

Our wine tasting Friendship Force Exchange of 2014 included wine tasting at 19 vineyards or wineries. In the Australian state of Victoria there were 5 and 14 in the state of South Australia.



Our first winery was the Montalto Vineyard in the Mornington Peninsula near Melbourne. They sell the brand Pennon Hills. It was a vineyard and there was no wine making facilities on site. They also made olive oil and we received a tasting of that also. It had a walk that took us past many unusual sculptures. We picked and tasted the grapes from the vine. We found the grapes at harvest time are very sweet and loaded with juice. The harvest was 85% complete.



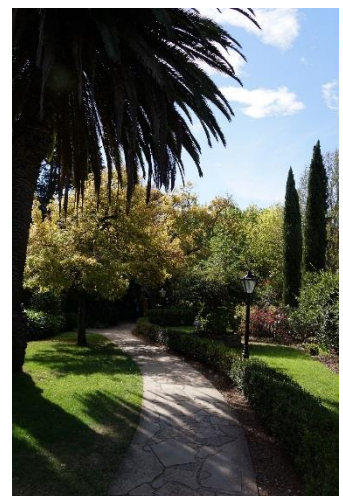
The second was a small winery named Red Hill Estate also in Mornington Peninsula. It is referred to as a boutique winery which is a small wine maker. Boutique is the term used which is equivalent to our term "Craft beer" which is a small pub brewery of beer. The view from the winery included the ocean.



The third winery was De Bortoli in Yarra Valley. There we learned that all wine sold in Australia has a 39% tax. The red wine making process there is to pick the grapes (called berries), remove the grapes from the stems, add yeast, and ferment the grapes in stainless steel vats for 10 days, balloon press them, then age the liquid in an oak barrel for 10 months, finally bottle the aged wine product. They had man-made ponds to ensure their water supply (upper right photo). We found their 2012 La Boheme Act 4 Shirah is excellent. Their wine is sold in the US.



The 4th and last tasting in the Melbourne region was Yering Station also in Yarra Valley. They had both an older wine cellar as well as a modern impressive facility (above). By now we learned that 2012 was a great wine year as all were promoting that year as the best ever. They had beautiful grounds (right photo). They also sold chocolate that was made to be eaten with wine. It cost \$20 for 8 oz.





The 5th winery was The Hill at Waurn Ponds still in Victoria. We learned sulfites are added to all wines as a preservative. The Hill sold 80% of their wine from the winery and 20% to restaurants. They sponsor a concert with top named talent every year.



The 6th wine tasting was at Caroline Hills at Mt. Gambier. It was the smallest winery we went to. They produce 10 barrels of wine a year, 2500 liters. Each barrel holds 300 bottles of wine. Our visit was constantly interrupted with gunshots as they had a mechanism that sounded like gunshots to scare away the birds. Most of the vineyards use nets to cover the vines to protect from the birds as the grapes ripen (middle).



The 7th was Herbert Vineyard at Mt. Gambier. The family owned winery had very nice new facilities. They told us about "Angels Share". Wine evaporates as it ages in the barrel and the portion that evaporates goes to the angels. The barrel is topped off with another wine. If it is topped off with another wine from the same wine batch the wine can be labeled "Vintage". The best wine is always labeled "Vintage".



The 8th tasting was in the Coonawara region, a very fertile area 2X15 km in size located north of Mt. Gambier. Wynns Estate was the largest winery we went to. They have the ability to process 300,000 tons of grapes a year. They will process 200,000 tons this year. They process through the fermenting stage for Treasury, Penfolds and Lindeman brands. Each has its own specifications. After fermenting the wine is taken to the respective wineries and put into oak barrels to age if red or bottled if white. They use 2 types of fermenters. Rotary fermenters are stainless steel tanks that stir the wine by rotating. The other is a screen fermenter which uses a screen to hold the solids under the liquid. The fermenters in this photo each hold 180,000 liters of wine. That is 240,000 bottles of wine. But this is before Angel Share evaporation during the next step, the aging process in barrels.



The 9th wine tasting was at Brand's Laira also in the Coonawara region. We had a personal tour by Scott Colbert, one of their winemakers. He had an open vat of grapes that were in the fermenting stage to show us how they bubble CO₂. They were bubbling just like they were boiling. He explained how the soil and weather are so important in producing good wines. It is best to be able to control the amount of moisture through drip irrigation so a dry climate is best. Hot weather delays the harvest. Frost is bad from bloom through the picking of the grapes. The soil should be fertile and sandy enough to keep the vines on the dry side.



