

In 1981 my father bought our present land in the King Valley after looking over many parcels of land in the Hunter and Mudgee. We wanted to be secure with regard to water and the King Valley certainly has its fair share of it. We commenced planting that year and luckily planted about 1/3 Chardonnay that was starting to become fashionable, and stood us in good stead over the next 20 years. We sell some of our grapes to other companies i.e. De Bortoli and Domaine Chandon. Chardonnay has always been in demand.

To tide myself over in the first years of development I did four vintages in Griffith, three at Orlando and one at what is now Cranswick Smith. In that vintage I was responsible for red wine production. We were contract processing for Mitchelton at that time. I made 1.25 million litres of red and I worked out it was 1% of the entire Australian crush that year.

In 1984 I went on the big overseas odyssey and did a vintage at Dry Creek Vineyard in Sonoma in California. Here I first saw oxidative handling of whites on a large scale and came to the conclusion that it was the way to go. In 1985 I came back to Australia and found myself working for Wolf Blass in the Barossa, and it was here I learnt a lot about barrel handling (no wood, no good!).

In 1986 we built our winery and crushed our first grapes and the Government introduced the first wine tax! After 20 years in the business my father saw the light and decided to retire to Melbourne (would you believe!) and myself and my wife Rosa bought the business from him and we now "live above the shop", so to speak. We have had a bit of luck with our Shiraz. The 1998 Shiraz won the 2000 Winewise Small Vigneron Award, and subsequent Shiraz have been highly recommended by them which is hard to achieve. The Chardonnay (1999) was also well rated by them. These successes have lifted our profile a little and kept us afloat. Cellar door has become quite buoyant in fact, particularly since more cellars in the valley have opened up full time.

Anyway back to my basic philosophy in winemaking. The wines are made very simply, the whites with oxidated juice and only minimal settling. The Chardonnay is fermented naturally with no added yeast, to gain complexity and mouth feel. It is left on lees and barrel stirred every week or so. The reds are fermented on skins for as long as possible to soften the tannins. The larger ones are precipitated by polymerization, leaving the smaller softer tannins. They are pressed to barrel (mostly Sirugue oak from Rick Kinzbrunner, Giaconda) and left on lees without SO₂ until bottling time, when they are racked a few times and bottled without filtration. Simple really!

11-11-2003

The current range of wines, as follows, again confirms the creative edge in small winemaking operations: Merlot 2002, Shiraz 2001, Cabernet Sauvignon 2002, Pinot Noir 2002 and Rosado 2003 (a wonderful warm weather blended wine from Shiraz, Pinot Noir and Tempranillo). In white wines: Chardonnay 2002, Semillon 2000, and finishing with the Pinot Noir Methode Champenoise. "I like anything with Pinot Noir in it", says Doug!