

Reach for the Moon

There's nothing new about vineyards being subdivided for villa rash. South Australian winemakers have been at it since the colony began.

John Barton Hack's North Adelaide vineyards were barely two years old when he subdivided the land in 1839, took his money to Echunga and started again: 500 vines to begin; 3000 more in 1842.

There's nothing new about South Australian developers and speculators going broke, either: Hack had barely got his first vintage fermented when debt swallowed him in 1843; by 1844 Walter Duffield had the vineyard and became the state's first wine exporter when he sent a case of his Echunga Springs to Queen Victoria. He was then prosecuted for selling wine without a licence.

But Duffield had 5.6ha of vines and orchard at Para Inga, on the river north of Gawler, by 1862, and he soon learned about the fickle nature of irrigation.

"We are sure a considerable quantity of very tolerable raisins might be gathered," wine writer Ebenezer Ward scratched drily upon his visit in the drought of February 1862.

At least Duffield got his vineyard mix right that time: while Echunga was all white grapes, the Gawler vineyard included shiraz and mataro alongside the verdello and muscats.

Back to Echunga. Enter Hylton McLean and Jane Bromley, quite a few years later. Their brave little Honey Moon Vineyard



Hylton McLean and Jane Bromley with their kelpie

rides the ridge east of the village, above a gully laced with springs. They planted reds there in tough podsolic soils shot with ironstone in 2004, and their first wines are stunning.

"Our climate's halfway between Burgundy and the Rhone," says Hylton, "so we reckon shiraz and pinot noir can co-exist here."

And co-exist they do, just as they work perfectly, given the right soils, at Romney Park, on a similar ridge the other side of Hahndorf. And again on the piedmont of Mount Barker, at Ngeringa.

We stood nudging the barrels on the apron of the neat Honey Moon cellar last week, a warm breeze stirring the leaves. If the air was not so sweet and acrid from eucalyptus

and very Australian grass pollens, and the kelpie not so persistent in troubling us with sticks, we could indeed have been in Burgundy in the summer.

The barrels certainly smelt of Burgundy: a range of oaks, of differing ages, from the better forests of France, wrangled, toasted and wrought by the cooping world's equivalents of Chanel, Dior and Givenchy. Their contents were Burgundian, too: pinots that evoked cellar after cellar from that amazing slope of gold, but sinister gunblue shiraz that glinted with as much Australian depth as earthy Rhonish elegance.

As Beaujolais is between France's pinot and shiraz vignobles, I couldn't help wondering what bright games its gamay grape might play

in these hills. Somebody will try it. That would be fun, and an earlier-drinking, cheekier red that would see some winery income a year or two sooner than the more serious models.

Hylton McLean taught wine science for many years; he now works on experimental oenology at Pernod Ricard's Rowland Flat winery. He's certainly not a sub-divider. One can't tread too much of the Honey Moon property without being aware of how painstakingly it was sought and selected.

"We're at 420m here, so at night it's more continental," Hylton said. "This last vintage, it'd be 41 degrees in the day, but we'd be quickly back to 12 at night."

The 2008 Honey Moon Vineyard Rosé (\$19; 13 per cent alcohol; screw

cap; 94 points) is a bright and cheeky young thing made from pinot and shiraz. It's all saucy raspberry, strawberry and cranberry, with, as Dan Hicks and His Hot Licks observed, "a maraschino cherry sitting on the top".

But as the seduction continues, stone fruits and kernels become apparent further down the drink, while an acrid edge of those mean-weathered soils adds a sexy, husky dry note.

The flavours are pretty much what those aromas prophesied, but better. It's deep and delicious stuff, bone dry, with the texture of a good chardonnay.

While that rosé was pretty much along the lines of your Folies Bergere, the 2007 pinot noir (\$33; 13.5 per cent alcohol; screw cap; 93+ points) was straight to a modern Burgundian cellar. The oak had squirted a streak of gingery lemon through a precise cordial of raspberry, wild cherries and juniper berries. It's nutty, like a cheeky Dujac, and finishes very deep, juicy and long.

Honey Moon Vineyard Shiraz 2007 (\$27; 13.5 per cent alcohol; screw cap; 93+++ points) is a triumph in the inevitable march towards lower alcohols. It's almost like malbec: as much gun blue as shiitake and blueberry; as much British Racing Green in mood as your pinus full of black cockatoos. Black tea; black pepper; black fruits ... glory be.

If you feel like sending some to the Queen, Hylton, I'll frock up right away.

Lenton Brae
Margaret River
Cabernet Merlot
2007

\$22
13.5% alcohol
Screw cap
91+

With 45 per cent cabé sauvignon, 45 per cent me and 10 per cent petit ver Edward Tomlinson m this softer than his ste austere, slide-rule 100 j cent cabemet, which nee decades to mellow. This ble combines the tomato leaf a cassis of cabemet with t smooth, supple fullness, pru and gentle tar of merlot, a the perfume and persist tannins of petit verdot. It's claret style, still slightly an, and austere, but it's lovely juice now - which is not to say that a few years in the dungeon won't smooth it out a little. Perfect with juicy lamb cutlets, reduced spinach with pine nuts and ricotta, and caramelised parsnips.

Dominique Portet
Yarra Valley
Sauvignon Blanc
2008

\$25
14% alcohol
Screw cap
93 points

Fresh, cool, honeydew m and nashi pear are the mic aromas, with creamy cosmesi below an acrid blackpowd edge that tickles the nostril This is much more comple and structured than most c its rivals of the same price but while Dominique's wine are forceful, they don't realt shout at you. The palat is thick for sawy blanc somehow approaching th syrup of pinot gris. It remind me of the sauvignon Michel Dietrich made Quelltaler in Watervale in the ou. The aromas up there, but it's more thoughtfully assembled and bred than most Marlboroughs. www.dominiqueportet.com