



# THE WIRRA WIRRA Bell Ringers

## Dear Readers,

## OWN ANNUAL

One of the most consistent questions I get asked is .....*'what is going to happen to the wine industry over the next couple of years?'* My crystal ball is no help at all, as it is repeatedly full of red wine, so I've been known to give a politicians answer (apologies to that fraternity) which can cause a glaze to form on the face of the listener. I've even plagiarised the latest best guess of the commentators or shot from the hip with my usual circumlocutional answers.

In more recent years this question has been spiked with some considerably large financial barbs. Usually this rather innocent query, appears to be asked as to your own well being, ie.....*'how's it all going?.....'Wirra Wirra OK?.....'Season good?.....'plenty of fruit?.....'exports look good, what proportion do you sell OS?.....'What does the future hold?.....'* Now comes the crunch - *'by the way, what does it cost to develop an acre of vines these days?'* Or you get the straight.....*'I am acting on behalf of a group of investors who see this industry, and in-particular grape growing, as a good investment, especially with the various tax advantages.....would Wirra Wirra be interested in contracting the fruit?'*

It is most heartening that the wine industry has placed itself in such a position to attract so many investors. They have contributed greatly to its rapid growth over the last three decades, but particularly over the last twelve years. Many millions have been invested in winery equipment but even more on vineyard development. Vineyards, while expensive to develop, show a far greater return on each dollar investment than does a winery. Hence the question of the industry's future from potential vineyard investors.

Bullish communiqués about the industry's future constantly issue from the very big companies. One can understand their reasons. However, the current leaders of these firms have never confronted a real shocker of a down turn when fruit is left on the vine. These dreadful highs and lows,



*Rising hopefully to the heights  
The Royal Riggs's raise their glasses as  
the ascending Wirra Wirra Bell reaches  
it's new lofty belfry.*

have for Australia at least, been minimised by export success. In the past, grower co-operatives were formed, seven of them in SA, which helped with the highs and lows. Distillation was another outlet. These buffers no longer exist, so it is hoped that the big, big companies have done their sums with great care or there will be much swearing and gnashing of teeth throughout the land.

Tomorrow, April 4th, will see the last of the fruit from our own vineyards harvested and if tomorrow, I am asked about the future, I would possibly answer by saying.....*'Hrmmph.....for the last six years I've been predicting a grape surplus and it hasn't happened, so I may well be wrong for the next six years.....I only hope so.'*

However the farmer in me senses a surplus of grapes in the near future. We had unprecedented rains during 1999 and 2000 and that could trigger a whopper vintage 2002! With such a sudden surplus, sales and marketing won't be able to perform quickly enough to soak it up. The world wine drinkers are not drinking more, only better.

This trend, along with a drop in grape prices, cannot overcome the problem. The Australian Wine Industry will have to jump on its marketing skate boards now to persuade the wine drinkers of the world to purchase a further 2% of Australia's wine. Not impossible, just a lot of time, money and hard work.

There are two aspects that concern me about this regions future. We have some 4500 hectares (11000 acres) of which possibly, over one third has been planted in the last three to five years. Many growers who have invested in these vines are expecting, and have budgeted for, the full district price before these vines are capable of producing mature flavoursome fruit worthy of a high McLaren Vale price tag. Grape growers and Winemakers together, must not let the hard fought McLaren Vale Brand be tarnished for the future.

The other concern is that for the future of this great industry, we need people of passion in the production of this product, not just investors looking for tax relief. One might say you can have both.....maybe, so long as those that love and seek that "great wine" are allowed to continue the search unimpaired.

The industries long term viability is without question, but the next two or three years could see:-

- Export sales continue, albeit not at the same rate.
- Australian sales will be 'soft'.
- Specific funds required to Brand build Australia.
- Over production potential.
- New investors to remember this is an agricultural business and do their figures with a large bank balance at hand.
- Education will be the key to Australia's success.

A little doom and gloom for a while, maybe, but that's agriculture. But we have vines upon ancient soils, lovely "enfolding sunny spots of greenery."

So it will be good.

My apologies to S.T. Coleridge  
And to you all.

**RGT  
Caretaker**

# Where Am I? Who Are All These People?

At the time of writing, I have been in the 'Chair' for nine weeks. Nine weeks of vintage, almost.

After twenty-four years in the first job it was a nervous first day walking to work, lunchbox under the arm, to present myself for the second.

There should have been no concern at all. In true Wirra Wirra fashion everybody was helpful and immediate lessons were provided on how to operate the impressive Espresso coffee machine.

