

# Long Room Wine and Food Society

## Function reports – 2015

### Function 301

October 28, 2015

There were plenty of surprises for the members and guests attending Function 301. Although more than adequate notice was given, old habits die hard and many guests went to the Long Room instead of the Olympic Room, cricket commitments having prevailed to make our spiritual home unavailable. It did, however, occasion a short tour of the ground and an appreciation of what a great facility we have in the Olympic Stand.

Then the function was chaired by me (Robert Rouch) with Chairman John Campbell still recovering from illness. We look forward to seeing him return in the New Year.

Chef of the day was a dual effort by Travis Dines and Deniz Karaca. Travis is the new Epicure “captain” and Deniz specialises in desserts and right down to the handmade chocolates. Perhaps we were wondering what would follow the exceptional 300th celebration, but we needn’t have worried because the meal, and in particular the presentation, was equal to or better than anything you’d find in our top restaurants. The wines were selected from the society’s cellar by food and wine master Paul Kinross and cellar master Ian Maguire.

Much had happened since the last function and Ruth and I were delighted to be part of the society’s trip to the Tamar Valley in northern Tasmania. Tour leader Stuart Stockdale left no stone unturned in giving nearly 40 participants a fine appreciation of what the region has to offer in wine and food and it also provided a good opportunity for members and guests to get to know each other better. Well done, Stuart.

There was plenty of space in the big Olympic Room to enjoy the canapés and the opportunity to circulate among other members. The canapés were very good. They comprised a cucumber and salmon sandwich, duck and ginger spring rolls with hoi sin, crispy pork buns and Argentinean beef pie with green tomato. The Sparkling was the ever-reliable Seppelt Salinger Henty Vintage Cuvee from 2011.

We didn’t have to move far in the spacious room to the table for the outstanding entrée titled From the Sea and described as beetroot-cured kingfish, fried whitebait, pickled onion, dill aioli, poached crab and king prawns. Once again we should mention the outstanding presentation of this plate and together with the ingredients it could only be described as a classic.

There were two whites to accompany, firstly the 2010 Wynns Riesling (James Halliday 93 points) which was still fresh and flavoursome. Its partner was a 2006 Brookland Valley Semillon (alc.12.0%) from Margaret River. Halliday (95 pts) described it as immaculate winemaking, a long intense and perfectly balanced palate, herb and lemon fruit with a touch of oak.

The main course was appropriate for October – Riverina spring lamb, a dish comprising sixteen-hour cooked saddle, pine nut and parsley-crust rack, Koo Wee Rup asparagus, potato fondant, carrot puree and a honey-infused jus. The plate delivered a combination of ingredients that certainly made the statement that it was spring in Victoria.

The reds were well selected to go with the lamb. We enjoyed a 2003 Lake Moodemere Shiraz 2003 from the 22-hectare vineyard of Michael and Belinda Chambers located at Rutherglen. The wine was a full-bodied Shiraz and showed good colour.

It was accompanied by a 2004 Seppelt Mount Ida Shiraz (alc.14.5%). We suspect Halliday's early rating of 90 points would have been upped appreciably if he'd joined us for lunch. The grapes came from the Heathcote region and provided excellent intensity and structure, very silky and clearly expressing the wine's heritage.

The cheese was a Woombye triple cream brie with sour cherry jam and linseed sourdough crackers. It was an excellent Brie and Travis informed us that it came from Queensland which surprised many members. Woombye cheese is located in the Sunshine Coast hinterland and this brie is their flagship cheese. The cheese was matched with a 2003 Brands of Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon (alc.14%), a typical Cabernet with a palate that was rich, long and well-structured.

No wonder Travis brought in Deniz Karaca for dessert duty while he concentrated on the rest of the meal because the sweet was really something! Titled Dessert Degustation, it comprised salted caramel crème, banana and passionfruit sorbet, salted cashew crumble, vanilla frangipane tart, mascarpone and lemon cream, fresh berries, Valhrona dark chocolate mousse, tonka cremeux and raspberry coulis. One could be trapped into thinking what a mess, but it was a dessert that would have done justice to the best restaurants anywhere.

It was complemented by a 2010 Flametree Botrytis Riesling (alc.10.5%) from the Frankland River area. The winemaker said it was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to make a wine which has such amazing botrytis and high sugar levels.

This will be recorded as one of the outstanding meals of the year, from the planning and creation of the menu to the preparation and presentation that made the occasion so enjoyable for those attending. Our thanks to all involved.

**Robert Rouch**

## **Function 300**

September 30, 2015

There was great anticipation surrounding our celebration of the society's 300th function, a real milestone in its 28-year history. Unfortunately chairman John Campbell wasn't well and our vice-chairman, Robert Rouch, officiated as MC for the event. Robert reports:

Grand Final fever was everywhere in Melbourne in the week of our luncheon and the Members Dining Room looked fabulous for the 330 members and guests in attendance.

Being the 300th function, there was a significant number of important attendees who were welcomed and acknowledged for their contribution in the past. They included Tom Hardy, one of the originals and a past wine master who drove over from Adelaide for the event and spoke entertainingly at half time on the early history of the society.

Life member David Fyffe commented on the wines at quarter time and this was fitting as the wines were all from our own cellar and most had been purchased during the time David was wine and food master. The wines were outstanding and had been carefully selected by current wine and food master Paul Kinross.

Also in attendance were Walter Dowell and wife Lilo, both in their nineties. Walter was another very early wine master for the society. Other society guests included life member John Lill and wife Rosemary. Of course, John was in the chair as MCC secretary when the society was established in 1987.

We also had the pleasure of welcoming members of the golf team from the Hong Kong Cricket Club who were in Melbourne to compete against the MCC Golf Section.

