiasfirstfamiliesofwine.com.au](http://www.australiasfirstfamiliesofwine.com.au)



## Yabby Lake at Heathcote Estate

Tom Carson hosted one of the most memorable lunches of the trip on a gloriously sunny day in Heathcote. We got down and dirty with the Cambrian soil, before being led through a fascinating barrel tasting of different clones, coopers and toast levels.

Vintage news! Tom writes:

*I am describing the vintage as satisfying, albeit challenging, in the sense that what really mattered this year was site, vineyard management and winemaking decisions....we are*

*calling it the 'european' vintage.....*

Check out Yabby Lake TV; its a bit like YouTube, but with fewer sneezing pandas and more Chardonnay.

<http://yabbylake.com/>



## Bindi, Macedon Ranges

Even the kangaroos seem to sense that Bindi is a special place, for there was a mob on hand to greet us as our gallant coach driver Wayne trundled us up the driveway. Our first proper sightings! Michael Dhillon walked us around his vineyard, and as we stepped over the chunks of quartz that litter the ground (you can see the minerality) he explained the geological and physical properties of every slope and gully. Back in the winery a selection of barrel samples had been pre-prepared, the 2010 Quartz Chardonnay reducing our group to a silent reverie, broken only by our restaurateur David mumbling something about lobster thermador and going to heaven. Wendy Dhillon had prepared a sumptuous feast that we ate under the rafters of the winery as the sun set. Michael's father Bill was on hand to charm each member of the group in turn with his sagacity, warmth and humanity, and as we reluctantly climbed back onto the coach, more than one member of the group was dewy eyed with emotion.

BINDI



Vintage news! Michael writes:

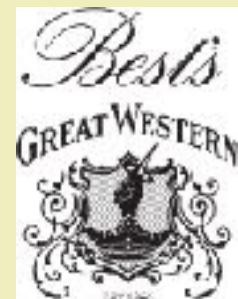
*Amongst ourselves, and to some winemaking colleagues, we said we might not make it. Many didn't make it this year. There were a myriad of different challenges and anxieties to overcome and the feeling from November to April was that at any point the crop could be lost. This season more than any other we were ever focused and attentive to what the vineyard needed in response to the incredible weather conditions.*

*For eight years now we have not used any systemic fungicides, herbicides or pesticides. Our focus has been to promote life forces rather than to apply death to control our vineyard environment. This year we held firm to this regime with the exception of two systemic fungicide applications, the first in eight years, to the foliage in December. We dropped 30% of the overall crop on the ground before veraison as we didn't want fruit in clumps where fruit ripening rates would be compromised and disease would be more likely to develop. As a reward for the hard work April provided some important warm, sunny classic autumnal weather and the flavours and sugars developed beautifully. The pickers were very diligent in removing any fruit not in optimal condition and the quality of the grapes arriving at the winery was quite remarkable. Overall, the volume of wine is very reasonable (30 tonnes from 16 acres/6 hectares) and, whilst clearly early days, the style of the wines looks to be intense and balanced. For this stage the wines are representative of their site and usual style.*

[www.bindiwines.com.au](http://www.bindiwines.com.au)







## Bests, Great Western

Its time to get personal. I used to work for a company that imported Bests in the UK, and spent a memorable time working vintage there in 2004. The family have always treated me more like a long lost son than the scruffy traveller that regularly dropped in to raid the fridge and get his laundry done. As Viv and Chris hand over the reins to the next generation Bests remains a precious jewell in Australia's crown.

Winemaker Adam Wadowitz hosted our tour, a brief introduction in the cellar door, then a walk past the nursery block, through the 1868 Shiraz and Pinot Meunier vines, then down to the 19th century hand dug cellars where Adam gave us a fascinating vineyard component tasting of Bin 0 Shiraz. Viv was on hand to man the BBQ and charm the ladies (see picture)



Vintage news! Adam writes:

Vintage has been long and late this year, we picked the old vine Pinot Meunier on the 17th of March and picked the Cab on the 6th of May - that's a 7 and 1/2 weeks picking difference from



the same vineyard. Overall the quality was great - tough growing conditions meant we needed to do a lot of canopy management to get the most out of the vines.

We'd ordered a sorting table from Italy long before every Aussie winery was crying out for them due to the vintage conditions - Jonno described this piece of good fortune as having come about more by arse than class!

