

40th
celebrations



BROKENWOOD

AUSTRALIAN CRAFT AT ITS FINEST

Brokenwood 40th celebrations

Welcome to Brokenwood's 40th birthday celebrations. As we are no strangers to parties, (remember the Brokenwood Mission Statement is 'Make Great Wine and Have Fun'), we thought that more than just a dinner was needed. Hence we have a weekend of tasting, eating and drinking lined up.

There is of course a serious part. Brokenwood started its verticals of Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz tastings back in the mid 1990s followed by the 'Monumental' tasting in 2000 and the opening of the Albert Room in 2006. We slipped in a bit of fun with the 'Horizontal/Vertical' tasting held in the Crypt of St John's in Sydney in 2002. What these tastings tell us is how the wine style is evolving, what is the impact of conditions of one vintage to the next and are we correct in our belief in the quality of this special 42 year old vineyard. Another aspect can now be included as the Graveyard Shiraz has been under screw cap since 2002. This weekend we go one step further and will open bottles (or magnums/ imperials) of every wine we've made, if we have them, since 1973.

The Brokenwood story has been well documented over the years. The three founders, James Halliday, John Beeston and Tony Albert declined to be part of the grand plans of Len Evans for The Rothbury Estate (1968) and opted instead to go it alone in their own venture. Len would comment in later years that he couldn't understand why he wasn't asked to be part of Brokenwood. The 1960s saw enormous changes in the Hunter Valley. Many believe that Max Lake and Lakes Folly was the catalyst and by the end of the decade the Hunter Valley was shaken from its slumber of the previous 3 or 4 decades. Those jumping on the band wagon included Jim Roberts at Belbourie - 1964, Hungerford Hill Syndicate, Frank Margan's De Beyer's and Tamburlaine - all 1967 and Don Francois - 1969.

The purchase of the 10-acre Cricket Pitch block on McDonalds Rd in October 1970 nearly didn't happen due to the vigorous counter bidding of the Hungerford Hill syndicate. By time the Brokenwood lads had purchased their block, cleared it through 1971 and had grapes to vinify in 1973 they were part of a second wave of enthusiasm that included Terrace Vale, Verona, Marsh Estate, Millstone and Rosemount in the Upper Hunter. Then so quickly did things turn around that 7 years after the bidding war, Hungerford Hill was selling land and offered Brokenwood the chance to buy the Graveyard Vineyard, first planted in 1968. The tree block separating the Cricket Pitch and Graveyard has remained elusive to Brokenwood and to remind the Brokenwood lads of his under-bidder status, Simon Currant GM of Hungerford Hill in the 70s would send outrageous accounts for firewood collected in the scrub by Brokenwood.

This weekend will represent a bit of history, a bit of fun, a chance to catch up with old friends, a glimpse at the evolution of a boutique winery run by a group of mates and, most of all, a chronology of the Australian wine industry across four very distinct decades - from flares and flowers to mullet hair-do's to portly frames or in a vinous sense - under ripe, high acid reds to heavily oaked whites to wines of balance and finesse.

Thanks for joining us.

ILR Reserve Semillon

The Hunter Valley Semillon's made at Brokenwood from 1983 perfectly fitted the Sydney wining and dining culture with grassy fruit lift on both nose and palate. Making use of the pyrazine inherent in Semillon by long skin contact, the wines were well received. Andrew Caillard, a cellar hand in 1984 can testify to the hours spent digging out drainers of Semillon. An unwooded Semillon style was not actually in the plans of the new pro-white Brokenwood as it was very much a time of Cabernet and Chardonnay.

Aiding the cause was a brace of wet years, 1984 and 1987 to 1990 except that skin contact and botrytis aren't good bed fellows with bottle age. By 1990 with the first Semillon's being 7 years old, it was obvious that the murmurings of Murray Tyrrell were correct – they weren't Hunter and they won't age. Although MJT said it in more colourful language. Vintage 1990 and 1991 weren't exactly ideal for targeting a style for long term aging, the first horrendously wet and the latter one of extreme heat. Vintage 1992 was another drought year but at least without the scorching days and despite the low yields it turned out to be a perfect Semillon vintage and a suitable tank bottled to be released at a later time as the ILR (Iain Leslie Riggs) Reserve Semillon.

After tasting the wine over the first three years the decision was made to release at 5 years bottle age, in other words to have some bottle development but capable of aging further. In terms of winemaking it was a case of low (and now days zero) skin contact and neutral yeast. Unfortunately it also corresponded with a decline in cork quality to the point where Brokenwood had to colour sort every bottle before release. We finally moved to screw cap for the 2003 Semillon's as it took an extra year to get the Georgian Green bottle for screw cap. Sporadic oxidation robbed us of up to 40% in some years and wasn't a case of some wines being slightly lesser quality than others, once oxidized, Semillon's are undrinkable.

The UK's Jamie Goode (participant in the inaugural Wine Australia Landmark Tutorial in 2009) wrote an engaging and wide ranging article in The World of Fine Wine for its Winter edition, hoping to bring closure to closures. As Brokenwood's Iain Riggs was mentioned, Riggs promptly penned his thoughts in a letter to the Editor published in Fine Wine in the September/October issue. This is enclosed for your interest.

How many drinkable Reserve Semillon's – 1992 to 2002 and Semillon's that we made (including the wooded version 1982 to 89) that are under cork, will be an interesting aspect of the tasting. Suffice to say, we don't hold high hopes. From 2003 the wines are as intended by the winemakers. Unlike a McWilliam's Lovedale Semillon or Tyrrell's HVD, the Brokenwood Reserve Semillon is selected from the best of the vintage. In other words, could be single vineyard or a blend. Brokenwood puts aside three or four different Reserve Semillon's each year and from the mid 2000s it became obvious that the wines generally fell into three categories. The Maxwell Vineyard was usually tight/restrained, the Oakey Creek was often richer as was the Belford Block 8 and then there were wines either as blends or straight vineyard (including the previous three) that showed great balance and finesse. History buff's would realise Brokenwood was simply following the Lindeman's classification of Chablis, White Burgundy and Hunter Riesling.

Everything old is new again.



What closure?

I thoroughly enjoyed Jamie Goode's coverage of the closure debate (*WW* 28, pp.62–65). It was a roller-coaster read, because no sooner did I agree wholeheartedly than I found myself taking an opposite view.

Jamie refers to Brokenwood scanning its library selections but doesn't mention that Brokenwood wines are now 100 percent screwcap-sealed (have been since 2002), and indeed it was sporadic oxidation (SO), not TCA, that forced the change. Would we return to cork if it were more reliable? Yes, indeed, but what is reliable? A 1% TCA and a 5% oxidation loss? 2% of each and 1% scalped? Jamie's discussion centers on "fine wine" and views the variability under cork the same way as Andrew Caillard MW of Langton's, here in Australia, views vintage variation: as the "light and shade"—something that actually gives the wine its interest, especially a wine of lineage. Is this, then, what differentiates it from food? Surely it is arrogance on behalf of us winemakers to sell a product that we know has a degree of failure—sometimes a very high degree.