Chef of the day was Shaun Crosling and this was the tenth time that Shaun had been in charge at our functions. He was the society's Chef of the Year in 2008 and 2012, as recorded on the honour board in the kitchen.

A highlight was the welcoming of seven new members into the society, among them Sam Firman who is the long-time MCC dining room supervisor for Epicure.

Appropriately, we gathered first in the Long Room to enjoy canapes with a lovely bubbly from Blue Pyrenees, their 2010 Midnight Cuvee Chardonnay which had won the Champagne and Sparkling Wine World Championship in London with 650 bottles entered from 16 different countries.

The canapés comprised red capsicum polenta with yellow capsicum relish, Meredith goat's cheese with apple and chives, chicken and shallot risotto and finally the Moroccan mint tea virtual.

Soon it was off to the dining room for this special luncheon which began with an entrée of prawns in their own dressing with celeriac remoulade. This was considered by many as the dish of the day given the presentation and the celeriac remoulade complementing the prawns. Shaun later commented that perhaps the remoulade could have been on the plate rather than in a separate dish.

The white wines accompanying were a 2007 Kimbarra Great Western Riesling which James Halliday had rated at 90 points, describing the wine as having very ripe fruit flavours moving towards topical, but generous texture on the palate and fine lingering acidity. The 2007 Penny's Hill Red Dot Pinot Grigio was a lovely expression of the variety and had matured well.

The main course was roasted fillet of beef with café au lait sauce and confit garlic. The beef came from Gippsland and reflected the good season they are having in that region. Cooked medium/rare, it was tender and full of flavour with a sauce that added to the character and fullness of the beef. The good chefs know how to lift these dishes with their specially crafted sauces.

With the beef we enjoyed two very good reds, both with more than a decade under their belt.

The 2004 Vinea Marson Syrah (Halliday 95 pts) was outstanding. Bright red/purple in colour and an elegant wine featuring blackberry and spicy flavours with ripe tannins, it was a true Heathcote gem. Its partner, the 2004 Seville Hill Reserve Shiraz (Halliday 90 pts) was another excellent Shiraz from the Yarra Valley.

The cheese, described as “a real bit of Welsh”, was a Wattle Valley vintage cheddar that had been aged 12 months. It was accompanied by a 2005 Chapel Hill Cabernet Sauvignon made by Michael Fragos who was adjudged Winemaker of the Year at London’s 2007 International Wine and Spirit Competition. The wine also was rated best Cabernet Sauvignon of the year at the same show. Our local expert, David Fyffe, declared it the wine of the day.

Then came something new to society lunches. Named on the menu as “Inter-course”, this was a cherry blossom sake granita refresher, which Shaun explained came from his recent trip to Japan.

Finally we did love the Deconstruction of Berry Charlotte Russe consisting of raspberries and a mess, but it was a very good dessert. It came with the Campbells Classic Rutherglen Muscat NV and no wonder the muscats of Rutherglen are considered the world’s best.

So a brilliant day finally came to an end and among many thank-yous the MCC’s Greer Dutton was first and foremost.

Staging a function for 300-plus is no walk in the park and we are also indebted to Epicure’s kitchen and waiting staff who performed admirably when it counted.

**Robert Rouch**

## **Function No. 299**

August 26, 2015

With Melbourne experiencing one of its coldest winters on record, attendance was down to 150 as many members had escaped to the north. However, those who braved the cold appreciated the warmth of the Long Room where both the canapés and the lunch were served.

Guest chef Renee Guymer said in her introduction that she hoped we would enjoy the meal and we did. In many respects Renee is a product of Spotless/Epicure having started with the company at 15 years of age and completing her apprenticeship with Spotless. She then worked at a number of restaurants before returning to the MCG in 2004.

The wines were from the five-star winery of Hugh Hamilton from McLaren Vale, which has been described by the winemaker as one of the best locations for growing grapes. The Hamiltons are very proud of their heritage, and rightly so! The family planted their first grapes in South Australia in 1837, and in the past 175 years they have produced a vintage every year in the face of droughts, two world wars, two depressions and several recessions.

The family was represented by Mary Hamilton, daughter of Hugh who was unwell and couldn't make it to the MCG. Hugh's specialty is Shiraz and Shiraz blends.

The canapés prepared by Renee were excellent with a variety full of different flavours. We started with the chorizo and prawn skewer with chimichurri sauce. Next came the Meredith blue cheese and leek croquette with garlic aioli, followed by the chicken empanada with a mango chilli salsa. Last but not least was a members' favourite – soy-lacquered duck parcels. Service was very good and the quantity plentiful.

All were appreciated with the 2011 Hugh Hamilton 'Drama Queen' Methode Traditionelle (alc.11.7%) comprising Chardonnay 58% Pinot Noir 33% and Pinot Meunier 9%. A splash of Shiraz added an interesting depth to the colour of this very drinkable bubbly. They certainly love their exotic titles at Hugh Hamilton's and the 'Drama Queen' is painted on the water tank at the winery.

Upon taking our seats in the traditional and impressive MCC Long Room and following the introduction by chairman John Campbell, we were presented with an impressive plate of caramelised scallops with wagyu bresaola, balsamic reduction and walnut cream – an excellent dish as scallops have to be treated just right and Renee certainly did that. Two whites accompanied the scallops, the first a 2014 Hugh Hamilton 'The Floozie' Sangiovese Rose (alc.12.3%). The Church Block grapes were 100% sangiovese fruit which was crushed and chilled then left on skins while some colour migrated from the skins to the juice. The result is a fresh dry wine with minimal tannins on the finish.

