

MENTELLE NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF CAPE MENTELLE AND CLOUDY BAY

Savvy Sauvignon...

A Margaret River dawn... cloudless sky, a leisurely north-east breeze blowing 2 to 3 knots, an Indian Ocean groundswell of 2.5 metres with waves standing twelve feet high on a glassy sea. White foam curls off the crest as the waves roll beachwards, closing in as they reach shallow water.

Out at The Point surfers jockey for position. The right wave, judged for the right moment and take-off will provide a breath-stopping, adrenalin pumping rollercoaster ride all the way to the beach. A prolonged ride of pure pleasure.

The wrong wave will peak quickly for a slippery-slide take-off and free-fall down its face with enough momentum to zap back up to a diminishing crest, which fizzles quickly, leaving a sense of loss and a speedy paddle back for another.

Waves and wine? What's the connection? None at all, unless you're writing about wine and thinking about waves. It's that time of year. But then again, maybe there are analogies to be drawn.

Some wines, like good waves, will go the distance. Flavours and aromas that peak and hold up for years before thrashing themselves out in a glass poured too late. Others will look great to start and give plenty of enjoyment, but all too soon they peak and close out in a disorderly array of spent sensation.

Sauvignon blanc has, rightly or wrongly, a reputation for lack of staying power. Jancis Robinson for one, is not an avid fan of sauvignons, especially older ones. *"The sauvignon wines with a bit of bottle age did not seem to have gained much from it, and such has been my experience with even more antique sauvignons.* However in the same article in the *U.S Wine Spectator* last year she did confess that, *" Good sauvignon is one*

of the few wines I crave in really tropical temperatures." (That's why we drink so much of it Down Under, Jancis.)

For sauvignon blanc is a wine that starts life with attractive tropical fruit, but its herbaceous character can degenerate to cat's piddle, canned asparagus and sour vegetables.

A wine's ability to age and improve is possibly a simple matter of chemistry. Acidity, pH, alcohol and tannins all play their role. Flavour and aroma components oxidise with time and in sauvignon blanc this development is not always agreeable. Some varieties age more gracefully than others, but ultimately soil and climate are the most important factors.

At Cloudy Bay we have until now stood aside from any debate on the longevity of sauvignon blanc. For a young producer like Cloudy Bay, only time would tell. Last month Kevin Judd thought it was time to put Cloudy Bay to the test in a retrospective tasting of every Sauvignon Blanc from the '86 vintage to the current 1991 release. (The 1985 was missed only for lack of samples - does anyone out there have some?)

The tasting certainly demonstrated that Cloudy Bay is a stayer, although the '88 vintage is about to close out. Here then, Kevin's tasting notes and within them, a definitive statement on the aging potential of Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc. **1986:** Ripe tropical fruit characters have stood the test of time; the aroma exhibits passionfruit and lychees with limey citrus highlights. Palate full and soft with a long, toasty bottle developed aftertaste. **1987:** Pungent herbal bouquet of honeysuckle and capsicum introduces this complex, developed wine. Equally powerful flavours leave a crisp dry impression.

continued overleaf



A Tiller...



Tiller and son, Brad

Mentelle Notes profiles Mike Tiller, a Cloudy Bay grower

Mike Tiller was not born into a farming family but many of his forbears have tilled the soil, including grandpa Tiller, a farmer on the Coromandel Peninsula. Perhaps more relevant to Tiller's viticultural pursuits is his claim to be related to the current owners of Chateau Latour.

With well preened moustache and stylish Hawaiian shirts Tiller cuts quite a dashing figure round the Wairau - a man more used to the cockpits of big planes than tractor seats. Tiller graduated as an engineer but turned his teenage passion for flying into a profession. Twelve years ago his aerial obsessions brought him to Marlborough with Air New Zealand's cargo division. For ten of those years Mike flew lumbering freight planes from one end of the country to the other, dreaming of a vineyard.

It just so happened that these viticultural musings coincided with the discovery of Marlborough as a premium wine region and Tiller was encouraged by characters like Danny Schuster (then at St Helena near Christchurch) and expat Champenois, Daniel Le Brun, who suggested Tiller plant chardonnay. And so between flights the first twenty acres were established and named after his mother, Isabel.

As one might be led to expect and lesser mortals have learned to rue,

Tiller approaches his viticulture with the singlemindedness of his scientific training. He has opted for close spacing with 5000 vines per hectare (versus the more conventional 2000.) According to Tiller, vine spacing in N.Z. was simply a function of the width of the Massey Ferguson tractor. So he imported a special 'skinny' tractor which allows closer planting and maintains this results in smaller vines which produce less fruit per vine, of greater intensity. The novelty of Tiller's concept isn't lost on his colleagues. "It's like driving a Tonka toy down claustrophobic hedgerows," claims one harvester driver.