Returning to the "fine wine" theme, we are at a stage in the Australian industry of trying to convince overseas consumers that we have more to offer than, say, Yellow Tail. We have a history, a story, and fine-wine regions, but it's pretty bloody hard to get your point across if, in the case of Hunter Valley Semillon or Clare Valley Riesling, you can't find a wine older than ten years (under cork) that isn't over the hill. It's even more frustrating knowing that we have had Semillon growing here for more than 180 years. Our Reserve Semillon is released at five years of age, and this is the one Jamie refers to in his article. Luckily, Brokenwood started with and kept the pale-green bottle, allowing, with the use of a light box, color sorting. In one case of 1999 Semillon recently sent back to us, the 12 bottles showed a great variation in wine color. A tasting held at the winery in 2006 featured a vertical of the Reserve Semillon with the first nine being under cork. As is always the case, the best bottles are sought, and I made the following admission: "In all honesty, with hands on our hearts, we can confidently say that a minimum of 48,000 bottles have been color-sorted to get nine of these 15 bottles on the tables." A joke? No, fact. Sporadic oxidation has robbed us of not just 30 percent but up to 50 percent of production on release at five years. As the Australian Wine Research Institute reports (personal communication), once a wine is heading down the oxidation track, then eventually all of it will be affected.

A well-known Australian winemaker who isn't a fan of screwcap assured me many years ago that the cause of SO is winemaker-related, and that the chemistry will soon prove it. I was much encouraged by this but am still waiting. Jamie mentions the "horrible problems of premature oxidation of white Burgundy," which have variously been blamed on low sulfur use, the corking machinery, the bottles, and even the excess grass between rows and occasionally the corks.

He goes on to question, Why no change? Indeed, why? A tasting I had in the cellars of a well-known Chassagne-Montrachet producer in 2007 involved a number of bottles being opened till a good one was found. The question was asked: "Why not change the closure?" A shrug of the shoulders accompanied the producer's reply: "It is the market." Australian winemakers are accused of being too technical. If so, is it our overuse of technology that has caused sporadic oxidation? If not, why haven't we been able to solve it through our technical knowledge?

This brings me to Jamie's statement that took me to the bottom of the roller coaster: "It is undesirable to eliminate taint and random oxidation by introducing a closure that itself carries with it a degree of risk." Really? By the end of June 2010, Brokenwood had put approximately 12 million bottles under screwcap, and the so-called degree of risk between the three faults has well and truly been measured and voted on. Does our occasional wine sometimes carry a reductive character? Probably. Do people care? It appears not. And since when do style-oriented European tasters who favor the rustic, earthy, funky, low-acid, high-pH, barnyard, robust, edgy, complex, low-input wines suddenly turn technocrat and complain about a "whiff"? Do wines under cork carry reductive characters? Absolutely, but they, of course, are winemaker-caused; and the cork, with its higher rate of air ingress, will rectify the problem—or so it goes. Jamie states that the risks should be "as informed and considered as possible." No worries there, mate.

Toward the end of the discussion, we again hit on common ground: bottling practices. I'll take Jamie's comment a step further and ask whether chateau-bottling has had its day. There is no question that some of the larger producers get it right, but the variability among smaller producers is scary. Corker jaw creases, saturated sides of corks (filling nozzles that leak), or poor moisture content (those crumbly corks that stubbornly resist all attempts at removal) are problems I commonly see in "fine wine"—not just the variation in oxygen pickup of different lines.

What closure for fine wines? As a producer, the choice for the moment is clear. As a consumer, I have already spent the money, so one, two, or three bottles down the sink from taint or oxidation isn't going to return my dollars, but eventually there is the good one to keep the faith. Thankfully, there's enough non-fine wine under screwcap—like Laroche grand cru Chablis and a raft of German Kabinette—to slake the thirst in between.

Iain Riggs
Managing director/chief winemaker, Brokenwood Wines
Pokolbin, New South Wales, Australia

Iain Riggs happened to send me a copy of his letter in response to Jamie Goode's article. For what it is worth, I agree with everything [Riggs] had to say.

James Halliday
Coldstream Hills, Yarra Valley, Victoria, Australia

ILR Reserve Semillon

Sporadic oxidation 1999 Brokenwood Semillon (Photographed 2010)



ILR Reserve Semillon

1992

A vintage more known for winemaker Iain Riggs nearly being run out of the Hunter Valley. An 'off the record' remark to Huon Hooke about the vintage being a disaster went into print and made for a very tense time down at the Tallawanta pub.

The 'disaster' for Brokenwood was real enough, with no grapes being picked off the Graveyard vineyard and the Hunter overall suffering a loss of at least 10,000 tonnes. As locals were keen to point out, quality of what was on the vine was generally good, especially the Semillon.

A tasting of all the Semillon tanks (there weren't many) post vintage identified one as having what Brokenwood deemed as the right stuff. Low alcohol, no grassy characters and it just happened to have about 5g/l residual sugar. Thoughts of the 1970 Lindeman's Riesling Bin 3855 came to mind.

Only a few bottles and magnums left. 10.7% alc.

1993

The recovery vintage and one where the Shiraz bettered the Semillon. A wine very much affected by sporadic oxidation, with virtually all bottles now oxidized. 10.8% alc.

1994

A very good winter in 1993 enabled the vines to survive the extreme heat of the summer. The bushfires did not affect flavours in any way. Regarded in the Hunter as a great Semillon year. 11% alc.

1995

While the rain caught the Shiraz at the back of the vintage, the Semillons were all harvested in great condition. Fuller, generous-flavoured wines. 11.4% alc.

1996

Odd year/even year quality starting to emerge. A much higher crop than usual, but weather in favour of the winemaker. 67mm of rain 10-17 January, then 5mm in the most important time up to January 31. Outstanding Semillons. 11.4% alc.

ILR Reserve Semillon

1997

Difficult year even for Semillon. Wet spring giving lots of foliage, then 100mm of rain over the last 4 days of January and another 90mm 10 days later. Some botrytis influence. More forward style. 11.6% alc.

1998

A very hot, dry summer led to an early start in mid January. Lower crops and lack of heavy rain put the quality high. This Reserve was actually rebottled after a protein haze was evident. Some S.O. and shows the double handling. 11.2% alc.

1999

The first of a single-vineyard wine, but due to Brokenwood's policy of just releasing the best, labeled as 'Reserve'. Sourced from Drayton Oakey Creek Road. Picked mid February. A change in processing with zero sulphur through to the tank stage and then to fermentation, ie. slightly oxidative. Held back and released in 2005, is quite restrained and the best bottles have aged well. A great Hunter Semillon vintage. 11.4% alc.

2000

Winter of 1999 provided an unusual amount of rain, so set up for an excellent vintage if no rain. Exactly what happened and surprisingly early as well. Most of the Semillon off before the end of January. Once in tank very herbaceous characters which met with critical acclaim. Two reserves kept with the Drayton (Pokolbin) ahead of the McMillan (Lovedale). Riper and more grassy than Brokenwood would usually make and released ahead of the 1999 as such. 12% alc.

2001

Dry winter and then 130mm in November 2000. Very large crops evident but no rain between mid December and late January. Another January picking of Semillon, which worked in Brokenwood's favour as the rain came down in the first 10 days of February. Lean but citrusy/lime flavours. The Maxwell Vineyard (Pokolbin) well ahead of the others. 11.3% alc.

ILR Reserve Semillon

2002

The merry-go-round of picking dates continued in 2002. A very dry winter in 2001, bushfires and no January rain. But unlike the previous year ripening wasn't until early to mid February and so was the rain: 135mm by February 10. Lean and austere in style. Trials finally conducted on screwcap as Brokenwood debated over the bottle to use if the Georgian Green didn't become available in screw cap. Brokenwood did bottle under screw in the antique bottle that was available, so both wines available for tasting. The Oakey Creek became the Reserve. 10.3% alc.