The second white was the 2015 Hugh Hamilton 'The Trickster' Pinot Grigio (alc.12.6%). There was no trick to this wine and it was appreciated as having the lively refreshing and zesty dryness of a Grigio. The fruit came from the Adelaide Hills.

Main course was pork cheek with potato puree, a crisp ham hock bon bon, crackling and apple compote. The pork cheek was well cooked and had a lot of flavour. We can always do with more crackling, but the apple compote certainly complemented the pork.

We were now introduced to the 2014 Hugh Hamilton 'The Scoundrel' Tempranillo (alc.14.5%). Tempranillo is the most widely planted red variety in Spain. This fruit came from the Church Block at McLaren Vale and was awarded 93 points by James Halliday. It was a very soft, velvety drop with a smooth tannic structure that went well with the pork.

The second red was a 2013 Hugh Hamilton Black Blood I Shiraz (alc.14.5% and 94 points from Halliday). Described by Hugh Hamilton as the most archetypal McLaren Vale Shiraz of their three Black Blood wines from 2013 and “if you could ever say a wine has been forged from the soil, this is the one”. The term Black Blood comes from the powerful black clay on the south side of the vineyard.

The cheese dish was truffled pecorino stagionato with pear, walnuts and chestnut honey. Pecorino is the name given to all Italian cheeses made from sheep’s milk and aged Pecorino, referred to as stagionato, is hard and crumbly in texture with buttery and nutty flavours. Renee continues to educate us on the many and varied cheeses throughout the world.

With the cheese came what many regarded as the wine of the day, the 2013 Hugh Hamilton Black Blood II Shiraz (alc.14.6% and 91 points from Halliday). Mary Hamilton suggested that members should compare the Black Blood I versus Black Blood II with the fruit grown on different soils, the latter being from the Church Block vineyard where the vines are flanked by what remains of an old river bed.

The dessert of lime and coconut tart with Malibu jelly, sago, lime sorbet and meringue was splendid and many acclaimed this the dish of the day. Accompanying the sweet was a 2014 Hugh Hamilton ‘Goldilocks’ Moscato.

Renee Guymer had certainly rewarded those who stayed in Melbourne for the winter with a fine luncheon and we are indebted to Mary Hamilton for her very colourful and informative comments on the company’s extensive range of wines.

So we look forward to Grand Final week at the ‘G’ when the society holds its 300th function since inception in 1987.

**Robert Rouch**

## July Luncheon

The end of July definitely characterises Melbourne in winter and a slightly smaller attendance suggested that some of our members had sought warmer climes. However, this was one of our better lunches as reflected by our judging panel and we congratulate guest chef Paul Johnson and his team. It is no wonder that Paul is the sous chef for the Members Dining Room and the meal reflected his appreciation of many flavours and combinations, in particular the outstanding dish of the day, the entrée.

The wines came from the ASX-listed company Treasury Wine Estates stable in Victoria – Coldstream Hills and St Huberts from the Yarra Valley and Seppelt from the Grampians wine district at Great Western. The latter wine district was founded in 1851 and famously has been regarded as a premium producer of sparkling wines. Adam Carnaby gave an interesting address on the history of Seppelt. He was one of a trio of winemakers presenting their wines at the luncheon, the first time in memory that this has occurred at a society function.

Adam was joined by Andrew Fleming from Coldstream Hills, which is the vineyard established by James Halliday in 1985. Andrew explained that James Halliday holds an annual dinner for staff and others where he opens a bottle of every vintage from Coldstream Hills produced since 1985. The third winemaker was Greg Jarrett from St Hubert's.

So with the House of Seppelt opening the batting it was natural that we were greeted by a 2011 Seppelt Salinger Vintage Cuvee (alc.12.0%, Halliday 93 points, Gold Medal Perth Wine Show 2011), an outstanding wine to go with the canapés – vodka salmon with crème fraiche and dill, a scallop pop of scallops, bacon and parsnip and the well-named Olympic burger featuring brioche, spiced chicken avocado and jarlsberg.

The entrée was absolutely brilliant. It was goat's cheese gnocchi with Napoli, scampi, parmesan and basil producing flavours that one would nearly die for. Definitely the dish of the day and Paul really nailed it to go with the two white wines.

They were a 2013 Coldstream Hills Rising Vineyard Chardonnay (alc.13%). The Rising Vineyard is located at St Andrews and the fruit was grown by Neil and Elizabeth Roberts from vines planted in 1991 from Penfolds clones.

The second white was a 2015 Seppelt Drumborg Riesling (alc.12%) from the Southern Victorian cool climate region of Henty. The Drumborg vineyard is recognised as one of Australia's premier producers of Riesling and this very young example looked like developing into a serious wine.

Next came the main course of coq au vin with mustard mash and green beans. This classic French chicken casserole had a rich, deep flavour from the mushrooms and the red wine of Paul's choice. This lovely dish was nicely complemented by the red wines – a 2013 Coldstream Hills Pinot Noir (alc.13.5%) and the acclaimed 2012 Seppelt St Peters Shiraz (alc.14.5%).

From the Deer Farm vineyard, the Pinot ironically won the James Halliday Trophy for the best Pinot Noir at the 2014 Royal Melbourne Wine Show. While conceding that Pinot was the most difficult wine to get just right, the winemakers claim that the Yarra Valley is now highly regarded for its treatment of the grape.

The flagship wine from the Seppelt portfolio, St Peters is sourced from the finest and most intense fruit grown on the Great Western vineyard and is the ultimate expression of cool climate Grampians Shiraz. The wine is only made in exceptional years and is called St Peters after an historic block of Shiraz. The 2012 vintage was outstanding and James Halliday awarded this wine 97 points. It was the wine of the day, but there was one surprise yet to come!