Mike Tiller's interest in grapes doesn't stop at the vineyard gate. He is a regular visitor to the Cloudy Bay winery to follow the progress of Isabel's chardonnay. In earlier years during harvest Mike would share his aerial forecasts and satellite photos. These allowed anticipation of the weather patterns so crucial to harvest planning. Now the service is provided by the Wellington Met office and has become an integral part of harvest strategy.

These days Tiller has chucked in the flying for full-time growing. If he ever has time to doubt his decision, a drive past Blenheim's Woodburn Airfield provides ample reassurance. There lie Tiller's fat-bellied Argosy freighters, dismantled, surrounded by tethered goats. A case of a Tiller the wise one....

Savvy Sauvignon... cont

1988: Rich honeyed development integrated with ripe peachy fruit; full-bodied with mouth-filling intensity.
1989: Appealing fresh passionfruit and gooseberry aromas are still much a part of this wine. Hints of spicy oak and tomato leaves combine with some attractive bottle bouquet development to create a balanced wine.

1990: Intense ripe passionfruit and peach aromas blend with lemony floral highlights. Showing fresh ripe fruit and a balanced, full crisp palate.

Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 1991

And now for the youngster - the just released 1991 vintage:

"Fragrances of fresh fruit salad exude from this intensely aromatic wine, the classic combination of gooseberries and blackcurrants in harmony with peach and quince. The Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 1991 brims with concentrated flavours and the palate is packed with mouthfuls of lingering ripe fruit. The clean crisp finish is synonymous with the style."

MARLBOROUGH



WINEMAKERS

Take a look at the Marlborough's Winemakers new image - a striking logo that is very evocative of the region's beauty and primary activity, and one that you are likely to see much more of.

Fourteen of Marlborough's wineries have joined to form a new Association with three major objectives...the promotion of Marlborough's wines, the protection of their reputation in local and overseas markets and the promotion of Marlborough as a tourist destination.

Amongst other initiatives the group is seeking to win approval for Sunday cellar door trading and planning signage to guide visitors to the district's world renowned wineries.

COME CELEBRATE...

Marlborough Wine & Food Festival

Saturday 8 February, 1992, 10am-6pm
Brancott Estate, Blenheim.

Entrance \$15 (includes tasting glass)

Children under 15 FREE

Admission by pre-sold tickets only

(inc FREE coach service)

Enquiries: Marlborough Wine & Food Festival,

Freepost 85, Box 498, Blenheim

Tel: (03) 577 8877 Fax: (03) 577 8866

Savour the Flavours of Marlborough!

From Popcorn to All-Sorts

by Douglas Kennedy

English author Douglas Kennedy, a man of curious palate and pen ponders the wonders of winespeak.

It is a Sunday morning in London and I'm browsing through the pages of a well-known wine magazine; a periodical which is written for individuals who were probably born in tweed suits, listen to Bach motets when stuck in traffic, and consider themselves cognoscenti when it comes to knowing a thing or two about the grape. And in a section devoted to a hit parade rundown on Saint-Emilion Grand Crus, there's the following description of a Chateau Franc-Mayne 1986: *Very spicy, tobacco box smells. Very luscious, rich black cherries on the palate.*

Tobacco box smells? In a bottle of Saint Emilion? My late grandfather used to keep his pipe tobacco in a musty old humidor, and the smell emanating from that box was vaguely reminiscent of an attic room in which a dead body had been decomposing for the past six months. And what's one to make of this reference to rich black cherries? I mean, that's the fruit I associate with Black Forest cake, not with a jug of Saint-Emilion. Nor, for that matter, have I ever encountered any wine which (to quote from that same magazine of a Settesoli Rocco 1987) possesses a *very dense blackberry, licorice aromas on the nose...plummy, blackcherry, dense fruit on the palate. Slightly hot, flabby finish.*

A hot, flabby finish? Is this wine the equivalent of some hyperventilating fatso who's just been to an aerobics class, and eaten an entire packet of licorice all-sorts? And, for the life of me, I can't figure out how the reviewer was able to differentiate between the wine's very dense blackberry aromas and its plummy blackcherry taste. Very confusing, smelling blackberries, then drinking blackcherries. Is some Italian vintner trying to pull a fast one?