The 10th wine tasting was at Rymill Coonawara Winery. We found out all about the oak barrels. All red wines and Chardonnay are aged in oak. The barrels are bought from the US or France. The US barrels cost more as they last longer and provide a more desirable taste. The barrels cost from \$1000 for the 225 liter to over \$8000 for the 4000 liter. They last up to 6 years and then reconditioning will add another 4 years of use. The smaller the barrel the better the flavor and the less time needed aging in the barrels. Oak adds a vanilla flavor to the wine. The longer the wine is aged in oak the better the taste. Most wineries age for 10 months but some fine wines are aged in oak for many years. Note new barrels in the photo are wrapped in plastic. The left bottom photo are some of their rotary fermenters.





The 11th wine tasting was at d'Arenberg in the McLaren Vale near Adelaide. They have 400 acres in vines and are all organic. They buy 10% of their grapes. They will produce 2000 tons in 2014. Most vineyards have Rose bushes planted on the end of the vine rows to provide an early warning for the fungus Downy Mildew (right). We found our favorite white here which was a Riesling, the Dry Dam 2013. Their wine is sold in the US.



The 12th tasting was at Wirra Wirra in McLaren Vale south of Adelaide. They buy 300 barrels a year and have 5000 in use at all times. They use all rotary fermenters. Here we learned about aging wine. Most reach their peak in 3 years but the really fine wines can age for over 20 years. The taste continuously improves but all will eventually turn to vinegar. A sip of well-aged wine is unforgettable! The left bottom photo is of some of their rotary fermenters. We found the 2011 Woodhenge Shiraz exceptional.



The 13th wine tasting was at Hahndorf Hill Winery southeast of Adelaide near the German village of Hahndorf. They sell the brand HHW. There we were entertained by a story about how you must get the vineyard aligned with the cosmos in order to grow good wine. We all thought the story was a fairy tale but later our hosts insisted there was something to it. The story told how to produce a substance called Preparation 500. The buildings and grounds were very scenic.



Our 14th wine tasting was at Nepenthe Winery also near Hahndorf. The Winery was located on a hill with a scenic view highlighted by a large gum tree (left middle). Most grapes are picked by machine. To the left bottom is a grape picking machine. It shakes the grapes off the vines. Our hosts informed us that the grape picking machines are not as desirable as hand-picked. Why? Because sometimes the machine picks a spider or some other undesirable things.



Our 15th wine tasting was at Penfolds Magill Estate Winery in Adelaide. It is the most expensive and famous wine of our wine tastings. The right upper photo is of the barrel sizes presently in use. They range in size from 240 gallons to over 5000. The photo to the left is of Cellar Door 20 and each row of barrels has Grange wine (their premier wine) and is worth \$10 million. The Grange sells for over \$700 a bottle in the US. Lower left are open fermentation tanks that are Screen Fermenters. Screen Fermenters hold the solids under the liquid. After fermentation is done they drain off the liquid and do not press the grapes at that point as most wineries do. They take what solids are left and have it distilled into brandy with 95% alcohol to be used in making fortified wines (port). The liquid is put into oak barrels for aging. We found Bin 28 Shiraz Kalimna 2011 fantastic. It is sold in the US.



The 16th wine tasting was at Jacobs Creek Visitor Center in Barossa Valley. The facility was for wine tasting and tours. They had at least 5 large groups tasting at the same time as us. They had a great tour which included showing 14 rows of grape vines with each row a different variety. They also had the most spectacular wine tasting room (center) with a totally surrounding window view of the vineyard. The wine tasting included red sparkling wine. Most have had the white sparkling wine but many had not tried the red Sparkling Shiraz. Sparkling wines are made by a second fermentation. After the first fermentation the wine is aged in oak barrels then bottled with yeast and a small amount of sugar added to the bottle. The yeast interacts with the sugar to cause a second fermentation in the bottle. The second fermentation creates CO₂ which causes the bubbles. The bottle pressure can go to 5 atmospheres so the corks are wired on. Jacobs Creek is a large winery and sell in the US.



The 17th wine tasting was at the winery of many palms, Seppeltsfield Winery also in Barossa Valley. We saw the wine making process in the most detailed way of all the wineries we visited. Upper center photo are the hand-picked grapes being fed into the stem removing machine (upper right). When picked by hand the stems must be removed. From there the grapes go to crushing and fermentation. During one of their fermentation processes the grape skins are kept wet manually at Seppeltsfield (left lower photo). Note the wine cellar.



The 18th wine tasting was at Sevenhill Cellars in Clare. It is run by Catholic Jesuit priests. Left middle photo is the church located on the grounds. They specialized in fortified wines which are used in religious services. A fortified wine is the sweet Port wine. To make "Tawny" (Aussie for Port) they interrupt the fermentation process after only a couple days by adding brandy. By stopping the process early the wine retains much of the sugar content. We found the Port labeled "fine Old Tawny" best.



The 19th wine tasting was at a small family owned vineyard, Heaslip Wines. They only grew grapes and had another winery make their wine. Everyone felt their wine was unusually good. There we learned that they test the sugar content with a Refractometer to know when to pick. The grapes are ready with a test of 24 or better. They served us a great lunch. Left photo is the wine tasting.