The cheese dish following was an Ashgrove premium vintage cheddar with polenta crisps and a smoked pepper relish. Ashgrove cheese comes from the cheese factory at Elizabeth Town in the heart of the dairying region of Northern Tasmania. The cheese we sampled had won a gold medal at the Hobart Fine Food Awards.

Paired with the cheddar was a 2012 St Huberts Cabernet Sauvignon (alc.13%) which Jeremy Oliver awarded 95 points. The St Huberts vineyard contains some of the oldest Cabernet vines in the Yarra Valley with plantings dated back to the 1960s.

The dessert was a beautiful white chocolate-centred pudding with vanilla, orange and mint. With it came the surprise of the day – a 2012 St Huberts Late Harvest Viognier (alc.9.5%). None of us had experienced this wine before, so it was a real eye opener, quite different to other dessert wines. The fruit was sourced from John Denton's vineyard near Yarra Glen. The grapes were hand-picked ripe in a man-versus-bird struggle and the result was a luscious, sweet wine.

And so wrapped up a great lunch of outstanding food and wine, but it was all repeated the next night when 243 attended the waiting list dinner. No doubt they would have been equally impressed and satisfied as we were!

Thanks to all who ran a marathon to put this function together -- chef Paul Johnson (working day and night), the three winemakers from Treasury, the kitchen brigade, the waiting staff, Epicure management and our own wine and food master, Paul Kinross.

## June Luncheon

The Epicure staff made an excellent decision to move the meet-and-greet pre-luncheon gathering of 170 attendees to the rear of the Long Room on a typical cold Melbourne winter's day in June.

We turned out for the last function of the financial year and were greeted with a Moorilla Muse Series Extra Brut Rose 2009, which is the flagship sparkling from the dry, low-yielding 2009 vintage at Moorilla Wines in Tasmania.

The chef of the day was Blair Humphrey, well known as the society's Chef of the Year in 2013 and currently chef de cuisine for the MCG corporate suites, responsible for the culinary development, style and delivery to the 115 suites around the ground.

Blair matched the Moorilla wines with a Tasmanian theme based on the outstanding fresh produce available from the Apple Isle.

The history of Moorilla wines is fascinating. The venture was founded in 1947 by Claudio Alcorso, an Italian textile merchant. In 1958, ignoring advice that the site, 15k north of Hobart, was better suited to fruit trees, Mr Alcorso planted 90 Riesling cuttings sourced from David Wynn's South Australian vineyard. In 1995 David Walsh purchased Moorilla Wines and the winery has been developed in tandem with his well-known tourist attraction Mona Art Gallery on the picturesque Derwent River

Winemaker at Moorilla is Canadian-born Conor van der Reest who began his career on Ontario's Niagara Peninsula before his love of winemaking took him to extend his experience in France, the Marmara Sea and Australia's King, Hunter, Alpine and Yarra valleys. His philosophy of winemaking is to abide by the weather, nurture the soils and hand-tend the vines.

Within the warmth of the Long Room Blair produced four enticing canapés, headed by the shucked Barilla Bay oysters from south of Hobart, served natural with accompaniments of mandarin sorbet and samphire with warm virgin olive oil and sea salt. Judging by the length of the queue, the oysters were very popular.

Then came the Pyengana cloth cheddar soufflé with caramelised Tasmanian onion and green tomato pickle. Last but not least was the outstanding twelve-hour slow-cooked beef brisket croquette with cold climate beetroot aioli.

Our members also loved the traditional Peking duck and coconut pancake with scallion and hoi sin. The Tasmanian inspiration continued with the entrée of spicy Tasmanian striped trumpeter with added flavour of yellow curry liquor, monsoon herb storm, lime and chilli. There is no doubt that this dish would have been well scored by our experts as the trumpeter really appreciated the yellow curry liquor. Well done, Blair!

The winemaker chose two whites to go with the entrée. First was the 2014 Moorilla Muse Series Pinot Gris (13% alc.), which many thought was the wine of the day. Described by the winemaker as hand-picked and meticulously crafted, this wine is for those who like their Gris interesting and off the beaten track. We certainly thought it was interesting in both flavour and texture.

The 2012 Moorilla Cloth Series White (11.4% alc.) was made in the year Moorilla celebrated its 50th year of winemaking in a vintage that was as close to perfect as possible.

The plate presentation of the main course was photogenic with the centrepiece being the slow-cooked (over 24 hours) Riverina lamb neck and shoulder ragout with whipped Sebago, minted sweet pea, rosemary gremolata and cab franc evaporation. While a very good dish, some members commented that they still prefer prime cuts of lamb.

A couple of nice Tasmanian reds accompanied the main course – a 2012 Moorilla Muse Series Pinot Noir (13.8% alc.) and a 2013 Moorilla Muse Series Cabernet Sauvignon Cabernet Franc (14.5% alc.). The latter was a combination of 70% Cab Sav, 26% Cab Franc and 4% Syrah and drank remarkably well for a region that is more highly regarded for its Pinots.

The cheese dish was interesting. Rated by Blair as one of France's outstanding cheeses, it was the Marcel petite comte "la couronne" which came with light rye, Tasmanian leatherwood honey and gherkin. Marcel Petite is one of the most respected affineurs in Comte, France, where wheels are hand selected for maturation in their 19th century underground cellars at Fort Saint Antoine, high on the border of France and Switzerland.

With the cheese was the 2012 Moorilla Muse Series Syrah (13.5% alc.) made from fruit sourced from the stable's St Mathias vineyard located close to Launceston's Tamar River in fertile soils and warmer, concentrated air. The fruit produces a peppery spice and floral perfume.