Highlights: Beautiful spicy shiraz, tight and fine Rieslings. Lowlights: Winemaker and cellarhand fatigue as we are now very cold whilst doing the post vintage pack up. Vintage party at the Royal Mail tonight! Cheers, Adam

Front-runners in all things social media related, get your tweet on at

[www.bestswines.com](http://www.bestswines.com)



## Crawford River, Henty

Was it luck or judgement that led John and Catherine Thomson to plant vines in the flat farm lands of South Western Victoria over thirty five years ago? Whatever their rieslings, sorry, reasons, they made the vinous equivalent of an oil strike, and have since become one of Australia's leading producers of fine, age worthy Riesling. As our esteemed coach driver Wayne set us down outside their modern, new cellar door and tasting room, I asked John when was the last time a group of UK buyers had visited Crawford River. Last time?? he replied, this is the *first* time!!

John led us through a stunning range of aged Riesling and Cabernet Sauvignon, and I could tell from the rapt attention amongst the group, that many were reappraising their world view of great Riesling. That evening we stayed at the Royal Mail in Dunkeld, a hotel and restaurant as famous as it is isolated. We were lucky enough to be



guests at the Regional Producers Dinner, which felt like we had gate crashed a family wedding. Representatives and wines from both Bests and Crawford River were present, whilst later on in the public bar, a number of our crew showed the locals how to play pool.



Vintage news! Bee writes:

All in all we're very pleased with the fruit and flavours this year. Dad worked hard and kept the vineyard in immaculate shape all season, managing to avoid the disastrous Powdery and Downy that affected so many producers across Eastern Australia this year. Botrytis, as so often happens in cool, late seasons made an appearance late in the game which we hope will produce some magnificent Nektar. We have some potentially excellent Riesling that is nearly finished ferment, as well as a couple of surprises up our sleeve. The reds have been a real surprise this year, with rich flavours at lower Baumes and gorgeous ripe tannins. Take care, Bee

Check out their smart new website [www.crawfordriverwines.com](http://www.crawfordriverwines.com)



## Majella, Coonawarra

The start of the second week, and our indefatigable coach driver Wayne took us over the border and into South Australia. First stop, Coonawarra. Lying remarkably close to the state border, at least by Australian terms, Coonawarra is one of the world's great terroir landscapes. Pancake flat (they say there are slopes, but you can't see 'em) with the famous red terra rossa soil lying right on the surface and the wire trained vines lined up like serried rows of soldiers, the overall impression is something other-worldly, like vines on the moon.



Majella stands right at the forefront of contemporary Coonawarra wineries, and they have the gleaming silverware in their Trophy Cabinet to prove it.

The day we visited The Prof (Brian) was away, but we were hosted in style by brother Tony Lynn and winemaker Bruce Gregory. And when I say style, I mean South Australian style, which means we were offered Coopers with our lunch - most welcome!



Our tasting took us across the entire range, including the rare chance to taste three vintages of Sparkling Shiraz. Cabernet Shiraz blend The Musician has been winning many plaudits of late, most recently appearing in Matthew Jukes Top 100 (along with the 2008 straight Cabernet), while Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW, writing on e-bob, said that the Musician was one of the wines she often drinks at home.

I'm sure the boys at Majella are 98 plus on that Lisa!

Check out their newly updated website at [www.majellawines.com.au](http://www.majellawines.com.au)

drive up to McLaren Vale, made even longer by a forced two hour stop to repair the luggage trailer. To pass the time cricket equipment was begged and borrowed from the local community, and an impromptu game played to beach cricket rules helped to pass the time. Eventually our heroic coach driver Wayne gave us the all clear, and we continued our journey, which was enlivened by a ferry crossing and dinner with the local banjo players and pig rustlers at the riverside township of Wellington.

Mike Brown from Gemtree acted as our Regional Anchor, taking us up to the top of Toops Hill for an overview - literally - of the McLaren Vale landscape. Then onto our first visit.