2003

At last 100% under screwcap. Hot drought year, again bushfires, but the Semillons held up and local winemakers still partying in Wanaka for Dan and Sarah-Kate's wedding had to pick slightly riper grapes on their return. All in by end of January. Fuller style but good blossom/citrus characters. Maxwell better from the warm year. 10.9% alc.

2004

Quite a large crop. Ripening helped by heavy spring rain. A very hot summer interspersed with rain. The first use of Semillon from the Belford area on Hermitage Road. A triumph for the blend that featured Belford and Brycefield Vineyards. The latter in the Lovedale region next to Allandale Wines. 10.1% alc.

2005

Funny what makes a great vintage. The lead-up to picking had everything from hailstorms and rain to 40-degree heat. Considered one of the best vintages, equal to 1996 perhaps. Three very distinct wines put aside and the Lindeman's classification springs to mind. The Brycefield/Belford (white burgundy) released first, the Maxwell (chablis) also now sold out and the 2005 ILR Reserve (riesling) is now just on sale. The wine is in fact a blend of the three vineyards above. 11% alc.

2006

This time a few too many days over 40C. Still all the Semillon picked between 10.3 and 11.2 with very good talc/lemongrass flavours. The Belford Block 8 is on release and the Reserve is still 12 months off, but the Drayton has the front running. 11% alc.

Semillon Vintages

2007

The last of three hot dry years and again three superb Semillons. A very dry winter of 2006 and picking started mid January. Based on weight of Gold Medals, the Drayton Vineyard likely to be the Reserve. 11.7% alc.

2008

La Nina returned with gusto and the 2007 year was well over 1000mm as the rain continued over the summer and into 2008. Low sugars and at times herbaceous fruit characters. Four Reserve wines ranging from 9.5% to 10.6% alcohol. The Drayton presented for tasting. 9.5% alc.

2009

Another above average year of rain but good fruit ripeness in the whites. All picked before the February rain. Three Reserve wines and all at 11.0%. The Drayton presented for tasting. 10.9% alc.

2010

A year that caught a few on the hop with rapid sugar gains. Across the board very good Semillon but on the fuller/riper side. The Drayton presented for tasting. 11.8% alc.

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz and the Langton's Classification of Australian Wine

"Langton's Classification of Australian Wine has achieved recognition because the criteria for inclusion are objective and market-driven and the Classification is regularly revised and updated. The fourth edition of the Classification, released in 2005, reflects a new confidence in quality Australian wine."

www.langtons.com.au

Brokenwood Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz has been listed on the Langton's Classification of Australian Wine since the first release in 1991. Then one of 34 wines across 3 categories. The 1996 Classification included 64 wines; the 2000-89 wines and the 2005-101 wines, across 4 categories. The Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz has remained as 'Outstanding' since 1991 and also the sole Hunter Valley Shiraz.

Brokenwood is very honoured that the Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz has been elevated to the highest category 'Exceptional', with the release of the 2010 Langton's Classification.

Vineyards within a Vineyard

By 2005 the message had finally sunk in. The Graveyard Vineyard should be a repository of original vine Shiraz grapes. By now Brokenwood had also been crushing Shiraz from the Rayner Vineyard in McLaren Vale, planted in 1950, as well as Shiraz from the 1972 plantings at Seville Estate in the Yarra Valley. The Wade Block 2, also in McLaren Vale, is only a young vineyard but sourced from vines originally planted using cuttings from the original Kay's Block 6 Shiraz vineyard. These are now all represented in the Graveyard.

The 15 hectare Graveyard Vineyard comprises three distinct sections. Of course it wouldn't be Brokenwood without the various blocks reflecting a bit of history and fun.

The accompanying map, an aerial photograph from 2009, shows the layout of the vineyard: a gentle slope of east-facing vineyard, generally the cooler, made up principally of red clay/loam (with or without iron stone) over grey/white clay. The various blocks and the year of planting are:

- A. 1968 - Pa's. Originally Soper's and so named because of a never-repeated feat of bogging three tractors in one contour drain in one afternoon. We have photographic proof, too. This was the last block to get irrigation, although the Hunter Valley Gardens nursery provided more than enough subsoil moisture for many years. It is now named after the father of one of our staff who pruned the block for many years.
- B. 1968 - Middle. Originally named Albert's Rest. Whether Tony actually ever pruned his block is unknown. One of the great (true) Tony Albert stories involves Tony having to man cellar door on a weekend. He asked Iain Riggs what the usual taking was, was told 'about \$2000'. He then promptly wrote a cheque for that amount and closed cellar door for the weekend.
- C. 1968 - Quail. The original name. Haven't seen any of late, though.
- D. 1968 - 7 Acre. The original name. Of the original block, 5 acres left. Only the top part, 3 acres, is from 1968. The bottom 2 is now State of Origin (J).
- E. 1993 - Bush. The first of the replants on rootstock. This vineyard was also reoriented from north/south to east/west.
- F. 1994 - Duck's. Two legged and feathered.
- G. 1995 - Road. Along with Duck's planted to PT23 and 1654 planted on rootstock.
- H. 2008/09 - Steel City. Clonal vines and was an experiment with high galvanized posts, now own root Shiraz and timber posts.

Vineyards within a Vineyard

- I. 2002 - Kat's and Dog's. An important block as it was the first to use cuttings from the 1968 vines. It is named after Katrina Barry, the daughter of our Vineyard Manager KB who helped plant the original vineyard in 1968. Kat has been an integral part of the vineyard team and at 12 years of age could out-work anyone at Brokenwood except her father.
- J. 2004 - State of Origin. Well what else could we call a block that is one third each New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria? All cuttings from old vineyards, on own roots.
- K. 2004 - Trees. Brokenwood has spent in the vicinity of \$30,000 in laying underground drains through this area to combat the increasing level of the saline water table. This has been steadily rising due to the development of the area back towards the foothills of the Brokenback range and the increased availability of water in the Valley. This block leads down to the new arboretum designed to utilise some of this excess ground water. Cuttings are from the 1968 vines, on own roots. One of our stalwart shareholders, renowned for his love of all things tree-like and which often involved putting an auger through Telstra lines, just happens to be one Tony Rees.
- CP. The Cricket Pitch Vineyard seen at the top of the picture is also up for redevelopment over the next few years. This was in fact the first vineyard to be planted on rootstock. It is Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot on SO4 stock, planted in 1990. There is also 0.3 of a hectare of Semillon. Being the same tough red clay as the Graveyard it is not surprising that, 1/ the two red varieties are superfluous and, 2/ the Semillon is on completely the wrong soil.
- V. Verona. A mix of 1968 plantings and some redeveloped in 2002/3.

Vineyards within a Vineyard



Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1983

This was the first vintage of the expanded and modernized Brokenwood. A new air-conditioned shed, press and refrigeration all had an immediate impact on wine style. It was the inaugural vintage of Winemaker/Manager Iain Riggs.

Budburst in September 1982 was helped by 6 inches of rain, but this was to be the last rain for some time. An extremely hot and dry 6 months followed. All varieties were severely stressed with low yield and high sugars the norm. Concentrated, full-bodied reds and rich, high-alcohol whites were produced. One period of 5 days saw the temperature over 40-degrees each day.