Dessert promised to be a comfort dish – old-fashioned apple pie made from Granny Smith apples with decadent chocolate ice cream, walnut praline and blackberry sherbert. We don't mind being called old fashioned so long it's as good as Grandma made it!

Accompanying the dessert was a 2014 Moorilla Praxis Series Sparkling Riesling, something quite different in having a young sparkling at the conclusion of the menu. It was a pleasant drop but for most of the wine buffs we still love a good fortified red to keep the conversation going.

Our thanks go to Blair Humphrey for yet another outstanding presentation and to Conor van der Reest for giving us the opportunity to enjoy the Moorilla wines. No doubt many of our members and guests' next visit to Tasmania will be to Moorilla and Mona.

## May Luncheon

May is the month of Taurus and we were very bullish about the May function that turned out to be another surprise experience both in food and wine. Particularly interesting was the co-operation and understanding that arose from the planning meeting (which is held prior to every function) between Shane Freer, the chef of the day, and Ros Ritchie of Ros Ritchie wines from Mansfield.

The challenge for Shane was to match an eclectic selection of wines from Ros Ritchie's range with suitable dishes. He came up with what amounted to four entrees that were called courses, each of two parts, and he really nailed it!

We started in the Percy Beames Bar where we were welcomed by a 2012 Ros Ritchie Cuvee, a delicious sparkling made from hand-picked Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay fruit from the Kinloch vineyard near Mansfield.

Some rated Shane's four canapés as possibly the best ever. They were absolutely outstanding in quality and presentation and they were also very plentiful. An added touch was that Shane served some personally with a sandwich-board sign informing members and guests of the canapé's pedigree. They comprised: Coconut free-range chicken breast with pineapple salsa, crushed peanut praline and a crisp wonton cup, a banh mi duck slider with chilli plum jam, sweet pickled carrot and a soft buttermilk bun, osso buco lamb pithiver with jackfruit and lime pickle and Asian spiced potato with green chilli nahm jim.

The canapés were so enticing that together with the sparkling we had difficulty remembering that we were now required in the Long Room for lunch.

When settled and following the official welcome, the MC read a quote from Sir Winston Churchill:

“The dinner would have been splendid,  
If the wine had been as cold as the soup,  
If the beef as rare as the service,  
The brandy as old as the fish,  
And the maid as willing as the duchess.”

The MC trusted that all would find the lunch much better!

Then came the first of the four entrees, the Course 1 Duo: Beetroot-cured Port Lincoln kingfish with golden beets, avocado, crisp Goulburn apple and breakfast radish followed by Western Australian prawns with fava bean, Tamarind relish and pickled daikon.

The Course 2 Duo comprised poached Victorian chicken with Echuca navel orange salad, toasted almonds and pancetta. It was paired with zucchini lasagne with cashew cheese, walnuts, sun-dried tomatoes and spinach.

The Course 3 Duo was starting to test us – a parmesan and herb-crusted lamb cutlet with confit fondant potato, pea and lemon crush, scorched vine tomato and vincotto reduction. This lovely piece of lamb preceded some slow-braised Gippsland beef with potato and sweet yam croquette, Malbec evaporation and fresh Argentinian chimichurri.

Course 4 was hand-selected gorgonzola cheese with roasted fig, wafer biscuits and candied walnuts.

The white wines to accompany the early dishes were a 2013 Ros Ritchie Gewurztraminer (alc.13%, James Halliday 95 points) and a 2012 Ros Ritchie Riesling (alc.12%, 93 pts from Halliday and winner of two gold medals). The Gewurztraminer is a specialty of Ros's and both whites were very pleasant drinking.

With the red meat we enjoyed the 2012 Ros Ritchie Tempranillo (alc.13%). From the Cowan's vineyard at Lima South, this is a wine that is growing in popularity and carries full flavours of ripe red blood plums. Its partner was a 2012 Ros Ritchie Nebbiolo (alc.14%). Of interest was that the grapes came from a vineyard owned by Geelong Grammar School at Timbertop.

The final red was the 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon (alc.14%, 95 pts from Halliday). It came from the Baxendale vineyards, 570 metres high in the Whitlands hills and a fine drop it was, a real stand-out.

Then it was time for desserts (plural) which had been prepared by Rosie Utteridge, our last year's chef of the year. Rosie wowed the guests with a selection of mini desserts shared at the table – tiramisu, assorted macarons and a lemon and lime tartlet with vodka-flavoured meringue. They were all very scrumptious and went well with the 2014 Ros Ritchie Late Harvest Riesling.

The discussion with chef Shane Freer brought out how closely he had worked the menu into an inspired series of entrees that followed a meeting with Ros, a case of the winemaker and EPICURE's chef de cuisine working closely together to produce one of the best functions ever.

Our thanks to Ros Ritchie, Shane Freer and the waiting staff who did a great job, with special mention to Greer Dutton for her work on our behalf as club operations and interest group co-ordinator at the MCC.

## April Luncheon

The gala black-tie function of the society's year is the April annual dinner, and this year was no exception with new chairman Steven Smith, six MCC committee members, the MCC's CEO and 300 members and guests gathering in the Long Room for canapés plus a welcome glass of Lanson Black Label Brut NV.

The wines were all selected from the society's extensive cellar and were highly praised by the end of the evening. Chef for the function was Peter Haycoft, who is the director of culinary operations for Epicure and has vast experience over 30 years with some of the world's leading hotels. He is well known to the society having presented many fine dining functions in the past that our members have enjoyed.