## Paxton, McLaren Vale

Paxton manage one of the largest biodynamic vineyard operations in the world, and it was fascinating to get a glimpse into their world and see biodynamics-in-action. David Paxton set the scene by explaining their journey so far. We then set off with winemaker Michael Paxton and viticulturist Daniel Lavrecic to visit the Jones vineyard, as well as seeing the bat boxes and the long horn cattle that provide the base for all that lovely biodynamic compost. Back at the cellar door we were shown the compost piles and herb garden, followed by a comprehensive tasting. A vertical of Triple AAA Shiraz Grenache was remarkable for the quality and age-ability of this, their "baby" red wine.

Vintage news! Michael writes:

I must say I would not have wanted to be in any other region other than McLaren Vale this season. Although some growers experienced some difficulties resulting from the rain at Paxton we have got some exceptional whites and reds although down a bit on yield. Biodynamics and attention to detail was a winning combination this year. The cool growing season resulted in wines with great flavour and natural balance.

Check out the dogs at [www.paxtonvineyards.com](http://www.paxtonvineyards.com)

**PAXTON**  
WINES







### **d'Arenberg, McLaren Vale**

Our visit to d'Arenberg began with Chester showing us a vineyard of Shiraz affected by the famous "dead arm" disease. We weren't allowed to walk into the vineyards, as having recently been in the phylloxera zone of northern Victoria, those in phylloxera-free areas are understandably cautious. The roof of the winery offers spectacular views across the Vale, but is not recommended for those suffering from vertigo. The view inside the winery is equally mind boggling - over 2000 tonnes annual crush, and everything still in open fermenters, hand dug and basket pressed, like you would expect in a winery a fraction of the size. The vast space of the barrel room reminds me of the final scene in Raiders of the Lost Ark. And Chester tastes every barrel. A remarkable attention to quality and detail. We were privileged to have d'Arry join us for the tasting, which was a masterclass in Grenache and McLaren Vale diversity and the distinctive, rather European, d'Arenberg house style.



Vintage news! Chester writes:

Summer conditions were very mild with vintage starting on February 24, only a few days shy of the latest start on record. Disease pressure was high due to multiple periods of rain throughout the ripening period. The minimal input viticulture practices at d'Arenberg dealt with this challenge well. With no fertilization grape skins are much thicker and cope better with common moisture related issues such as botrytis.

It was definitely a year for diligence in the vineyard and many blocks were hand-picked because bunch and berry selection was required. The late start to vintage and mild conditions throughout also meant a long harvest. Some parcels were picked in late April and botrytis whites bound for dessert wines are still coming across the weigh bridge at time of writing in mid May.

The white varieties from McLaren Vale and some parts of Adelaide Hills are looking fantastic, showing lots of minerality and great acid. Of the red varieties the thicker skinned varieties of Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Sagrantino fared the best with some very good parcels showing strong pepper/fennel characters. Some great Grenache resulted although there was variability and some high yielding wines show soft fruity characters with ample ripeness. Those with nerve achieved reds rich, strongly fruited with very stylish fruity tannins and the best acidity seen for years.

Overall many outstanding wines across all varieties but with also more variability. Give me a cool year with disease pressure ahead of any year overly hot.

[www.darenberg.com.au](http://www.darenberg.com.au)

### **The Victory Hotel, Sellicks Beach, McLaren Vale**

Seven local producers took part in a 'Small Growers Dinner' at [The Victory Hotel](#) in McLaren Vale



**S.C. PANSELL**  
ADELAIDE HILLS

### **S C Pannell**

Steve is a passionate believer in producers working hard to develop styles of wine that they can enjoy with modern cuisine. His Pronto red blend is insanely popular in the Australian on-trade, while his Nebbiolo is one of Australia's most convincing interpretations.

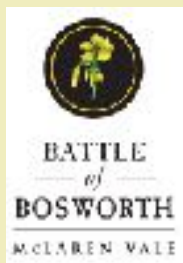


Winery news! Steve writes:

Just rolled to our premium reds: 2008 Nebbiolo, 2008 Shiraz, 2008 Shiraz Grenache. A cool vintage for us back here in Australia, we have made some fantastic Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc.

Check out the naughty birds at [www.pannell.com.au](http://www.pannell.com.au)





### Battle of Bosworth

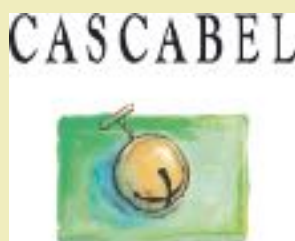
Leading organic producers, Louise and Joch Hemsley-Smith were co-organisers of the dinner and gave us a fantastic welcome to the Vale. Louise even brought a few bottles to our lunch at The Star of Greece

Winery - and planking - news! Louise writes:

Have you heard about the new craze, planking? Well it has reached Willunga, apparently with Joch being snapped 'planking' on the new retaining wall being built behind cellar door -to-be.

