



Mal's Vintage Report 2009

Off to a flying start on 1 July 2008 pruning the Old Block (Old Savina). We worked at a pace and were interrupted only by attendance at the EKKKA, with all pruning completed by 23 September. As usual, we pruned with the aim of cropping two tonnes to the acre which results in 1100-1300 litres of wine depending on the wine style. All large pruning wounds were painted with pruning wound paint to prevent cankers. The weather was average for Winter - mostly fine with the lowest temperature -6C. There was a little sleet and snow in July.

Budburst started on 20 September 2008 and was slightly uneven which meant some adjustment to the spray schedule. Spring was generally cool with some very small hail in October.

Our biggest project for the season was to prepare an acre of the Millennium Block for grafting from shiraz (Arabia, Fandango and Pickpocket) to an Italian white variety called fiano. First the vines were cut off at the trunk about 25cm from the ground and above the graft. Considerable difficulty was encountered in developing new shoots suitable for grafting due to strong Spring winds breaking shoots before they could strengthen. Where possible the strongest new shoot was kept and when large enough, in December and January, a fiano bud was grafted into the new cane. The new grafts were also irrigated twice weekly to ensure rapid growth during the season. We went over the new fiano block once a week to train the new vines up and onto the cordon wire and to trim off unwanted extra shoots. The result is pleasing with a success rate greater than 90%. We are hoping to have a small crop in 2010 to make our first white wine.

Lel is interested in biodynamics and I'm interested in some aspects of biodynamics. So, during Spring and Summer, we spread the biodynamic Combined Soil Preparation throughout the vineyard with the aim of increasing soil bacteria and fungi, microbial activity, and thus the uptake of nutrients by the vines. We'll continue with this next season and monitor improvements.

Spring and Summer proceeded well until hail around golf ball size on Christmas Day. It came from the east and damaged most of the bunches on that side, leaving most of the western side intact. We spent three weeks performing the laborious job of dropping all the damaged fruit because the damaged berries do not ripen properly and are more susceptible to disease. We estimate that we lost about 40% of the crop in blocks running north-south (the Tempranillo and Millennium Blocks) and less than 10% in the Old Block which runs roughly south-east to north-west. There was also damage to new shoots and canes in both the fiano and graciano blocks, setting back growth by a few weeks.

It was a cool summer with satisfactory rainfall, although rain around picking time always induces anxiety at the end of the season. With the continual training of the fiano and graciano, it made for a long and busy season. It is so much easier with the old vines who know how to behave themselves!

Our picking days were 18 March (tempranillo) and 21 April (Old Block). Picking went smoothly and the quality of the grapes was very good, and like expectant parents, we can't wait to see the end result.

Our Italian Stone Pines are now seven years old and have yet to bear fruit. They are growing well but there is no sign of any nuts. The only problem encountered has been the eradication of woolly pine aphid. Maybe next season they will bear or they'll get a stern talking to!

One good side to the season was that there were few vine and stalk eating moths, few fruit fly, and the birds, whilst always a problem, were not as abundant. The season finished with beautiful Autumn colours in the vines and more than six inches of rain at a good time in May to top up the ground water and the dam (just as it did last year!).

Cheers, Mal