The chefs always test us with new experiences and this was no exception as the canapés were all vegetarian, being sticky rice balls with pineapple chilli jam and toasted sesame followed by pumpkin feta with pine nut cigar with minted yoghurt and pomegranate. Then came a twist in procedures with a special station serving vegetable dumplings with assorted dipping sauces. The canapés were so plentiful that one had to be very careful of what was to come.

So we moved onto the magnificent Members Dining Room where chairman John Campbell welcomed all the dignitaries, members and guests, adding that this special night is when the society announces the winners of its much sought-after awards for Chef of the Year and Apprentice of the Year.

The Chef of the Year not only receives appropriate prizes but also has the honour of being recognised on the Honour Board in the kitchen. This year's top chef was Rosie Utteridge who prepared a magnificent meal for the August luncheon, which included a special dish named Oaks Day favourite.

During Rosie's apprenticeship at Epicure at the MCG she won the Spotless Apprentice of the Year award, following which she travelled to New York. She also worked at the Arts Centre and Zinc before returning to the MCG in 2013.

The Apprentice of the Year as nominated by Spotless was Gregory Smith, a young man who came from South Africa and is making a name for himself in Spotless Catering. The society's committee awards were both won by two young people who are taking the catering industry to new heights.

The much-coveted Winemaker of the Year award went to two organisations who showed their wines in tandem at the February 2014 luncheon. Patrick of Coonawarra provided the whites and Zema Estate the reds. They really starred at this function and we were particularly surprised at how good the Coonawarra whites proved to be.

For entrée we enjoyed a seafood bouillabaisse terrine with saffron vinaigrette. The seafood was a combination of about six different types and we are advised it is a master craft to combine all of these flavours and it's very lengthy and time consuming to get it just right. The members voted this the dish of the evening.

The wines to go with the entrée started a real discussion as to which was the best Chardonnay. It's a bit of a laugh that James Halliday scored both 97 points, so everyone was right, but it acknowledges the class of the wines coming out of our cellar. The first white was a 2009 Mount Mary Chardonnay (12.8% alc.) which Halliday described as "everything you would expect from this producer, subtle power, great balance and length, white peach with a touch of creamy cashew to the fruit, the savoury minerality adding complexity".

The Mount Mary was paired with a 2009 Leeuwin Estate Art Series Chardonnay 1(4.5% alc.) which represented "craftsmanship of the highest order where the vineyard and the winery has combined to create a perfect example". The consensus was that the Leeuwin Estate won on points.

The main course was a Western District pork belly with pancetta, braised green lentils, jowl croquette, parsnip cream and young vegetables together with some pork crackling (perhaps we could have done with more). Peter Haycroft spoke about the extent of preparation of the pork belly from 24 hours in brine and 18 hours of slow cooking to have it so tender, although perhaps a bit fatty for some.

Accompanying the pork were three Pinots, which prompted widespread discussion about their merits. First was the 2006 Trinity Hall High Country Pinot Noir (alc. 14.5%) from New Zealand's Hawkes Bay on the north coast. This historic wine region is New Zealand's second largest after Marlborough, and is highly regarded for its red Bordeaux blend wines.

Its vintage mate was a 2006 Bastard Hill Pinot Noir (alc. 13.5%) which originated from the Yarra Burn stable formerly owned by one of our life members, past wine and food master David Fyffe. The vineyard has to be hand-picked because it is too steep for machinery, hence the "Bastard Hill" tag. Rated 91 by James Halliday, he noted it was "profoundly a typical Bastard Hill, light in colour, body and texture, positively delicate with fresh red fruits and spice".

The third offering was a 2013 Hand Picked Mornington Peninsula Pinot Noir (alc. 13.8%) which attracted a Halliday rating of 97 points and was selected as the number one wine for Victoria at the VIC 100 Wine awards in Melbourne. The fruit was selected from three vineyards and the wine was "mid-red colour, quite dark for a Pinot showing plenty of cherry spice aromas producing a rich full-bodied Pinot Noir".

There was even more discussion about the cheese dish named Holy Goat's yeast rind cheese with a fig pizza. The cheese was melted and very tasty but many members felt the pizza was too thick and heavy to complement the dish.

The cheese wine was voted wine of the night – a 2005 Shingleback D Clock Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon from McLaren Vale grapes planted in the 1830s. Winner of the Jimmy Watson trophy against 850 entries and rated 93 points by Halliday, it showed "good colour, flooding the mouth with intense black currant varietal fruit and good texture, structure and length".

To finish we enjoyed a dessert of late-season white peaches with a pistachio cake, tarragon and raspberry sorbet. The late-season peaches, which are hard to obtain, were soft and full of flavour, just like the Baileys of Glenrowan Classic Muscat NV (alc.17%) from the home of Australia's great fortified wines. This classic was no exception.

The function was embellished by guest speaker Gary Baldwin giving a summary of his expert opinion on all the wines. Gary is an experienced winemaker who travels widely throughout Australia and overseas, providing technical advice and assistance. He is also a well-recognised wine judge having judged at many Royal and major regional shows.

So the annual dinner came to an end on a cold autumn evening and as usual there are many to thank, but this time we should single out the waiting staff of Epicure. Well done.

## March Luncheon

It was entirely appropriate that our March luncheon was held on the first day of the Melbourne International Comedy Festival because we had our own source of belly laughs courtesy of Howard Park proprietor and winemaker Jeff Burch.

Called to the microphone after the entrée, the man from Margaret River surprised all and sundry when he announced that he wasn't going to talk about wine! Rather, he had some life stories to tell and proceeded to regale the audience with some hilarious tales of his promising but unfulfilled education (three university starts, no finishes).

Eventually, Jeff started a packaging business and sold out to Amcor 20 years later, thus enabling him to enter the world of wine that had always interested him.