Obviously such conditions produced a very small crop, the Cabernet Sauvignon resembling currants more than a wine grape variety. The Shiraz produced small berries with concentrated characteristics. The wine when young was deep black and now still displays a vibrant, deep colour with red cherry edges. Muscly, drought-year aromas of tar, smoky briar and dry leather. The fruit sweetness is giving way to complex aged characters.

The wine shows integrated flavours on a reasonably high alcohol backbone. Not really 'hot' but firm structure with licorice/tar and dark chocolate. Slight varnish, tobacco probably from a combination of the hot year and bottle age. May soften with air and decanting. The dry tannins with 'lemon twist' American oak carry the flavours to give reasonable balance and length.

The first of new-style Brokenwood - picked later and riper than previous vintages with less extraction and added sweetness of American oak.

At 27 years of age time to drink.

Alcohol: 12.6%

T/A: 6.7g/l

pH: 3.21

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1984

Recovery from the 1983 summer started post vintage and good rains continued through the year. A very hot (40-degrees) 1983 Christmas and the rain on Boxing Day continued virtually unabated through the 1984 vintage. This resulted in low sugars and difficult working conditions.

The conditions weren't helped by a large amount of fowl manure added to the vineyard the previous spring. Just add a lot of rain and the result was 1-2 metre high weed growth completely swamping the vines.

Now a mid-weight Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz that at 26 years has cedar, earthy Hunter Valley characters. Brownish, red rim colour and aged earth/leather aromas. Surprisingly elegant, not unlike a lesser year Bordeaux (could be the background brett).

The palate opens up after some air and while 'lighter' still has persistent flavours which are best described as savoury, cherry cedar. May hold.

Alc:12.5%

T/A:5.8g/l

pH:3.38

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1985

Rain continued through 1984 with the resultant budburst and growth being very strong.

Hunter Valley soils are not known for their deep root zone and high water retention and a dry December/January saw some vines under stress. A very good red year with good body and tannin.

Best described as a robust wine, with the colour still quite dense and no sign of 'fading'. Rural/Rhone-like characters on the bouquet. Earth spice with some cedar and leather lift. Solid warm year flavours and tannin. The fruit appears to be slipping into the background with the wine finishing slightly dry. However, the savoury, coffee flavours are enjoyable and backed by tobacco oak/tarry edges. Herbal/dry leaf aged flavours. Oxidation showing plus background V.A.

Not a wine of finesse but has generous mouth feel and a good drink. Will be interesting to watch over the next few years to see if further age softens the robust edge.

Drink up!

Alc:13.1%

T/A:6.24g/l

pH:3.39

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1986

The excellent but wet spring of 1985 laid a great foundation for the 1986 vintage.

This was Iain Riggs's 4th vintage. He was joined by Roseworthy graduate Wayne Donaldson at the end of 1985, and a welcoming hailstorm prior to the 1985 Christmas (cricket ball size at Wollombi!) did not deter him from staying.

The last 3 months saw 415mm (nearly 17 inches) of rain and a further 128mm (5 inches) in January 1986. The vine growth and canopy meant that if rain continued a disaster loomed, but dry conditions in February and March meant a perfect vintage. A good indicator is the ability of the Semillon to ripen (usually picked at 10.5-11.0 Baume). In 1986 Brokenwood had three pickings of the Latara Semillon block with the last dessert style being picked at nearly 18 Baume.

By now the handling of the grapes/ferment was gaining consistency using the 2 tonne open fermenters, cap plunging and ferment finished in new American oak. As a young wine the 1986 impressed all who tasted it. Like the 1983 Brokenwood Semillon, a wine style became entrenched.

At 24 years of age the wine is holding remarkable colour. While the brick red hues are evident the wine is still quite dense. Classic Hunter Valley aromas are forthcoming with rich 'old couch' leather and mocha characters being the feature. These change with air to give more cedar edges. Certainly regional in character but harmoniously so. The powerhouse palate highlights red cherry, earth and polished leather. The initial mouth feel has fruit and oak sweetness and is carried to the finish by developed, textured tannins. The middle palate has spice and clove flavours. Great length.

Good bottles, well cellared, will continue to evolve and develop over the next 10-20 years. The lasting impression is of the intense 'terroir' stamp the wine carries.

Alc: 13.5%

T/A: 6.70g/l

pH: 3.26

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1987

The 1986/1987 vintage debate can get vigorous, with the final result being that Hunter wineries made great wines in both years (and some surprisingly poor wines considering the perfect weather). Brokenwood favours the former across the board. Vintage 1987 produced firmer wines, a bit like 1996 versus 1997. The 1987 Brokenwood Hermitage, Cabernet Sauvignon blend (100% Hunter Valley) is an outstanding wine. The 1987 Graveyard Shiraz has softened due to poor corks.

A dry mid-year 1986 leading up to flowering and causing some early stressing dry land vines. An uneven set in Cabernet Sauvignon. Good November rain, 6 inches followed by a further dry spell and then follow-up rain in January (3 inches). Vintage conditions were excellent with long periods of cloud cover. Two wet days towards the end but no disease, no damage caused.

Colour has deep reds but starting to show maturity. Lifted developed Shiraz, charcoal, smoky briar aromas with bottle age varnish edge. Rich coffee mocha flavours on a full-bodied palate. Still drinking well with more robust tannins and sweet oak/fruit evident on the finish. The determining factor on longevity will unfortunately be the cork.

Drink up!

Alc:13.8%

T/A:5.88g/l

pH:3.37

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1988

Budburst got under way with reasonably hot 1987 September/October weather. A good boost with rain starting in mid November. Over the 2 months to mid-January 125mm (5 inches) had fallen. The weekend of 16-17 January produced an 80mm downpour. Quite heavy but sporadic rain continued until February 14. The dry end of February and all of March meant that Shiraz and Chardonnay were not affected.

The first of three consecutive wet years, but the Graveyard showed instability to withstand the effects of rain. The 1988 has always been a favourite of the Brokenwood team. The colour is reasonably dense with vibrant red hues on the rim. The bouquet shows a concentrated leather/char character typical of Hunter Valley Shiraz, occasionally leading to marmite, licorice aromas. The palate has these plus a fleshy fruit weight. A vanillin oak background backs the hallmark of leather/earth Hunter Valley characteristics, almost 'ethereal' in true Hunter Valley burgundy sense. Excellent finish. This wine has plenty of life but at 22 years is a great example of a mature Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz.

Alc:13.5%

T/A:5.64g/l

pH:3.51

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1989

The middle of three very wet vintages had Winemaker/Manager Iain Riggs in the winery full-time as Wayne Donaldson was not replaced until mid 1989. Kevin Ingle played an integral part and kept our vintage casuals in check.

The growing season started in spectacular fashion with 100mm of rain in September. What appeared to be becoming the norm followed with a very hot, dry October including fierce westerly winds. The Cabernet Sauvignon flowering was completely ruined with a resultant low crop picked. 3 inches of rain fell in November and December and then a very wet (nearly 150mm or 6 inches) January 1989.

The Hunter Valley dried out enough to ensure clean ripe grapes late in the harvest. This was always an appealing wine when young with the perfect amount of oak backing up the mid-weight fruit palate. A decade on and the wine is distinctly Hunter Valley with lifted leather and briarwood characters like the 1986. It was a museum dry red trophy winner at the Hunter Valley Wine Show, an entry that has to be 8 years of age.

Colour is starting to show a slight reddish brown rim but is still dense. Mature leather Shiraz with earth and cedar characters. The palate is mid-weight and has developed flavours of tobacco and bitter chocolate with gamey overtones. Mid-palate shows softening tannins and flavours that carry to the end.

