

TAPANAPPA

A U S T R A L I A

TAPANAPPA WHALEBONE VINEYARD 2003 MERLOT

Vintage Notes

In late 2002, Tapanappa assumed control of the 27 year-old Koppamurra vineyard in Wrattenbully, just north of Coonawarra. The vineyard was renamed the Whalebone Vineyard because of the 37 million year-old whalebones that formed the walls of the cave that was discovered below the vineyard.

The 1.2 hectares of Merlot vines at Whalebone Vineyard must be some of the first ever planted in South Australia. The foliage of the 27 year-old Merlot vines was retrained into a vertical canopy and the crop level reduced to a meagre 3 tonnes/hectare. The deep-rooted old vines of the Whalebone Vineyard rely on the natural rainfall and moisture reserves of the marly clay of the Terra Rossa soil, as well as the deep porous limestone upon which the Terra Rossa is formed.

In the 2003 vintage those reserves were sorely tested, as the first 4 months of the growing season were nearly 20% hotter than the long-term average. Then the critical ripening months of February, March and April were dry, sunny and nearly 20% cooler than average. The Merlot fruit ripened with deep colour and the freshness of flavour and acid that can only be conferred by a long and cool ripening period.

Wrattenbully has a heat summation of 1503°C days (quoted by the regional association as an average for the region), which is warmer than Coonawarra at 1376°C days. However, the Whalebone Vineyard location, at 80m altitude on the western edge of the Naracoorte Range, has consistently measured cooler than Coonawarra and has averaged 1390°C days over the 5 vintages from 2004 to 2008.

Despite the cool, attenuated finish to the season, 2003 was a warmer than average growing season in Wrattenbully and there was plenty of heat to fully ripen the Merlot fruit. The Merlot was picked in the first week of April at 24°Brix, with a pH of 3.6 and 6.5 gpl of acid.

Winemaking Notes

The hand picked Merlot bunches from the Whalebone Vineyard were destemmed and partially crushed (60% whole berries) and chilled to 1 tonne open top fermenters. After a cold soak of 3 days, the native yeast of the vineyard was added and the fermenters were hand plunged twice daily throughout the 2-week fermentation. The fermenters were sealed for a further week of maceration and then pressed directly to new French oak barriques to undergo malo-lactic fermentation on full lees.

After malo-lactic fermentation, the wine was racked every 6 months of its 20 month stay in barrique. The final clear racking was followed by a light fining with egg whites, and the wine was bottled without filtration in May 2005.

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The 2003 Whalebone Vineyard Merlot was deliberately left out of the initial Tapanappa Whalebone Vineyard blend because it was too full bodied and firm, and distorted the balance of the Cabernet Shiraz blend. It was bottled separately and kept in bottle with the intention of allowing the wine's exceptional tannin structure to integrate with the fruit flavours and texture.

In 2008 we decided to release this bottle aged merlot as a mature example of the special qualities the Whalebone Vineyard can elicit from this difficult variety.

Winemaker

Brian Croser

600 cases produced