

Tête à Tête

News from Stoney Vineyard

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Domaine A

Stoney Vineyard

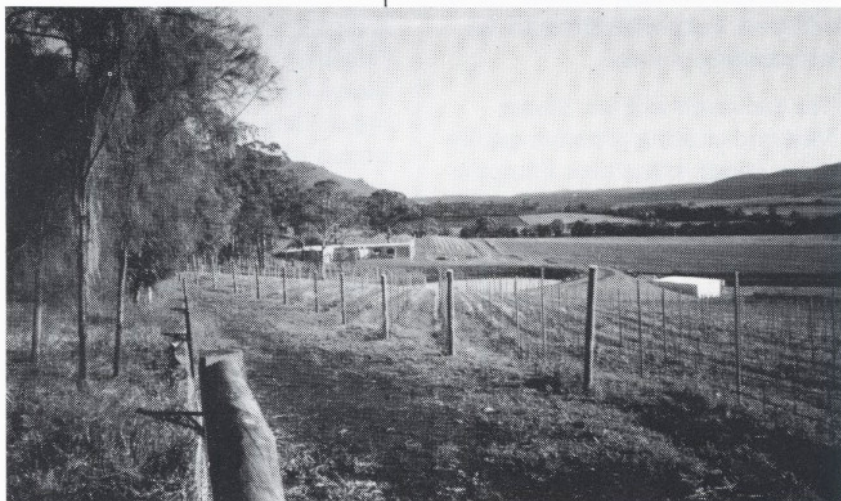
Stoney Vineyard began life in 1973 as the property of George and Priscilla Park. Located in the Coal River Valley to the east of Tasmania's capital city Hobart, it lies roughly midway between the historic hamlet of Richmond and the small town of Campania to its north.

The vineyard's present owners, Ruth and Peter Althaus, bought this 20 Ha property in 1989, having moved from business interests in Switzerland to become pioneers in a new high-quality, cool climate region of wine production.

On their first visit to Tasmania in 1988, they tasted the wines of Stoney Vineyard, and were impressed by their consistently good quality. When the site was offered for sale a year later, news was quickly dispatched to them, and the vineyard was purchased before it was sent to auction.

Peter Althaus resigned his position with IBM Switzerland, where he was in charge of the Customer Engineering Division in Zurich, and soon took up residence at Stoney with his wife Ruth.

Under Ruth and Peter's careful planning and guidance, the site has expanded to 9 Ha of classic grape varieties. The vines are planted on a north - north east facing slope, protected from the prevailing westerly winds by the Coal River Tier. The property rises gently from 25 m to 100 m above sea level.



The shelter given by the mountain ranges around the vineyard provides it with a very mild climate, allowing the grapes to ripen earlier than anywhere else in Tasmania.

Rainfall is only 550 mm per year on average, and the vineyard's connection to the expansive Craighourne Irrigation Scheme in the valley allows reliable water supply. A network of trickle irrigation throughout the site allows water to be applied judiciously when it is needed.

Because of the absence of rain during a long ripening season, the vineyard is able to ripen its fruit well into May without risk of disease affecting the grapes.

The soil is well drained, stony as the vineyard name suggests. There is a thin layer of black clay over strongly weathered dolerite bedrock and sandstone. Differing subsoils run throughout the property.

Approximately 70% of the vineyard is planted to red

Bordeaux varieties, principally Cabernet Sauvignon, and with smaller quantities of Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Pinot Noir accounts for roughly 20% of the plantings, with the balance made up of the white variety Sauvignon Blanc.

While Tasmania is well known for its aromatic, cool climate wines made from Riesling, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and Pinot Noir, sheltered sites like Stoney Vineyard are capable of producing superb fruity, elegant wines made from Cabernet Sauvignon and the other Bordeaux varieties.

Its mild climate, with its long, dry ripening period, helps to bring clear varietal fruit aromas and intense flavours to the vineyard's wines.

Because the winemaker's aim is to produce only premium quality wines, the yields will never be large. Domaine A and Stoney Vineyard wines are made with the greatest care to achieve a superior product.

Production methods are labour and capital intensive. A thorough regime of effective viticultural practices, including hand-pruning and hand-picking, are employed. Quality work in the vineyard, and the careful hand selection and speedy crushing of harvested fruit in a modern, on-site winery, encourages the least possible use of additives and preservatives in the winemaking process.

The end result will see Stoney Vineyard creating premium quality wines which reflect their European ancestry, with striking colors and fruity aromas; intense and well balanced flavours that do not rely on high alcohol for their impact; and attributes of subtlety and elegance which bring enjoyment and compliment to good food and good company.

Location of the Vineyard



**Drink because you are happy -
and never because you are
miserable!**

G.K. Chesterton

The price of quality

As an island vineyard, sited in the face of the Roaring Forties and subjected to all manner of Mother Nature's whims, Tasmania is a marginal proposition when it comes to making wine.

Here - as in other parts of the world - our long growing season combines well with many sophisticated aspects of cool climate viticulture to offer us great advantages in the creation of wines of premium quality.

These advantages come to us at a cost.

To begin with, cool climate viticulture - which brings to us wines of greater elegance, intensity and subtlety of fruit flavours and aromas when compared to the products of warmer areas - requires us to adopt many practices which are costly to establish and expensive to maintain.

To overcome potential problems with attaining correct fruit ripeness, our vines are trellised and trained in certain ways that allow only small yields at vintage.

Our cool climate-based industry simply cannot reliably grow the large crops that the warmer areas of mainland Australia produces. We have to be content for example, to see Pinot Noir cropping at only six to eight tonnes to the hectare if we expect complex, fragrant and flavoursome wines.

The sound practices of leaf-plucking and shoot-positioning, which promote optimum fruit exposure, are labour-intensive, and must be paid for. This is always difficult to do when small-scale winemaking - admittedly something that brings to our wines a sense of uniqueness - reduces economies of scale.

Over the years, Europeans have come to accept differing price structures which clearly reflect the differing origins of their wines. They pay more for the premium products of the marginal cool areas, and much less for the mass-produced wines of warm climates.

The suitability of a grape variety to a particular region is not only reflected in schemes of appellation of origin, but in price as well.

Clever marketing alone cannot persist over the years in

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maintaining high prices for wines. It seems only logical that price clearly reflects the inherent quality of the product.

Every thing has its own market-value, including wine.

For some people, the value of a product is reflected in its style. Were that not the case, who would drive a Rolls Royce, or dine nouvelle cuisine?

For others, it is a matter of practicality. Who would bother to afford an expensive hi-fi system if they were tone-deaf?

If some people like to drink inexpensive commercial wines, then they should be happy with that. If they like to drink premium wines of high quality, then they should be prepared to pay the price for quality.

It's an ill wind

"It's an ill wind that turns none to good," wrote Thomas Tusser in the 16th century.

Even today, his statement rings true, and those of us who live in Tasmania know that the next few months until early December can be testing time for us all. Our island is a very windy place.

Wind can bring big problems to a vineyard. When it blows hard, like it did last year in December, it will interrupt flowering, and ultimately reduce our crop level. Gales and strong winds also break the tender parts of vines, removing growing tips, breaking canes, and bruising leaves.

Even stiff breezes can be worrying, when the 'wind-chill factor' can cause vines to close their leaf-pores, reducing photosynthesis. When this happens, our vines are not able to work to their full capacity, and fruit can suffer.

In Switzerland and Germany, vineyards often have their vine-rows set at right-angles to the prevailing winds to reduce the effects of wind. They believe the less wind, the better.