Will still hold, especially if well cellared, at least 10 years.

Alc:14.0%

T/A:6.33g/l

pH:3.44

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1990

The low yields from the Graveyard have to reward occasionally and 1990 repaid tenfold. All appeared lost under the volume of rain but the Shiraz hung on to ripen and be disease free resulting in a rich Shiraz dry red.

The rain of vintage 1989 continued up till June 1989 with a total of 843mm or 33 inches falling. In a land of contrasts, it probably should have not been a surprise that the next 6 months were virtual drought with only 155mm (6 inches) of rain being recorded. The dry land grapes were showing signs of stress and the dams coped with the very necessary irrigation. Hunter Valley appeared to be heading into a vintage similar to 1981 and 1983 until January 8, 1990 when the rain started. When it stopped on February 12, a total of 435mm (17.5 inches) had fallen. All Semillon and heavy foliage Shiraz and Chardonnay was picked immediately. The Graveyard Shiraz achieved high sugars in the dry weeks following.

The aromas show lifted coffee, with vanillin character probably from the American oak of that year plus a sweet edge similar to the 1986. The colour is surprisingly youthful, with deep red tints.

Dark cherry flavours with chocolate/mocha overtones. Flavours are up front, leading to a soft middle palate. The vanillin flavours persist with supple grape and oak tannin mouthfeel. Not a 'weighty' or solid wine but a great example of low yields enabling the stamp of the Hunter - lower alcohols supporting distinct earth leather flavours - to be displayed.

Will hold for another 5 to 10 years at least.

Alc:12.8%

T/A:6.45g/l

pH:3.29

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1991

The second half of 1990 was the exact opposite to the first. Virtually no rain was recorded from May to September with only 87mm (3.5 inches) in the period October to December. We weren't to know it but no serious rain was to fall until February 1992. January 1991 remained dry and the harvest was much reduced, but excitement was building in anticipation of high-quality wines.

With the vines under stress from lack of water it is not surprising that the alcohol in this Graveyard is only 13%, not super ripe as could be expected. The drought has given a 'tougher' wine but one that will continue to reward. The colour is quite dense and still has red hues on the rim. Licorice/iodine leather aromas dominate the nose. This really is a 'muscly' Hunter Valley red.

The wine has easily handled the new oak, still at this point 100% American. The palate has an earth (savoury) start with cedar/dark cherry flavours on the mid-palate. The structure is typical dry-year with firm (not hard) tannins. Polished leather overtones carry throughout the flavour profile with a firm finish to the wine. Not as supple as other Graveyard Shiraz but a wine that will keep on developing for a least another 10 to 15 years.

Alc:12.9%

T/A:6.45g/l

pH:3.29

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1993

No 1992 Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz was produced as the two years of drought leading up to the vintage meant not a grape was picked off the five hectares (12 acres) of old vines. The 1993 crop hardly bounced back with a plentiful yield. Only 2.5 tonnes was picked - less than a quarter of a tonne per acre!

Sub-soil moisture and enough irrigation ensured a good budburst, although growth was slow until a very wet December (178mm or 7 inches). Very much a recovery vintage following 1991 and 1992. February rain did not cause too much trouble.

The 1993 is, as expected, fairly concentrated. As a young wine, it caused some debate as to the nature of the aromas. Len Evans always liked the wine, winemaker Iain Riggs expressed reservations. True to form the wine with age has blossomed - Evans 1/Riggs 0. After its museum trophy win in 2001, Riggs wrote the following to Len Evans, "you win". Mid-density in colour with red/purple edges, which is a good sign at 7 years of age.

Ripe, slightly old-fashioned aromas on the nose. This means the typical polished leather with slight tomato bush, but also a 'barnyard' rustic edge that is very appealing. The oak is almost non-detectable. At an early 2000 tasting in London the wine as described by Steven Spurnier as "a Chateau Rayas of the Hunter".

Very good palate weight, with ripe berry/mocha flavours to the fore. Mid-range alcohol at 13.5%. The mouthfeel has soft grape and oak tannins. The oak is more evident on the palate with vanillin and slight char characteristics. A very distinctive Graveyard Shiraz that shows Hunter Valley as well as vintage idiosyncrasies. Will continue to age well, developing even greater complexity over the next 10 years at least.

Alc:13.6%

T/A:6.1g/l

pH:3.42

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1994

A welcome return to a good volume of wine after the troublesome two previous vintages. July 1993 was unusual with 4 inches of rain. Spring rain was even over the last 4 months. Christmas and New Year saw extreme heat and bushfires surrounding the Hunter Valley, the closest fires being at Broke. The vines appeared to survive okay, although with little growth after the rain in the back half of January. The rain was on time at the end of the second week of February. Generally regarded as a high-quality vintage, with Semillon and Shiraz being the highlights.

Hardly the lead-up to make a great wine, but something worked as the wine went on to clean up in the 1995 Hunter Valley Wine Show, with three trophies including Best Red Wine of Show.

The colour is a very appealing deep red, although not dense as in the sense of impenetrable. The aromas are starting to lose the primary fruit overtones. Blackberry/plum fruit characters marry with smoky burnt briarwood. Perhaps a slightly higher char level than previous years. The oak regime included French oak, introduced by new winemaker Matt Harop, which increases over the ensuing vintages.

This is not in the blockbuster category, with the body and weight of the wine being rich but not 'fat'. Intensity of flavour is more a hallmark than opulence. For this wine the flavour profile includes dark chocolate and berries to coffee/tobacco oak influences. It is a complete wine that integrates the stamp of the 'terroir' and modern winemaking. Good alcohol (13.4%).

At 16 years, developed characters starting to show through the primary fruit. Long, Rhone-like tannins and medium bodied weight will help this wine to develop over the short term as just starting to show variability

.Alc:13.4%

T/A:6.14g/l

pH:3.32

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1995

This was a remarkable year for our Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz.

The previous release was awarded three trophies at the Hunter Valley Wine Show, including Best Dry Red of Show and Best 100% Hunter Valley Dry Red. This was followed with the wine being elevated to "Outstanding" rating in the Langton's Classification of Distinguished Australian Wine.

In writing the climate details for each vintage the rainfall records make for fascinating reading. Everyone remembers the weather on Christmas Day, New Year's Day and vintage, but ask about the rest and the answer is often 'normal'. If climate change is a reality, should the Hunter Valley, being sub-tropical, be getting wetter or drier? Traditionally winter is dry with warm clear days and cold nights. January/February are the wet months, so should we be seeing more rain in winter?

If the winter of 1994 is anything to go by, the Hunter Valley has by no means heard of climate change!!! The last of the summer autumn rain was on April 13, with 304mm from January 1. There was then no significant rain (21mm) until November 17, over 7 months, or 217 days during which time there was only 27mm over 3 rain days.

November and December revived the vines with the Hunter having a wet Christmas. January 1995 remained wet and 48mm in the middle of February caused a few problems.

The 1995 Shiraz is an excellent follow-up to the 1994, although perhaps more typically Hunter Valley. Of our previous releases it compares with the 1987 - rich and solid. The colour is deep hue and quite dense. The aromas are earthy, leather Shiraz with a subdued oak background. Excellent flavours abound on the palate. Initially sweet chocolate fruit and char spice oak. This leads to a dry, slightly firm earthy sweet/char finish. The tannins are evident now but the wine will age and the fruit will fill out the palate, giving an excellent mature Hunter Valley Shiraz.