Other news...vintage put to bed, some bottlings coming up, planning rest of year, cellar door to be open allegedly by July 1st, we might try and skip to Bali for a family holiday before it does open....Cheers, LHS

[www.battleofbosworth.com.au](http://www.battleofbosworth.com.au)



### Cascabel

Husband and wife winemaking team Duncan Ferguson (Australian) and Susanna Fernandez (Spanish) purchased 5 hectares in 1997 and started setting up the winery and vineyards. Cascabel had a definite Spanish influence from the start, with varieties like Tempranillo, Monastrell, Graciano, Grenache and Cariñena making up the majority of the plantings. Spending time in France also encouraged them to plant Roussanne, Viognier, Shiraz and Cinsault.

Sadly neither Susanna or Duncan could make it to the dinner, with overseas commitments conspiring against them. We greatly enjoyed their wines nevertheless, which were well received by the whole group

[www.cascabelwinery.com.au](http://www.cascabelwinery.com.au)



### Rudderless

The Rudderless Vineyards are grown in a five acre estate surrounding the historic Victory hotel in the north of McLaren Vale. Owner of the Victory Hotel and wine enthusiast Doug Goven collected cuttings from Australia's top vineyards to create a diverse and unique *monopole* vineyard. The Lower Vineyard of 2.5 acres was planted in 1999, followed by a further 2.5 acres on the steeper slopes of the Upper Vineyard in 2003. With winemaking assistance from Justin McNamee (Samuel's Gorge) Doug produces a range of classically styled McLaren Vale wines from Shiraz, Graciano, Grenache, Malbec, Mataro and Viognier

[www.rudderlesswines.com](http://www.rudderlesswines.com)

The wines are made by Doug's good mate, Justin McNamee at nearby [Samuels Gorge](#) winery.





### Noon

Drew Noon famously sells most of his wine to a closed mailing list; the rest sells out when he opens his cellar door only on weekends in November. So we were very lucky to have both the man and his wines come along to our dinner.

Vintage news! Drew writes:

*What a vintage 2011 was! It was full of drama and loss but also made some spectacular wine, including our first V.P. since 2006. (Vintage Port - ed)*

*The difficulties arose because of the persistent showers through late summer and early autumn, causing widespread botrytis problems in South Australia. Rather than pick before our fruit was fully ripe (resulting in a lighter wine style) we made the tough decision not to produce a Reserve Shiraz or Reserve Cabernet from 2011.*

*The star of the harvest was the Grenache on the estate at McLaren Vale, which held on magnificently to achieve full flavour ripeness and produce what looks like some very exciting wine. The winery was filled with aromas of exotic oriental spices during fermentation and the rich and mouth filling flavours point to an excellent Eclipse!*

[www.noonwinery.com.au](http://www.noonwinery.com.au)



### Ullathorne

Rose Kentish travels regularly to France, and as their website declares, they aim to produce wines that are unique, elegant and fruit driven. In 1997, Sam Harrison and Rose Kentish leased and subsequently purchased the vineyard. In 1998, they planted a further 14 acres of Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon on the north facing hills. In 2002, they purchased 25 acres from their neighbour and have planted it to 1/3 Merlot and 2/3 Shiraz. 'Ullathorne' was named after Ullathorne, the first Irish Catholic Priest in Australia

[www.ullathorne.com.au](http://www.ullathorne.com.au)

### Chalk Hill

Jock Harvey, known as "naughty Jock" to "the other" Jock's (Hemsley-Smith) daughters, is part of the team at Chalk Hill that comprises Tom Harvey and Emmanuelle Requin-Bekkers.

The Harvey family have been growing grapevines in McLaren Vale for three generations. The grapes in Chalk Hill wines are primarily sourced from six family-owned vineyards in the McLaren Vale district.