We're glad he did because many of the members and guests thought the spread of Howard Park wines was as good as any in recent memory.

We started proceedings in the Percy Beames Bar where a pleasant Howard Park Jete Brut Sparkling accompanied a tasty selection of canapes courtesy of highly talented guest chef Aaron Duffy – the Boudin Blanc dagwood dog (suggest you Google it), quail egg kewpie kataifi (ditto) and Peking duck pancakes.

The entrée was beautiful, slow-cooked Atlantic salmon with scorched compressed Hendrick's and tonic cucumber, polished seeds and rice. Hendrick's is Aaron's favourite gin and the cucumber worked well with the salmon.

The Howard Park whites complementing this dish were their 2014 Mount Barker Riesling and 2014 Miamup Chardonnay. Both were appreciated in equal measure.

The main course of Margaret River smoked loin of venison with spiced paradise pear, red cabbage puree and alto el sol sauce was loved by fans of the meat but, as usual, some were less accepting.

The reds attracted universal acclaim, however, especially the 2012 Leston Shiraz, a premium Margaret River drop well partnered by the 2012 Flint Rock Shiraz from the Great Southern region.

The cheese was Montgomery's cheddar with pickled walnuts and fruit bread, a real treat that was brilliantly matched with a 2012 Leston Cabernet Sauvignon. More please!

The dessert was special, another magnificent creation by award-winning pastry chef Deniz Karaca. It was his K7 chocolate cake, a seven-layer concoction with dark chocolate, tarragon, berries and hazelnut. Rich but delicious, it was accompanied by a most enjoyable Howard Park Muscat.

So how did we learn about the wines? It emerged that Jeff and son Richard were a tag team, the latter a marketing graduate who spoke about the company's wineries at Margaret River and Denmark in the south with an occasional interruption from Dad, who had yet another anecdote to pass on. It all made for a very entertaining day.

President Paul Sheahan addressed the function in his last few weeks in the chair before handing over to president-elect Steven Smith. His oft-repeated observation that the society was robustly independent no doubt was appreciated by members who have contributed mightily to our buoyant financial position over many years.

## February Luncheon

The society's February lunch was something of a step back in time as we ventured to the Melbourne Town Hall (MTH) because of the MCG's unavailability due to World Cup commitments.

The Town Hall was completed in 1870 and it has been the hub of Melbourne's cultural and civic activity, playing host to theatrical performance, wedding receptions, exhibitions and the like.

We gathered in the foyer for pre-luncheon drinks and then moved to the Supper Room with its many Victorian features. It is a delightful room that no doubt has hosted many memorable events over the years. Our guest chefs from Epicure's Town Hall team were headed by Shandelle Moore who has 20 years' experience with Spotless and has worked at the MCG as chef de cuisine of corporate suites. She became head chef at the Town Hall in 2011.

Gabriel Freire worked in various restaurants in Sydney before joining Spotless and after four years at the MCG moved on to MTH as sous chef. The third member of the team was Erin Warhurst, a 10-year veteran with Spotless who is now head pastry chef at MTH.

The wines were from the world-acclaimed historic Rutherglen winery owned by Chris, Robyn and Jen Pfeiffer, who are passionate about their crisp whites and full-bodied reds as well as their muscats, topaques and a range of intense fortified wines. Pfeiffer's winery sits on a high embankment above a sweeping bend on the Sunday Creek near Wahgunyah.

Having walked the red carpet of the MTH steps we were greeted by a glass of 2012 Pfeiffer Pfizz Sparking (alc.12%), a flavoursome drop which was refreshingly crisp. Made from 100% Pinot Noir grapes, it had been crown sealed to maximise flavour and freshness and to eliminate the chances of cork taint.

The canapés were freshly shucked Coppin Bay oysters with mandarin and vodka jelly, beetroot macaron with Meredith goat's cheese and braised Wimmera duck cigar on crisp brick pastry with a date and tamarind relish.

We now moved to the Supper Room on Level 3 of the MTH to savour the dish titled Entrée 1, Australian tastes of the sea. Served on a long, narrow plate, the presentation was such that it seemed a pity to upset it. We really enjoyed the flavours of King George whiting, finger lime beurre blanc, seared Hervey Bay scallop, pea and leek veloute and a Spencer Gulf prawn with potato strings.

Two whites accompanied, first of which was the 2013 Pfeiffer Reisling (alc.12.0%) which certainly caught the attention of our wine lovers. Rated 94 points by James Halliday, the nose abounded with lemon and lime. The fruit was sourced from three vineyards in the Goulburn Valley, King Valley and the Strathbogie Ranges.

The 2013 Pfeiffer Chardonnay (alc.13.5% and rated 92 pts. by Halliday) has won two bronze medals. The grapes were again from multiple vineyards in the King and Yarra valleys and Rutherglen. Each parcel was fermented separately in new or one-year-old French oak barriques.

We were all surprised to receive Entrée 2 with the MTH chefs extending our depth of culinary knowledge with Gazpacho soup, which is an iconic cold soup from the Andalucian region of southern Spain. It is traditionally served in the summer when tomatoes are at their best and blended with vegetables. Our soup also had a touch of capsicum.

One surprise was followed by another with the arrival of the Pfeiffer Muscat NV (alc.17.5%), a five-year-old Muscat to go with the soup. Many of us would be happy to sit back and just sip away with this wine described as “Christmas in a glass”. Pfeiffer’s muscats have won so many awards and accolades there are too many to list. As the gazpacho is a summer dish, the winemaker thought it appropriate to enjoy a muscat that was lighter in texture and flavour against the older Rutherglen fortifieds.