At 15 years of age there is now developed characters starting on the aroma and palate. Shouldn't have any problem reaching 20 years, although start to drink.

Alc:13.2%

T/A:6.47g/l

pH:3.35

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1996

Another dry/cold winter in 1995, but early irrigation saw a good budburst, with follow-up spring rain. Fruit set was excellent, enabling a good yield. No down pours at harvest, although some rain meant the usual early picking. For the Graveyard Shiraz there were at least 10 separate treatments including run-off trials for an honours thesis by Caroline Dunn, a 4th-year Adelaide University student and now well known for winning the Jimmy Watson Trophy. Post-vintage tasting leant heavily in favour of the run-off wines and extended maceration.

A slightly higher crop than usual at 5 tonne/hectare (2 tonne/acre), with the resultant alcohol at 12.8%. A youthful-looking wine with crimson red hues. French and American oak was used (still favouring the latter in percentage), giving a briar wood/vanillin lift. It is important to avoid the overt American oak 'coconut' characters. Ripe fruit aromas and flavours abound as plum/dark berry and dried fruit nuances.

A mid-weight palate that shows the trademark earth/licorice flavours built on dry savoury tannins. The palate structure is often referred to as Rhone/Italian-like because of the intense flavours, lower alcohol and dry finish. A wine destined to be a great Hunter Valley dry red as the primary fruit characters are transformed to polished leather and earthy Hunter Shiraz flavours.

Has at least 20 years in front of it!

Alc:12.8%

T/A:6.19g/l

pH:3.39

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1997

A new winemaker was in charge of operations, with Dan Dineen joining Brokenwood from McWilliam's Mount Pleasant.

Excellent spring rain got the 1996/1997 growing season off to a great start. The last 4 months' rainfall was 300mm (12 inches) which meant a tempering of the summer heat. Only four wet days in January 1997 - the last four with a total of 100mm and then another 90mm 10 days later.

The Graveyard Shiraz was picked in drizzle and cold conditions in early March. Lower sugars and careful barrel selection was essential.

Good deep colour. The wet-year versus dry-year characters are quite different and the aromas for this wine are briar, polished leather/varnish. These are quite lifted and combine with wood char to give a tighter 'chunkier' edge as opposed to sweet and round. The palate continues this theme with a dryness/tight tannin structure. Flavours are earth, bramble wood, and 'pizza biscuit' savoury with underlying brett. Good tannins carrying the fruit, slightly grippy, but enough alcohol and oak sweetness to cope. Different in style to the ripe soft years but close to the 1991, 1995 and 1987.

Will age into a more leathery Hunter Shiraz, not for the long haul.

Alc:12.7%

T/A:6.56g/l

pH:3.36

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1998

The start of vintage 1998 saw a rush back to the records to see how many vintages had started in January. They revealed a few more than first thought, with the drought years of 1992 and 1983 and the wet vintage of 1989 starting in January. The hot, dry conditions that the Hunter Valley experienced (in 1998) meant low crops and in some vineyards early ripening. For Brokenwood most of the Semillon and Chardonnay was in before we had even got under way in 1997.

A vintage without rain has to put us ahead in quality. Probably an all-round, high-quality vintage similar to 1986, 1994 and 1996. 75mm (3 inches) of rain in September 1997 ensured a good budburst, although we commenced irrigation much earlier. Sporadic rain in January 1998 and then excellent weather through harvest. Rain in May totalling 4 inches led us into winter. A moderate yield off the old vine sat approximately 1.5 tonnes/acre (3.7 tonnes/ha) or, as the Europeans record it, about 23 hectolitres/ha.

This wine was awarded the Len Evans Trophy for the 'Best Individual Vineyard Wine' at the 1999 Hunter Valley Wine Show.

Youthful colour and reasonably dense with purple hues. The terroir characters of the Graveyard for both aromas and palate are quite distinctive. Fruit descriptives for the nose are dark chocolate/dark cherry with some earthy edges. Oak maturation now features about 25% French oak and the balance French-made American oak barriques.

As usual the oak is integrated even as a young wine; bramble, char and savoury flavours are part-oak and part-fruit derived. The mid palate has, surprisingly, a rich plum cake fullness. Slightly higher in alcohol than usual and this (plus glycerol) gives the softness. Excellent tannin structure with long 'polished leather' flavours to the back palate. One of the most impressive of our Graveyards, that will age extremely well.

No sign of development, still closed and primary in nature. Will see another 20 years from 2010.

Alc:14.2%

T/A:6.38g/l

pH:3.41

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

1999

With only 9.2 acres of the 1968 plantings left, Brokenwood often pushes its luck in terms of the timing of picking.

This can mean getting caught if the rain arrives later in the vintage. Such was the case in 1999, with 32mm of rain at the end of February. A straw poll of local winemakers has 1999 wines on par with or ahead of 2000. The 1999 Graveyard Shiraz has the frame of the 1988 and 1995 briar and savoury tannin.

There was very good rain just before budburst (120mm in August) and follow-up through the spring of 1998. One of the certainties of Hunter Valley weather is rain around January 18-24. In fact, of the past 9 years, 7 have had heavy rain in that period. In 1999 there was 25mm on the 21st and 25mm on the 23rd!

Excellent good colour, dense and youthful purple hues the feature. Aromas include dusty earth, clove and red cherry fruit character with spicy and some vanillin oak. The initial mouthfeel is of drying tannins, but this gives way to plums/cherry fruit. The oak is integrated with some obvious char, briar and toasted almonds. Long, almost elegant palate and great carry of after palate. Distinctive Hunter characters and will develop to a classic dry leather, cedar Shiraz.

Needs 10 years.

Alc:12.9%

T/A:6.49g/l

pH:3.36

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2000

The rotation of winemakers continues, with Dan Dineen leaving to head up the new enterprise of Len Evans - Tower Wines and Peter-James Charteris stepping in to run the winery. PJ, a Kiwi, was previously at Southcorp in Nuriootpa.

The 1999 year was the wettest in the Hunter Valley since the torrential early start to 1990. It just beat 1992 by 40mm. An unusually wet winter led to excellent spring growth, and continued rain. The new Millennium(?) favoured the Hunter Valley with one of the best vintages on record, with excellent yields, sugars and fruit flavours. The previous high-quality years of 1998, 1996, 1994, 1991 and 1987, 1986 will be hard pressed to challenge 2000.

A very good crop of Graveyard Shiraz at nearly 4.5t/ha (1.75t/ac). Sugars were high, giving 14 to 14.7% alcohol.

Very dense, purple colour. The aromas are an amalgam of fruit, region and oak. Black fruit aromas - blackberry, dark cherry and plum - combine with briar, earth characters. A solid oak level (to match the unusually robust structure/alcohol) that shows dark chocolate and mocha. Long, excellent finish to the palate with firm but balanced tannins.

Still quite closed at 10 years.

Alc:14.7%

T/A:6.31g/l

pH:3.55

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2001

One of the great Hunter Valley vintages, 2000 finished and led into a typical dry winter. No heavy rain until November, 130mm (5inches). Excellent vine growth and fruit set.

No rain between mid-December and late January 2001(38 days) enabled timely spraying and vine training. Ominous clouds built up over the last days of January and by February 10, 135mm (5.5 inches) had fallen. Semillons were harvested over that time and the wait was on for the Shiraz.