[www.chalkhill.com.au](http://www.chalkhill.com.au)

### Squid Fishing at dawn

Both Jocks (Jochs) very kindly lent us their "tinnies" for an early morning squid fishing expedition. They arrived at our motel before dawn, armed only with bait and a breakfast to be eaten once on the water that consisted mainly of Mars bars and Bunderberg rum. Those brave souls that ventured out were treated to a mill pond still ocean, a beautiful dawn, and plenty of fresh squid.



### Shaw + Smith, Adelaide Hills

We were greeted by Martin Shaw, Michael Hill Smith, and new recruit, David Le Mire MW. After admiring the spectacular view from the modern cellar door, across pristine lawns to the vineyards beyond, we were given a tour of the M3 cellar, which even by Australian standards, has to be cleanest winery I have ever stepped foot in. This was followed by a tutored tasting, where the conversation ranged far and wide as we took advantage of the wealth of experience, both vinous and commercial, of our hosts. A delicious lunch was then served in the tasting room



Winery news! David writes:

We're pleased to report that we've purchased the part of the view on the far side of the dam...whilst we've already been taking the grapes from this vineyard, we're now able to exert total control...not that we're control freaks...well maybe just a little. For the technically minded, apart from being a lovely looking vineyard, it faces south/south-west, it's Sauvignon Blanc, clone 14V9, planted on own roots in 2005.

[www.shawandsmith.com](http://www.shawandsmith.com)



### Cleland Wildlife Park, Adelaide Hills

Before our champion coach driver Wayne delivered us to Penfolds, we made a detour via Mount Lofty and the Cleland Wildlife Park. A happy hour was spent if not cuddling koalas, then getting pretty close to kangaroos and eyeing up the odd lethargic wombat



### Penfolds, Magill Estate

The winery that needs no introduction.

Peter Gago being out of the country at the time of our visit, we were met by Jamie Sach, who gave us a fascinating tour around the historic buildings and cellars of the original home of Dr Christopher Rawson Penfold, where the famous Grange cottage still sits.

We then enjoyed a tutored tasting with Jamie presenting the reds and white winemaker Kym Schroeter the whites. Highlights included the recently launched "retro" Koonunga Hill wines, as well as the latest release (at the time) of Grange 2005



Winery news!

The 2006 vintage of Grange has just been released, to what can only be described as rave reviews. The launch 'completed the pattern of "great sixes"', according to UK brand ambassador Tom Portet. 'It follows in the footsteps of the 1996, 1976, 1986 and 1996 – all great classical Grange vintages.'

For those with a techy bent, a case full of Pennies wines, and a spare hour on your hands, check out the global webcast taste-along that was recently released to mark the 2011 release of their Icon and Luxury wines.



[www.penfolds.com](http://www.penfolds.com)





## Clare Valley Riesling Sub Regional Masterclass

In spite of my avowal to avoid "big room" tastings, often the bane of overseas visits to Australia, I felt that the high quality, age worthiness and terroir transparency of Riesling from the Clare Valley deserved closer scrutiny. I was to be proved right with what turned out to be one of the most stimulating and educational events of the trip. The tasting was hosted by good friends Neil and Alison Paulett, who represented Polish Hill River. Skillogalee represented Skillogalee Valley, Kilikanoon showed Watervale, whilst Wakefield represented the Auburn end of the valley.



### Pauletts, Polish Hill River, Clare Valley

"All the money in the world can't buy you a bottle of this award winning drop"

This quote on their homepage refers to the fact that Pauletts 2005 Aged Release Riesling scooped the top prize - Best Riesling in the World - at the 11th Canberra International Riesling Challenge. Better buy a bigger trophy cabinet Neil

Vintage news! Neil writes:

I'm largely optimistic of the vintage despite the later than usual harvest and isolated disease pressures brought on by the higher than average rainfall. Early picked Rieslings and reds were generally of refined structure and elegance and although a year that featured more modest levels of alcohols, the best parcels were of excellent quality. The later picked Cabernets being definite highlights.