It must also take some talent to discern *apricots and custard on the nose* in a bottle of German plonk (especially since the one image that cheap German wine conjures up for me is of a football hooligan chundering on his shoes.) And could someone please explain how a Louis Jadot, AC Beaune Premier Cru 1987 could have a strawberry yoghurt nose? Is this wine on a diet?

Then there is the word buttery. As you probably know, wine writers love dropping the phrase "big and buttery", especially when referring to New World



chardonnays. Now, to me, buttery conjures up a soggy container of cinema popcorn or the yellow reservoir of goo which leaks out of Chicken Kiev once you cut into it. It does not, however, put me in mind of any chardonnay I have ever imbibed. Nor, for that matter, have I once encountered a wine with the aroma and/or taste of bananas, walnuts, plums, lychees, mangoes, guavas, bilsenberries, sloes, papaya or kumquats.

However, I have read innumerable reviews in which wines have been

"Wine writers have had to invent a lexicon of smells and tastes to practise their profession"

described as having one or several of these characteristics. Indeed, the vast majority of wine writing tends to trade in such fruity language, in my opinion, to the point of absurdity. Not that I entirely blame wine writers for falling into such spurious imagery, as they are dealing with the business of describing the indescribable. After all, after explaining the basic characteristics of a wine (sweet? dry? oaky? sour?), you enter a sort of Twilight Zone of language, in which you are trying to give the reader a sense of what their nose and tongue should expect to encounter when they uncork a certain bottle.

What this means is that wine writers have had to invent a lexicon of smells and

tastes to practise their profession. And they have largely relied on the descriptive uses of fruit, nuts and live Bulgarian yoghurt to conjure up the characteristics of a drink made from grapes.

And so, the next time you read about the *bitter chocolate subtext* of a cabernet sauvignon, or the *sherbert and almond underpinnings* of a Sicilian white, spare a thought for the wine writer.

To you and me, he may sound like a pretentious geek - chattering about *elderberry palates* and *vanilla finishes* (the furniture polish range of wines) - but he is dealing in an area where ordinary language simply doesn't do the job... though personally speaking, "a good drop" sums up just about everything us lay drinkers really want to know when it comes to the business of wine.

Between sips Douglas Kennedy has written two travel books, *Beyond the Pyramids & In God's Country* (Harper Collins). He also contributes regularly to *Esquire*, the *London Sunday Times* and *Sunday Telegraph*.

Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 1991

"The quintessential Sauvignon Blanc style is now made in New Zealand, not France... a rare example of an old classic being stripped of its crown.."

Oz Clarke, *New Classic Wines*
(Mitchell Beazley)

And while on things Gallic, a comment from a French retailer's newsletter:

"If your curiosity beats your chauvinism you will have a good time with this excellent sauvignon from New Zealand."

M. Ducreau, *L'Echanson*, Nancy

"Now the yuppies have turned 'new age', normal folk can reassess the Cloudy Bay phenomenon."

It is, as it always was, a serious wine made with great craftsmanship and care.

The nose has abundant tropical fruit and the palate offers passionfruit and gooseberry, balanced by zesty crisp acid.

Try a bottle with poached mussels."

Mark Shield, **** *Spoil of the Week*,
Melbourne Age



Sweet-tooths unite - the cellar master has decreed a re-release of the **Cloudy Bay Late Harvest Riesling 1989**, Kevin Judd's inaugural sticky, an ideal accompaniment to your Christmas or summer puddings. This wine, not released commercially due to its limited quantity, has without any to-do won the admiration of a number of keen palates. A year on, it is looking better than ever.

Kevin Judd, not often given to sweet talk, explains that with attractive bottle development, "The citrus fruit evident in its youth has intensified, from lime marmalade to fragrant orange blossom, tinged with orange zest. Aromas of ripe apricots complement the luscious honeyed palate and clean crisp finish."

A sweet treat available NOW in full or mixed cases.



Rudolph Red Knows Wine Dear

A SPECIAL FESTIVE DOZEN

Those in the know, red nose or not will be delighted to learn that Cloudy Bay's Santa has called early to deliver a bumper stocking deal for all good MENTELLE[®] NOTE[®]s readers. He and Christmas courier Rudolph can recommend this very special gift selection. Surprise family or friends (but only if they've been good!) with this classy case of Christmas cheer.