More rain through February with another 91mm and into early March, with 82mm falling over 7 rain days in the first 2 weeks. Careful bunch selection in picking the Graveyard Shiraz was the order of the day. We had to go back to 1992 to find a wetter February. Then 257mm of rain was recorded, but as it came after 2 years of drought it didn't really matter.

No doubt a wine that will create much discussion due to the obvious (to some) regional/wet year characters on the nose. In some years the brettanomyces character is part of the overall Hunter terroir; briar/earth and leather.

Mid-density colour with young wine edges still evident. Mention has been made of the Hunter aromas, which come through as earthy, farmyard; but there are also red fruits - red cherry and red currant. Surprisingly subdued oak as we used nearly 90% new barriques and majority French. Herbal, polished leather characters on the palate along with sweet vanillin oak. The tannins aren't too obvious and not out of balance. Earthy, red cherry flavours through to the end.

An interesting wine to watch over the next 5 to 10 years as developed flavours take over from the primary fruit may be too rustic for some.

Alc:13.5%

T/A:6.2g/l

pH:3.55

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2002

The 2001 calendar year was one of the Hunter Valley's driest (although not quite 1991), with a total of only 21 rain days in the latter 7 months, for a total of 230mm. As usual, winter irrigation was essential and the vines got away to a great budburst. Spring was dry and mild to hot. The summer really kicked in during December, with several 40C-plus days and fierce winds. Bushfires surrounded the valley but there was no damage in the vineyard area. January continued hot and dry with some rain at the end of the month. The vines were coping well and good quality appeared certain, with a return to normal-ripening picking in the first week of February. Of course this is the Hunter Valley and by February 10, 135mm (5.5 inches) had fallen. The Graveyard produced some great Shiraz for such a year, backed up with hand sorting at the winery.

Excellent colour, not overly deep but with youthful tints. Hunter Valley aromas!! Cherry briar wood, clove and red cherry. Background oak -some vanillin evident. Good weight to the palate, initially soft-to-mid tannins but then red berry and spice flavours. Excellent structure that has earthy, briary, savoury characters and grape/oak tannins. Tastings of previous similar vintages 1995, 1997 and 1999 have shown classic Hunter Valley characters developing at 5 to 6 years.

The first to be 100% sealed by screwcap. No doubting that it is ageing appropriately.

Needs 15 years.

Alc:13.3%

T/A:6.8g/l

pH:3.56

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2003

Winter of 2002 mirrored that of 2001 with only 18 days of rain, bringing a miserly 121mm of rain (compared to 230mm in 2001). It is some what of a contradiction that our main irrigation period is in winter to build up the subsoil moisture before budburst. The spring and early summer stayed hot and dry, with extensive bushfires through early December. At onestage the entire Brokenback Range was alight, forming an impressive, if eerie, backdrop. January and February continued dry, resulting in one of the smallest Hunter Valley yields in a long time. With further barrel selection, there was a very small 2003 production of the Graveyard Shiraz, but it was a wine of great concentration.

Excellent colour with youthful tints. First impression is of a muscly/brawny Hunter Shiraz. For those who follow the Graveyards, 1991 springs immediately to mind, the difference being that wine was predominantly American oak to the 2003's French. Charry briar wood, clove and red cherry. Background oak - some vanillin evident. Good weight to the palate, initially firm tannins but then red berry and spice flavours. Excellent structure that has earthy, briary, savoury characters and grape/oak tannins. Developed characters should start to appear around the 7 to 10 year mark.

Alc:13.7%

T/A:6.7g/l

pH:3.47

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2004

In the Hunter Valley a glorious but dry winter followed the excellent 2003 vintage. With only 5 days of rain from June to September, irrigation was essential during this time. A very good budburst and fruit set with a bit much fruit on some blocks. Spring was mainly fine, with one heavy down pour in late November.

Christmas Day was a scorcher at 40C-plus, and plenty more followed over the next few weeks. Some blocks of Shiraz were fruit thinned in early January to help the vines cope with the heat and lack of rain.

Mid January rain (22mm) on time on the 17th, followed by 40C, then 54mm a few days later, followed by 40C then another 19mm!!! If the vines weren't baffled and knocked around, the staff certainly were.

The waiting game for the reds didn't go our way, with 123mm of rain following on February 25 and 26. Further rain in early March meant lower than desired sugars, but at least no mould problems. The Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz was all picked by March 9. Medium-bodied reds are certainly not out of the norm for the Hunter Valley.

Excellent medium depth of colour with youthful tints. A very fragrant Graveyard Shiraz with red cherry, black pepper/nutmeg fruit aromas. These are complemented by the pristine cedar/mocha oak characters. The early youthful tannins give the initial impression of a full-bodied red but the 12.7% alcohol comes into play across the palate with soft earthy, bramble flavours and sweet oak.

The tannins are ripe and dry, carrying the spicy medium-bodied weight with ease. A long and even finish, very much in the mould of the 1996 (12.8% alc). A wine regarded as one of our top Graveyards, as is this one.

Alc:12.7%

T/A:6.9g/l

pH:3.32

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2005

Another miserly winter in terms of rainfall for 2004 with the middle 6 months recording 126mm over 16 days. This of course coming off a set start with 247mm in the first 3 months. Rainfall didn't reach double figures between 25th May and 18th August and some would say that 3mm in one shower is hardly worth noting. A better spring with 110mm in October kept the vines in good vigour.

'Character building' is a term we use a lot in the Hunter Valley. Our vineyard guys estimate four separate hail storms across the Graveyard plus 4 days over 40C and 50mm of rain in January 2005 plus 4 days over 40C and then 50mm of rain in January 2005 plus another 132mm up to 20th February. Tough fruit grapes!! All the old vine Shiraz picked between 20th February and 3rd March in very good condition and ripeness.

Comparisons to the 2004 are inevitable and while similar in texture and fruit weight, the alcohol weight gives the wine a much 'rounder' feel. Medium density colour with crimson hues as opposed to violet/purple. These almost iridescent young colours are rarely seen in Hunter reds.

Lifted aromas of dark cherry, clove and 'sweet' earth. These are complimented by soft mocha oak. Initial flavours of dark chocolate and plums supported by the ripe tannins. Some spice/pepper characters on the finish. Perfect weight of fruit, alcohol and tannin. A wine with great 'line' structure, balance and length. A comparison to other Graveyard Shiraz is difficult as it is quite the complete wine but the alcohol and style is close to 1993/1994.

Alc:13.4%

T/A:6.5g/l

pH:3.45

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2006

Looking back at the previous vintages, the lead up to 2006 mirrored that of 2003, except for a mere 60mm of rain in one down pour right in the middle of winter. The actual vintage conditions were very similar from the heat through to the low crops.

If the Hunter didn't get that 60mm the rain would have matched winter 2002, with 120mm over 6 months. For July and August 2005 there was only 2 rain days, both in July for 7mm. Again the district pipeline scheme paid its way with extensive winter irrigation. Spring/summer saw good rain to lead into what was to be one of the hottest summers on record.

Christmas Day 2005 and then New Years Day 2006 were both 45C. By late January the Hunter had had another 7 to 10 days of plus 40C weather. What was looking like a normal start, after Australia Day, became a 14th January start for many.

The Shiraz was certainly early by at least 2 to 3 weeks. Again low yields, some down as much as 30%. The last of the old vine Shiraz was picked on the 20th February. In some years we haven't started till the 1st March and a week earlier than 2005.