[www.paulettwines.com.au](http://www.paulettwines.com.au)



### Kilikanoon

Kevin Mitchell told us that he was a Barossa boy who'd had to learn to respect the terroir of the Clare Valley. Kevin purchased the Kilikanoon property in 1997. Inspired by his father Mort Mitchell, who planted Mort's Block over forty years ago, Kevin has built Kilikanoon in little over a decade, into one of Australia's most successful, young, family owned wineries. Kevin has been assisted by fellow investors, Bruce Baudinet (chairman) as well as two well known Australian musicians, Nathan Waks (cellist with the Sydney Symphony) and John Harding (concertmaster with the Hong Kong Philharmonic). [www.kilikanoon.com.au](http://www.kilikanoon.com.au)



### Wakefield (Taylors)

Represented by winemaker Adam Eggins. Adam provided great insight into the various sub-regional styles of the Clare, as well as a mini-masterclass on the causes and chemical explanation of "that" kerosene smell in aged Riesling.



### Vintage report!

As vintage 2011 draws to a close, we can take a deep breath and reflect upon what many will term a very difficult and at times stressful period.

With rain being the main issue (and the associated diseases that occur in those humid conditions) and the corresponding protracted ripening period, this will certainly be a vintage that separates the pack.

The older vineyards with the 'meaner' free-draining soils are the ones that have shined in the adverse conditions; producing fruit of great flavour concentration. The younger vineyards however, which are planted in more forgiving soils, have gleefully sucked up the extra moisture causing flavours to be less intense. These younger vineyards are more often than not the star performers in the dry conditions that have been the norm for the past few years. All in all, this vintage has provided a very steep learning curve for many in the industry. Many younger generation winemakers and grape growers would never have experienced vintage conditions like this. I can't help but feel (optimistically) that we have gained some powerful insights.

Chardonnay will be the highlight of the whites and Cabernet Sauvignon the stand-out from the reds. [www.wakefieldwines.com](http://www.wakefieldwines.com)





### Skillogalee

Dan Palmer represented Skillogalee at our Masterclass tasting.

Dan brought with him his beautifully fresh and approachable 2010 Riesling, as well as some superbly aged Cabernet. After the tasting we enjoyed lunch back at the Skillogalee restaurant, one of the must-visit locations in the Clare Valley

[www.skillogalee.com.au](http://www.skillogalee.com.au)

### JIM BARRY WINES

#### Jim Barry Wines, Clare Valley

Peter being overseas, we were met by viticulturist brother John, and where else but at the Armagh vineyard. Old vineyards have a tranquility and magic all of their own, and the snaking, wave-like curvature of the vine rows in the Armagh vineyard lend a unique character to the site. Apparently the vines “waves” were to reduce the risk of soil erosion. Our irreplaceable coach driver Wayne then took us back to the winery, where we were given a tasting of the highlights of their range. The incredible high quality, yet startling difference between The Lodge Hill and The Florita Rieslings served to underline for me that Riesling, possibly more than Chardonnay, stakes a claim to being Australia’s greatest white grape variety.

<http://jimbarry.com>



#### Some Young Punks

In case you were confused: Adelina is the single vineyard Clare Valley vineyard owned by the Gardener family and run by husband and wife team, Jen Gardener and Colin McBryde. Nic Bourke is the third member

who makes up the trio for Some Young Punks, the iconoclastic range that includes labels such as Passion has Red Lips, Naked on Roller Skates, Monster Monster Attack and (a personal favourite) The Squids Fist. Our evening with the Punks was a chilled out party in their wine shed. Great food, banging tunes, Nic’s homebrew out of old jam jars, and of course plenty of great wine. As you can see from the photo, Jancis really let her hair down.

[www.someyoungpunks.com.au](http://www.someyoungpunks.com.au)

We were also joined by Matt Gant from [First Drop](#), who basically crashed the party in a shameless attempt to promote his booze. Lads, what happened to the welcoming tune on your website? I loved that







## Yalumba, Barossa Valley

Only three hours? Its just not enough!

These were the thoughts that kept me awake at night as I planned the final few days of the itinerary. Three hours at Yalumba? You could spend three days there and not do the place

justice. But what to choose? Cooperage visit?

Nursery tour? Viognier masterclass? Shiraz Cab

vertical? Sub regional Shiraz tasting? Aged Riesling comparison?

Eventually we opted for the cooperage over the nursery, and the

tasting had three main themes; Shiraz-Cab blends, sub Regional

Barossa Shiraz and aged Eden Valley Riesling (Pewsey Vale). We

started with a film and overview by Louise Rose, then a barrel making

demonstration, a stroll through the gardens via the Octavius cellar, a

mouthwatering visit to the museum cellar, and finally to the newly

renovated "tanks" for our tutored tasting, and lunch. Jane Ferrari kept

us enthralled with her tales of derring-do on the high seas of export markets, and a particularly memorable account of American "meat palaces".