RUDOLPH'S MIXED BLESSING

Comprises four bottles each of three exceptional wines - the recently released Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 1991, "more intense, drier, yet more fruity than ever.." according to Sydney wine scribe Huon Hooke; the Cloudy Bay Cabernet Merlot 1988, a wine that tweaked James Halliday's palate, "I enjoyed it so much ...that I proceeded to drink it over two consecutive nights with continued enjoyment", small quantities of which have been held in reserve for re-release this Christmas and, for the sweet-tooths, the Cloudy Bay Late Harvest Riesling 1989.

A selection guaranteed to satisfy every keen imbiber's needs. Christmas stocking case price, a cheering **\$257**. This special dozen cannot be split but feel free to make up your own mixed case from the three wines offered in this newsletter. And remember to add the \$2.50 packing charge.

SEND 'EM MENTELLE IN THE U.K. THIS XMAS

Cloudy Bay's Santa has been busy. Not only did he drop off Rudolph's Mixed Blessing in Blenheim, he sleighed in a special selection of Cloudy Bay and Cape Mentelle wines to our London agent.

So, for the first time MENTELLE[®] NOTE[®]s is pleased to offer readers the opportunity of sending family and friends in the U.K. a selection of Antipodean treats. Brighten their British winter and Christmas celebrations with a gift case of quality wines from Down Under.

Wines available by full case only are: *Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 1991, Cape*

Mentelle Semillon Sauvignon Blanc 1991, Cape Mentelle Chardonnay 1990 and the Cape Mentelle Cabernet Sauvignon 1989. Case prices are listed on the order form overleaf, and include VAT and delivery to mainland U.K.

CLOSING DATE for orders for delivery pre-Christmas is **FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER**.

If you would like to SEND 'EM MENTELLE IN THE U.K at other times of the year, please contact the winery on telephone (03) 5728914 or facsimile (03) 5728065.

A SKINFUL

Cornell University plant scientists think they have the ultimate answer - the key to good health is skin deep. Grape skin deep.

They have identified the compound *resveratrol*, a naturally occurring plant substance that acts as a blood cleansing agent, thought to combat cholesterol levels. It is especially prevalent in the

skins of Bordeaux red wines, and its discovery supports earlier work by French cardiologists who knew that a drop of good red lowered *lipoproteins*, but didn't know why.

Rest assured that while the scientists probe further, the CMV research team is hard at work perfecting their red skin fermentations and maintaining your health.



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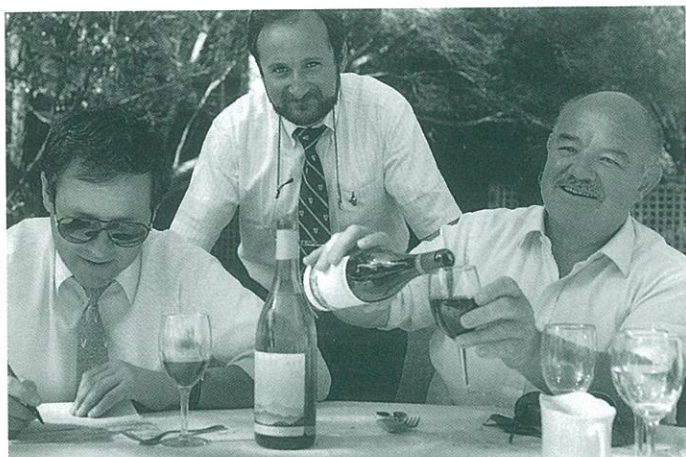
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Masterclass



Alain Pic (centre) and Pierre Troigros taste, while Georges Blanc notes

An Aussie BBQ is perhaps not quite where you would expect to meet three of France's top chefs, but then this was not your average cookout. Burnt bangers, potato salad and tom sauce were nowhere to be seen at the al fresco lunch held recently on Sydney's Pittwater for three Gallic gourmet giants - Georges Blanc, Alain Pic and Pierre Troigros.

The trio, and their confrère Paul Bocuse, were in Australia to cook a lunch and two dinners, as part of a massive regional Rhône-Alpes trade and

travel mission. Never before had these culinary treasures stood side-by-side at the same stove, each to prepare a course for three landmark meals.