On to the main course, a herb-crusted Victorian Farms lamb rack with Parisian potatoes, smoked eggplant cream, braised young vegetables and jus. The lamb was so good you’d have thought it was spring time, with a great eye muscle and beautifully, evenly cooked. The rack comprised four chops, tender yet full of lamb taste. The vegetables were simple with the jus complementing the lamb but not overpowering it.

The first of two reds from the Pfeiffer stable was a 2013 Tempranillo (alc.14.8%). It has already won a gold and three bronze medals. The fruit came from a single vineyard and the wine was deep red in colour with purple hues, while the palate was rich and flavoursome.

The second red was a 2012 Pfeiffer Merlot (alc.13.5% and rated 93 pts. by Halliday), a trophy winner that also has collected a gold and two bronze medals. The fruit came from Rutherglen and the King Valley

Next we were served a 2006 Pfeiffer Late Harvest Muscadelle, a rich sweetie to accompany the dessert titled Eton Mess. This dish was certainly not a mess. In fact it was outstanding in eye-catching presentation and blue-ribbon flavours. Eton Mess is a traditional English dessert consisting of a mixture of strawberries and pieces of meringue and cream. Since the 19th century it has been served at Eton’s annual cricket match against Harrow.

It was appropriate that we finish with a Pfeiffer Topaque (alc.18%), a magnificent aged topaque that Halliday had rated 93 pts. It is a divine, multi-award-winning wine of honey and malt with a hint of toffee.

We concluded the function with special thanks to the chefs and staff at MTH as well as to Pfeiffer wines and in particular to Chris Pfeiffer OAM for his excellent commentary.

## **Old Bottle Day**

### **January 28, 2015**

The society's season for 2015 was opened in the Long Room with the traditional Old Bottle Day, the only function which is a members-only event.

Chairman John Campbell once again introduced Jeremy Oliver to comment on and judge about 90 red and white wines brought along by members. The chairman made special mention of Jeremy being awarded honorary membership at the society's AGM last November. This function was Ian Kerville's bright idea in 1988 and it was in the following year that Jeremy Oliver joined in the festivities, bringing some welcome structure and formality to the luncheon.

Once again the chefs from Epicure provided an outstanding meal to complement the extensive variety of wines that members had brought to the event.

Proceedings commenced with an NV Grosset Champagne and Seppelt's Amontillado DP which carries five gold medals. The wines came from the society's cellar and were served with the chef's selection of three hot and cold canapés, the most favoured being the soy-lacquered duck parcel.

To go with some outstanding whites around the horseshoe table setting was an entrée of spanner crab and prawn salsa with chilli jam. Spanner crab has become much more prominent in the restaurants around Melbourne which indicates that the MCC chefs are right up with the best in town.

As we keep on saying, what else would you order with a good red wine – none other than a Gippsland (or high country) eye fillet for the 90 members in attendance. This was served medium/rare with a spinach and leek puree, sweet potato fondant, malted shallot cheeks and a bordelaise jus.

Accompanying was a summer salad of lettuce greens, torn buffalo mozzarella, semi-dried tomato and toasted hazelnut with an avocado dressing. In other words, a good steak with the lot and please pass that good bottle of red!

The cheese dish that followed was a new presentation of three Victorian cheeses with a cabernet paste, candied walnuts, lavosh and crackers. The various cheeses were plated to encourage a suggested progression to tackle the blue cheese last. Simple but effective!

The dessert was "here we go again". We really have had enough to eat but when the white truffle with chocolate mousse, blackberry sorbet and elderflower arrived it was too good to say "No thank you." What a great lunch to open the season, albeit traditional, but so are our older members

Now on to the winning wines. Jeremy opened his discussion on the wines by suggesting that in aged whites he prefers Riesling and Semillon and congratulated the members on their 2015 offerings. Mentioned in despatches were an '02 Mt Mary Chardonnay, an '03 Tablik Marsanne, a '98 Yering Station Riesling and an '05 Foresthill Riesling from the Great Southern region of WA. But top of the class were the following:

#### **WHITES**

1. 1971 Schloss Bockenheimer Spatlese Riesling brought along by Dariel Saleeba who also provided last year's winning white. For good measure Dariel's red was a Blue Pyrenees, in good shape and only the second vintage of that popular wine.
2. Robert John's 1982 Mc William's Elizabeth Semillon was described by Jeremy Olivier as so fresh you'd think it was only eight or ten years old.
3. Alex Gillon was on the money with his McWilliam's Lovedale Semillon, the grape being quite popular among member's offering this year.

Next came the reds, which dominated the luncheon and again proved that members like to age some of their reds rather than whites. Jeremy singled out an '02 Petaluma from the Barossa, a '96 Wynns Cabernet, a '96 All Saints Cabernet, a 1994 Xanadu Cabernet and an '03 Coldstream Hills Pinor Noir.

He also noted that there were some very good Penfolds Bin 389s from 1966 to 1969. Special mention was given to a couple of vintage ports – a '76 Wendouree from the Clare Valley and Joe Rotblat's 1975 Hardy's Special Vintage Port. But the placegetters were:

## REDS

1. The 1998 Tim Adams Aberfeldy Shiraz was adjudged the day's outstanding wine, delighting long-time society member Russell Snibson.
2. From Katnook Estate's premier range came the 1998 Odyssey Cabernet courtesy of Tony Wells.
3. Bruce McDonald continued his good form as the 2014 winner with a 1998 Lindeman's St George Cabernet.

So the 2015 opening event came to a conclusion with an Amadio 18-year-old Port from our cellar, and nobody missed the Australian Open tennis tournament being held next door.

Our thanks are extended to all the Epicure staff and the MCC and especially to Jeremy Oliver for his continued support of our Old Bottle Day which he looks forward to each year.