Thats what they call the top end steak restaurants, just in case you're wondering.

[www.yalumba.com](http://www.yalumba.com)



## Henschke, Eden Valley

"Would you like to stay for supper?" the nice lady from Henschke asked me on the phone a few days earlier. I paused. Thursday evening was

supposed to be one of the few 'rest nights' for the weary travellers.

Didn't I have a responsibility for their welfare and well being? We

were nearing the end of a fun-filled, but tiring fortnight of travel. If it

said "free evening" on the itinerary, then surely I had a duty

to respect that promise, rather than inflict upon my group yet another

evening of eating, drinking and social activity.

"Sure" I said breezily, "That would be great. Shall we say 7pm after the tasting?" Oh come on! Dinner with the Henschkes? Are you kidding.

Like I was going to say no.

We started the visit at the Hill of Grace vineyard, where viticulturist Pru Henschke explained about the different parcels that make up the site, and character, of Australia's most famous single vineyard wine, including the famous "Grandfather" vines. Back at the winery Stephen Henschke showed us their traditional winemaking equipment, and then hosted an unforgettable tasting of Eden Valley Riesling, Mount Edelstone and Hill of Grace. Supper turned out to be great fun, with a BBQ and all of us seated at one long trestle table. I know for many there they felt that their cup did doth over floweth. (with Shiraz of course)

Vintage summary!

A strong La Nina event dominated the weather pattern, bringing a wetter than average winter and the coldest for 13 years. The drought was broken across the country and a return to full dams. Summer was generally mild, and conditions encouraged the spread of powdery and downy mildew. veraison began in mid-February, heralding a late beginning to harvest. Bunch and berry weight seem to be lower, with the expectation of lower yields and greater concentration of colour and flavour in the fruit

[www.henschke.com.au](http://www.henschke.com.au)

HENSCHKE







### Spinifex, Barossa Valley

Peter Schell makes great booze. It would be hard to find anyone in Australia who argues with that statement. Just how good was what we hoped to find out during our three hour visit to Pete's shed. Three hours, in one shed, with just one guy, and a dozen bottles of wines. Perhaps I was risking some sort of anti-climax to the fantastic two week trip. After all, we'd seen ancient vineyards, historic cellars, cooperages, state of the art cellar doors and more besides. But I needn't have worried.

Pete's simple descriptions of his philosophy, his wines and ultimately himself held the group captivated.

And the wines spoke for themselves. Beautifully

[www.spinifexwines.com.au](http://www.spinifexwines.com.au)



### Torbreck, Barossa Valley

Dave Powell popped his head round the door whilst we were tasting, but our visit was hosted by senior wine maker Craig Isbel.

I'd asked Craig to focus on a Grenache "story", which he did admirably with sub regional component tastings as well as older wines and a selection of their old vines Shiraz. A suitably stunning finale to our two weeks of travel and tasting.

Vintage news: extracts from Dave's blog:

I feel reasonably satisfied with what we have produced from 2011. I don't have the suicidal tendencies that came with '08 and I actually feel quite optimistic about the quality of the wines we made. The wines are lithe, bright and well structured. They certainly don't have the trade-mark Barossa texture, palate weight and concentration serving as one of the reasons why we have decided not to release any of our top shiraz wines from this vintage. We will however be able to make a great Woodcutter's Shiraz and a very high quality Struie. (benefitting from de-classified Laird and RunRig components - ed).

The Grenache and Mataro are both lighter in colour and texture but have lovely spice and lifted aromatics and we should produce some interesting wines from them; perhaps more "Burgundian" than some of our previous vintages.

Our wines are always a true expression of the vintage they are from and that should be the standard promise of all who stomp grapes. The season will always dictate the quality of our wines and 2011 has certainly provided us with many challenges both in the vineyard and the winery. It has been a great learning experience and I actually can't wait to drink some of these wines in 4 or 5 years time; I have little doubt that we have earned it!

[www.torbreck.com](http://www.torbreck.com)



*THANK YOU FOR  
READING THIS FAR.  
BRAVO!!!*