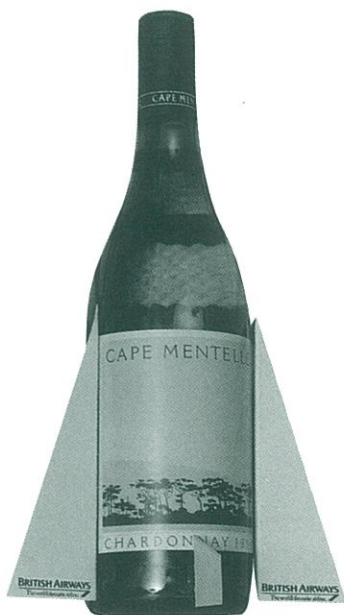
Relaxing at the end of the week by Sydney's sparkling Harbour, the trio, all of whom operate Michelin three-star foodie monuments, obviously enjoyed

local chef Leigh Stone-Herbert's all-star lunch. Plump Jervis Bay and Sydney Rock oysters, finger-thick Victorian white asparagus; an array of Australia's best seafood and meat - Yamba prawns, Fremantle dhufish, grass-fed beef and spring lamb - all chucked most professionally on the barbie; exciting Aussie cheeses - Gippsland Blue, Western Australian goats cheese and Tasmanian gruyere - all washed down, with a glass or two of Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 1991 and Cape Mentelle Shiraz 1989. *Sante!*

"The fact that the panel chose the Cape Mentelle Chardonnay 1990, is a true endorsement of one of Australia's premium wine districts, and its ability to produce wines of exceptional quality and international stature," commented CMV's David Hohnen (who's often found up in the clouds). "Britain is our most important export market and BA's selection will afford Cape Mentelle prestige exposure both at home and abroad."

It is the first time a Western Australian wine has been available on BA flights, but if you're not planning a trip to the Old Dart, and, like the editor of MENTELLE NOTES you spend more time on the ground than at 30,000 feet (and then hanging onto the tail wing), why not try a bottle at lower

altitudes? Huon Hooke of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, who's always down-to-earth tried it and wrote, "*The Cape Mentelle Chardonnay 1990 is classic Margaret River chardonnay - full-bodied, rich, silky and voluptuous. It fills the mouth with flavour and lingers on the aftertaste.*" Sip it and see! And remember that a little time in your cellar will temper the already elegant components.



Cape Mentelle's Chardonnay 1990 is taking to the skies - courtesy of British Airways. Selected by BA's wine consultant, Colin Anderson MW, Vice Chairman of the Institute of Masters of Wine, from among 200 Australian wines, it will be served from next year to those lucky passengers who sit behind the driver, en route London-Sydney-Auckland

THE CELLAR RAT

Wine writing, it's a dog's life....

Dear Mentelles,

G'day. Since my last column *The Rat* has been in hiding...from assorted winemakers, those alchemists who have now joined an elite group...of six-foot-eight tall vineyard managers, grape growers, truck drivers and Frenchmen, all of whom would love to drop *The Rat* headfirst into his gumboots. After much consideration *The Rat* has decided to add wine writers to the list.

It was after the bottling of the '91 Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc, as I was enjoying a stress release session with a flask of Cape Mentelle Shiraz and the line crew, that loose talk and my thoughts turned to wine writers. Someone remarked that 'so and so' was a real terrier, and suddenly, *The Rat* thought...dogs. And so, dear Mentelles, a canine evaluation of wine writers...

St. Bernard: Big, imposing but laid back and easy going. Often found lying in the sun sleeping off the last tasting. Carries its favourite reviving vintage around the neck in a small Nevers oak barrel.

Fox Terrier: Has limitless enthusiasm, attacks everything with a head down, no nonsense approach. Once it's found someone to throw the ball (and pour the sample), keeps coming back till your arm gets tired or you run out of stock.

Rotweiler: Huge, dominant. Looks good with teeth buried in the opposition. Feed regularly and treat with respect. If this hound enters your winery and cocks a leg on your best red barrel, let it!

Weimaraner: The lights are on but no one's home.

Labrador: Old faithful, the winemaker's best friend. Once you've got 'em, you've got 'em for life. Responds badly to criticism but needs it from time to time. Drinks from the vat.

Bloodhound: Has an incredible nose, can pick the next 'yuppie' trend at three sniffs. Once he's on the scent, will bark nightly to let the neighbours know all about it.

Mongrel: Good all-rounder but dubious parentage can prove difficult at tastings. Tends to bolt under scrutiny. Prefers shiraz to chardonnay.

Airedale: Forever under your feet, but not to be underestimated. Can pick a medal winner at 20 paces.

Doberman: Intimidating with a bad reputation on which it thrives. Quite a nice dog if you get past the snarls and bad press.

Some wine writers are like all dogs....no amount of plastic bottles filled with water will stop them crapping on your lawn. Then just as you've forgotten about them, you hit something with the mower and all those bad memories come flooding back. Others, just bark up the wrong tree.

Love, light and peace,

Gerald

PS Any similarity between the dogs in this article and any wine writer living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Mentelle Takes Flight