

CLONAL WARS

In 2015 when I was faced with what to plant at Holy Grail, I thought back to what I had said to my growers for the past 20 years when they asked what to plant, my answer had always been 'Shiraz, Shiraz and Shiraz'!

So the question was which Shiraz clone to plant?

I have always been of the belief that there are three cheats in our wine industry: the cork maker, the barrel maker and the nursery man. We are lucky enough to have managed to beat their system ourselves over the years. For cork, we have moved exclusively to the brilliant Diam 30 closure which leaves us with zero cork taint in our wine. For Oak we have six great French Oak Coopers that we have worked with and visited for many years and move on if their oak does not perform well in our blind tastings. The hardest problem of all was how to outsmart the nursery man? I did not want to walk my Shiraz blocks and to one day discover a few mis-planted Cabernet or Chardonnay vines, like I spot in so many vineyards. The answer was to propagate as many of our own vines as possible from vines in vineyards that we knew and trusted. This involved several hours of cutting 400mm canes from the vines in winter, tying them up in bundles of 100 and sending them off to the nursery to get them turned into rootlings ready for planting the following season.

We started our quest at Yalumba nursery with two blind tastings wines made from their clonal test plots coincidentally, planted at the rear of Holy Grail on Hempel Road by Simon Cowham (Sons of Eden Wines) when he had worked for Yalumba years earlier. The block had been planted sporadically with each vine tagged, the vines were then all picked on the same day, fermented separately in exactly the same way and aged in stainless steel for a short time. From these tastings we found two stand out Clones - BVOV10 and EVOV12. And so I decided to plant the top of the ridge on a drought and salt resistant rootstock 140 Rugger with both these clones. We then made cuttings of these clones directly from the source. We chose the Prouse vineyard on Saw Pit Gully Road Eden Valley, managed by a friend and the Kaesler Alte Reben vineyard on Jenke Road in Marananga.

Next up I decided to call Tony Brady at 'Wendouree' to see if I could propagate cutting from his original 1891 Shiraz vines. Tony was great and contacted me at the start of winter and gave me his pruning dates. So, I and a few mates headed up to Clare and spent two days in the bitter cold cutting enough vines for a 5-acre section at Holy Grail.

Then, I had my dear friend Paul Georgiadis (ex Penfolds Chief Viticulturalist and owner of Paulmara wines) visit the site and he told me to plant a very rare 'Modbury Shiraz' clone on my toughest ground. I had a steep sloping hill with more rock than soil, so we decided Modbury was perfect for that spot. Paul incidentally had some of the Modbury Clone in his vineyard down the road. This clone was appealing as there are very few vineyards left with this heritage material used in all the old Penfolds vineyards in the 30's, 40's and 50's and which is now a suburb of Adelaide called Magill. Paul also suggested that I plant Cabernet Sauvignon on my lowest lying ground with the deepest soils

We then headed to McLaren Vale and propagated the old Blewitt Springs vines at Dave Pridmore's: these vines make our single vineyard Dave's Block each year. These vines were originally propagated from 'Kays Block 6' cuttings and we thought it would be interesting to see what result we could get on a lower patch of our Northerly facing slope.

We were lucky to be offered a new selection from the hill of Hermitage in France called 470, so we planted a section of that. My daughter Lily, son Max and I spent a weekend taking Cabernet Sauvignon cuttings from our Coach House Vineyard, our Grenache is sourced from material off Dave Materne's old Kapunda Road, Greenock vines and for Mourvèdre I took a patch from Jimmy Zerella's Ryan Road vineyard, as I had made a brilliant single vineyard Mourvèdre from it years earlier

To round out the picture we propagated from our existing 16 acres at Holy Grail which are 20-year-old vines planted with Penfolds prized 'Kalimna 3C' clone.

So now four years later we have 87 acres of the best material, planted on one of the best sites with in the Barossa and farmed to perfection by our very talented team lead by Travis Coombe.

I am excited by the early result and this will be a fascinating story for follow for generations to come.