The middle year of three dry vintages and very similar to the 2005. Medium density colour with purple tints. Lifted aromas of dark cherry, clove and 'sweet' earth. The tannins for the 2006 are ripe with a dry, cedar edge. Some spice/pepper characters on the finish. Perfect weight of fruit, alcohol and tannin. A wine with great 'line' – a Len Evan's expression used to convey structure, balance and length. A comparison to other Graveyard Shiraz is difficult as it is quite the complete wine but the alcohol and style is close to 1994/2005.

Alc:13.5%

T/A:6.35g/l

pH:3.33

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2007

The rainfall record for the Lower Hunter Valley shows an average rainfall of 800mm calculated between 1919 and 2006. However since 1992 there has not been 1 year at that average - 14 years all up. A similar period occurred between 1932 and 1948. The year 2006 was one of the driest on record with a miserly 416mm. A dry 2006 vintage continued until rain (133mm) in September. Brokenwood as usual commenced irrigation well before budburst. A further 30mm in early November kept the vines going as water restrictions became a reality.

Cooler weather over Christmas gave short-lived respite. High temperatures and low ground water meant an early start to picking with Brokenwood kicking off on the 17th January, a week later than others in the Valley.

The harvest was one of our shortest with the first reds in on the 8th February. The first of the old vines was a week later and vintage all wrapped up by the 18th. The low yields made it all very quick.

The last year of three dry vintages and very similar to the 1998. Medium density colour with purple tints.

Excellent deep colour and youthful tints. Drought years often bring a different set of challenges especially in maintaining finesse. Strong lifted aromas of sweet earth and dark cherry. The oak (nearly all French) is obvious in this as a young wine but will soften and integrate. Initial flavours of dark chocolate and ripe plums. These are supported by beautifully ripe tannins giving a slight cedar edge. There is mocha/vanillin from the oak but this is in balance with the fruit characters. Perhaps a 'solid' Graveyard Shiraz as opposed to a 'big' wine but a skilfully made Hunter from a hot, dry year.

Alc:13.5%

T/A:6.20g/l

pH:3.38

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2009

Mid January in the Hunter Valley always brings with it a slight nervousness in the wine industry. Having been battered in both previous years - drought in 2007 and pouring rain in 2008, it is no wonder. Black cats certainly not wanted and ladders given wide berth.

Vintage 2009? The rain that plagued the 2008 vintage finally eased up at the end of April and then no rain days in May. The middle three winter months normally dry for us saw another 250mm (10 inches) and then odd rain days through to the year end. Fruit set was not as complete but resulted in long loose bunches especially in the Shiraz. A good result.

A dry January created some excitement and the Semillon all picked in perfect conditions. Alas the reds got to within a whisker but 162mm between 11 to 17 February meant the sorting table was rolled out again. As can be seen by the finished alcohol the Graveyard was ripe before the rain, so no real loss of quality.

Not too long in bottle, hence medium colour in density and hue. Lifted red cherry and earthy aromas and the oak also noticeable at this stage. Very good savoury Hunter Shiraz flavours - briar wood and ripe tannin but somehow still medium bodied.

Alc:14.0%

T/A:6.80g/l

pH:3.41

Graveyard Vineyard Shiraz

2010

The Hunter Valley finished the calendar year with 680mm of rain and the majority of that in the winter months. Then followed a very warm to hot spring but bud burst and flowering was unaffected. Friday 20th November saw the temperature hit 46C and gave way to one of our more spectacular summer storms. The hail that swept across the lower Hunter Valley, came around the foothills of the Brokenback Range then swung north east taking in the Graveyard and Verona vines. A bit of fruit thinning, even if random, didn't do too much harm and the continued 40C weather helped dry out the damaged fruit. Rain at the end of December and then again on the 3rd January had the vines in great shape.

Vintage started on the 20th January and all whites picked by the 28th, one of the most compressed pickings at Brokenwood.

A number of hail affected blocks were fruit thinned through December. In terms of weather vagaries, 2010 did not ease up. Brokenwood managed to get most of the red grapes in after the 180mm of rain in late January (with another 34mm on 6th February). This timing would not normally present a problem but the early ripening meant the grapes were at their best. Some dilution of sugar levels, say 13.5 down 12.5 baume but the colour was already well established. For the third year in a row all red grapes went over the sorting table.

Of the four 1968 blocks, not all will be used for the 2010 wine. It is likely a small blend will be bottled from 2010 and for this tasting a representative blend has been assembled.

HBA/Quail Shiraz

The story of Brokenwood's homage to Hardy's Reserve Bin Burgundy goes back to the late 1980s. The Hardy's wine was a blend of regions and more often than not just Hunter Valley and McLaren Vale. Another wine, the Bin (yellow label) wines of Mildara, also plays some part as it was a favourite of the Brokenwood partners through the 1970s. Both wines led to the purchase of bulk Shiraz from Brands Laira for the 1978 vintage to create a blend that stayed in the Brokenwood stable for nearly a decade, the tongue twisting Brokenwood Cabernet Sauvignon/Hermitage, Hunter Valley/Coonawarra blend.

A great deal of effort was put into the research of the wines, as evidenced by the number of empty bottles lining the shelf in the Brokenwood dining room set aside for memorable wines. These included the Hardy's wines – Reserve Bin 1958 C184 (Hunter Valley/McLaren Vale/Barossa Valley), RB 1959 C266 (McLaren Vale/Hunter Valley), RB 1961 C354 (HV/MV/BV), RB 1962 C896 (HV/MV) – and many more. Discussions between Iain Riggs and Bill Hardy in 1988/89 were about swapping a barrel of Shiraz to each other's winery, no doubt just as was done in the 50s and 60s. Len Evans was of course included in the discussion and stressed that the wines should reflect current styles, that is, with reasonable oak and no doubt lower pH than their counterparts of 30 years earlier. Brokenwood started purchasing Sauvignon Blanc from McLaren Vale in 1990, hence the decision to swap Shiraz.

The early Hunter vintages of the 1990s didn't auger well for the project. The horrendously wet 1990, the drought year of 1991, no fruit at all in 1992 and tiny crop level of 1993 meant that Brokenwood couldn't contribute much from the Hunter Valley. By 1993 the Rayner Vineyard had become available and the first vintage made at Brokenwood from the 1950 Shiraz plantings went on to win the Best Small Producer Trophy at the 1995 Sydney Royal Wine Show. Bill Hardy had also moved on from Tintara in McLaren Vale and Brokenwood had its own source of fruit. Matt Harrop joined Riggs as winemaker in 1994 and the first blend, a barrique each of the best Graveyard and best Rayner Shiraz, was bottled and buried. One of the original Graveyard blocks is Quail and the wine was given this name although, to further confuse any prying eyes, Harrop decided in youthful exuberance to write 'Quail Shit' over the cling-wrapped half palate. It obviously helped as it wasn't until the mid 2000s that questions were asked about the build-up of half pallets of Quail. Perhaps if released in its youth the wine could have been the forerunner to Australia's 'critter' wines.

As the wines were in honour of the Reserve Bin's the decision was made to release with 10 years' bottle age. The label it carries for the best vintages honours Brokenwood's founders, James Halliday, John Beeston and Tony Albert, and is labelled as HBA. The wine is not made every year, as vintage conditions dictate whether justice can be done to the blend, hence no 1995, 1999 or 2008. If the wine is not deemed of sufficient quality for the HBA blend, it is released under the original Quail designation. So far the releases have been:

HBA 1996, 1998 and the about-to-be-released 2000.

Quail 1994 and 1997.

Produced 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2010.