



## Wetter the weather at Bloodwood December 2009

**Maximum temperature:** 33.9°C at 2.33 pm on December 17

**Minimum temperature:** 10.21°C at 5.18 am on December 12

**Rainfall:** 106.8 mm or 21% above average

What a difference a day makes. For 2009, that was Christmas day when we received 56.6 mm of gentle, soaking rain in a December total of 106.8 mm and an annual registration of 724.8 mm.

The annual total represents 86% of our average at Bloodwood, so we came home with a wet sail for calendar year 2009. The fact that 12% of this annual figure fell in the last few days of the year tends to statistically obscure the toughness of a growing season which has tested many on the land.

Indeed, with more than 100 mm (that's 400 points in old water talk) falling over the Christmas New Year period, our dam levels did not improve. This is something we have never before experienced in our 27 years at Bloodwood.

The reality of the situation is that there is now such a long-term rainfall deficit that we will have to have all our Christmases come at once before we can all breathe a sigh of relief.

Not only does this happy change in the weather bring out the clichés in the best of us, it also means vintage 2010 lives to fight another day. All right, I'll go away now and play in the mud!



*Bottom left: Bloodwood's main dam just before the Christmas deluge, and above, just after the deluge ... not that much difference, unfortunately!*

## Observations from the vineyard

Science, to be sure to be sure, is stuff that people of a similar social niche more than less agree upon. That's why when I am in the vineyard at Bloodwood I, and all my friend are absolutely sure of the manifestly obvious fact of global climate change, whereas when I visit the North Queensland of my dark and humid youth, I am just as sure that it is all a Southerners' conspiracy to do we FNQ types in the neck.

So, in the interest of disclosure here (and in recognition that the only reason I am seen as such a logical, calm and dispassionate type of old bloke is because of the balance provided by the Bloodwood chip on both shoulders), I wish to assure you all that what follows is NOT science.

It's just an observation; a hunch, a bit of whimsical reporting on the stamp that is terroir. Until very recently, it's been exceptionally warm and dry here at Bloodwood. The conventional wisdom in the wine making and grape growing social niche is that these conditions lead to early, ripe vintages where yield and quality is adequate but not exciting ... a season that is outside the off stump and through to the keeper before you've had enough time to line it up. There's no real damage done and no real excitement to be enjoyed by the audience or those out front.

This year may be different. It was so dry from winter



*Solar power ... Bloodwood is now using a solar-powered pump to move water between dams. Early usage has detected an evaporation loss of 30 tonnes of water per day from the main dam.*

to mid summer that the vines seemed to have shut down. Shoot length is barely adequate, flowering seemed to be begrudged by each vine, and the struggle to keep the small canopy healthy and respiring against the dry and dusty conditions was intense.

This seems to have delayed the natural processes of the vineyard to such an extent that vintage 2010, following excellent recent rains, is likely, at this early stage, to provide a good, healthy crop at the normally expected time.

As I write this, the first of the early Clone 777 Pinot Noir is just beginning to colour up, and some of our P58 Chardonnay clone berries have begun to soften. Our records suggest that vintage for these two varieties will begin about the third week of March. If this occurs, vintage 2010, despite all that the weather has thrown at us thus far, is likely to be on time.

Whether it is on track is up to the weather gods, but to date, our Bloodwood terroir seems to be worthy of a rigorous scientific investigation. We'll keep you posted.

## **Solar pump installation**

Those of you who have been following us on Twitter will be aware that we have installed solar pumping at the vineyard.

We installed a 400-watt Mono submersible pump under a BP GPS solar tracking array to help keep the levels of our main irrigation dam high enough to deliver an adequate supply of water to the vineyard

during the dry times we've been experiencing.

This set-up is capable of delivering an average of 30,000 litres of water daily from the bottom storage on Bloodwood to the main dam. In theory this should gradually increase the water height of the main dam and reduce overall evaporation from the water we collect from the slopes of Bloodwood.

Although the pump has been running every day for 37 days now, the level in our main dam has not moved. What this means is that we lose, in the middle of summer, more than 30 tonnes of water per day from our main dam through evaporation alone. Now that's a worry!

## **January mailing list exclusive pre-release 2009 Bloodwood Chardonnay \$25**

This Bloodwood is made from the region's oldest Chardonnay vines which were planted in 1983. The 2009 vintage our 26th, giving Bloodwood unparalleled experience with this variety in one of Australia's pre-eminent Chardonnay producing regions.

The Bloodwood Chardonnay vineyard was propagated from a mother-vine plantation of the original small berried Penfolds P58 clone. Rumours have it that this selection originated in Montrachet, but whatever the truth, this old Australian selection is very low yielding and one highly suited to marginal cooler climates.

*These Shiraz vines have been covered with bird netting ... birds, particularly starlings, can cause a huge amount of damage to ripening grapes. (Nets also give us some protection from hail!)*



The challenge with Chardonnay in a soft and sunny growing area like Orange is to express the inherent crispness and minerality of this classic variety by being sensitive in the vineyard and gentle in the winery.

The 2009 vintage is a lovely bright, fresh style that reminds us of our 1992 Chardonnay, which is still drinking beautifully.

Every Bloodwood Chardonnay is hand-picked and champagne whole-bunch pressed in order to gently express the high quality of this vineyard's fruit.

This wine was then cool fermented in stainless steel with 30 percent matured for a few months in old Saury French oak hogheads. There was no acid addition or malo-lactic fermentation, ensuring that the focus of the wine is on freshness and its quality cool climate fruit.

Last year was a fantastic vintage in Orange. The 2009 Chardonnay shows the quality that can be grown and made in Orange, with flinty minerality at the core and purity of fruit across the palate.

Considering that we didn't make any Bloodwood Chardonnay or Schubert in 2008 as the fruit wasn't up to the quality that we require, we're very pleased to offer you first refusal on what we both think is an exciting example of what good Chardonnay can achieve at Bloodwood.

## **Rhonda's rabbit recipe**

### **Rabbit vine leaf sausages**

Just the best match with our 2007 Bloodwood

Chardonnay. The ingredients are:

- 500 gms deboned and minced rabbit (use other meats such as chicken, lamb, venison)
- 100 gms minced pork fat
- 1/4 cup salted capers (can substitute olives)
- 1/2 t nutmeg
- grated rind of one lemon
- salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 30 vine leaves blanched
- olive oil
- juice of one lemon

### **Method:**

Mix first 6 ingredients thoroughly (may not need extra salt because of the capers) and cook a small amount of the mixture to check seasoning. Add more seasoning to taste.

Place some mince the size of chipolata sausages in the vine leaf and wrap as per dolmades. Brush all over with olive oil. Heat char grill to medium heat and grill both sides until just cooked through. Plate and sprinkle over the lemon juice and more oil if necessary. Makes approximately 25.

Cheers, Rhonda

P.S. We served this to Mr Andrew Jefford, a UK wine writer who visited recently (he is researching to write a book on Australian wines.) He said the combination of rabbit and capers was very Maltese. Don't skimp on the fat as the sausage will be very dry without it.

**Happy New Year from**

*Mark & Rhonda*