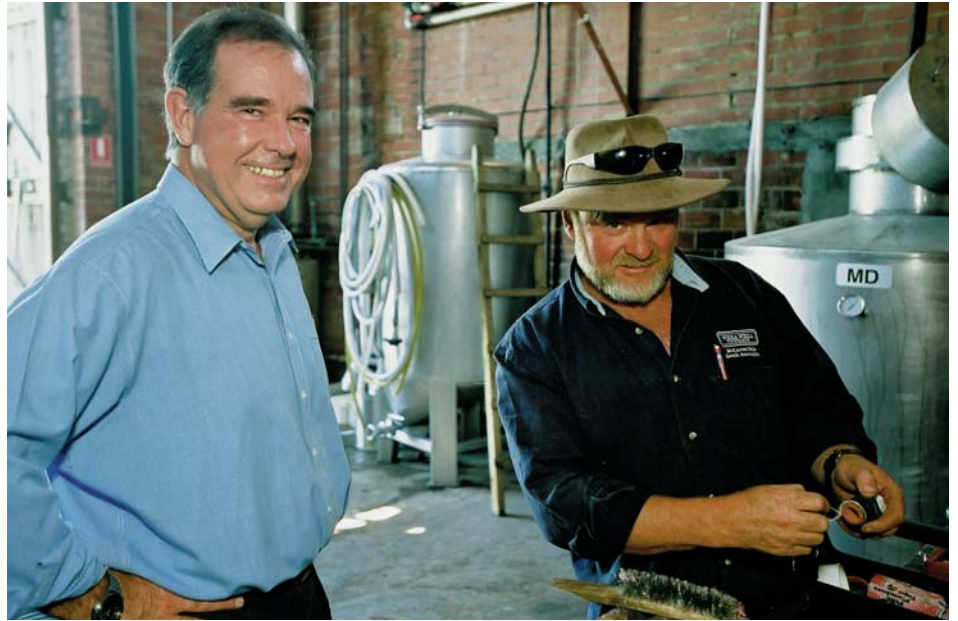
The weather though, has been the true test of Wirra Wirra spirit this vintage. It has been a vintage of records. The hottest summer in SA since 1905/06 and the coldest March day since 1933. And a record crush for Wirra Wirra.

Ben and Sam and the vintage crew have been working twelve hour shifts, plus some, and Craig, our 'on-site man for all occasions', seems, somehow, to have covered both shifts. No matter how early I get to the great wooden front door, Craig is already about, generally covered in red skins or grease or both.

Trotty has been about to patiently guide the 'new boy' and to ensure that he hasn't delivered his beloved winery into the insensitve hands of an overly zealous maniac. So far he seems contented.

Jon, Brad, Kym and Tracey, along with the rest of their crew, have been cautiously guiding this MD from the safety of his cloistered production background into the subtle but bewildering world of sales and marketing. Until now I thought winemaking was a challenge.

The great attraction for me coming to Wirra Wirra was the very 'nature and essence' of this McLaren Vale icon. The



*Tim James tries to follow the thread of Craig Hills narrative but can't tell whether he is speaking Whitworth or S.A.E.*

wines have always been a great reflection of the region and while we will never rest in our search for quality, the current range says a lot about McLaren Vale's vineyards as well as our ability to use some fruit from other regions to enhance our wines and explore their individual characters. It is also a quirky, interesting place to work.

Cyd and I are building a house just up the road on a property we have owned for a number of years, so this is the region we had chosen for our lifestyle. We have some interesting family connections going back a few generations within a stones throw of where I work.

Steve and the viticultural team have managed to pull in some excellent fruit for

us this year, despite the challenging weather.

To ensure that I wasn't the only 'new' person on-site we have employed Delta Robins in the office to help keep me on track and along with Michael, Lynne and Chris, the smooth transition through my mid life crisis has been successfully navigated.

I look forward to meeting more of you Bellringers on-site. You must visit because we are rebuilding presently, and have re-sited the great Wirra Wirra bell. A new barrel store is nearing completion along with some cellar extensions. Stage two of the project, later in the year, will involve a new cellar door and a few offices and probably best of all, an 'inside' dunny.

**Tim James**

**Newly planted Managing Director**

## Tim James MD - Barossa Boy But Not A Total Stranger



*What are you up to Mr James? Nothing Trotty, Nothing at all..... Yet!*

Silver tongued Trott has been fortunate in attracting another wine industry leading light to take on the mantle as Wirra Wirra's Managing Director.

Tim James has been with BRL Hardys as a winemaker since 1976 and for the last 5 years has been Group Technical Manager.

A regular Wine Show judge, he is Vice Chairman of the Grape and Wine Research and Development Corporation

and a Past President of the South Australian Wine and Brandy Producers Association.

Tim said he had been 'mad keen' on McLaren Vale for years even though he was a Barossa boy from a winemaking family, brought up at Leo Burings.

His father worked for Renmano and Angoves and his stepfather, Reg Shipster, was the son of McLaren Vale pioneer Fred Shipster, who's photo, in a group with Wirra Wirra founder Bob Wigley, hangs proudly in the cellars.

Tim still has to be occasionally sedated as he grapples with the rash of building and the rush of vintage but should eventually realise that the tribe has his best interests at heart and he soon will be indistinguishable from the rest of the inmates. Somehow he is not comforted by this.



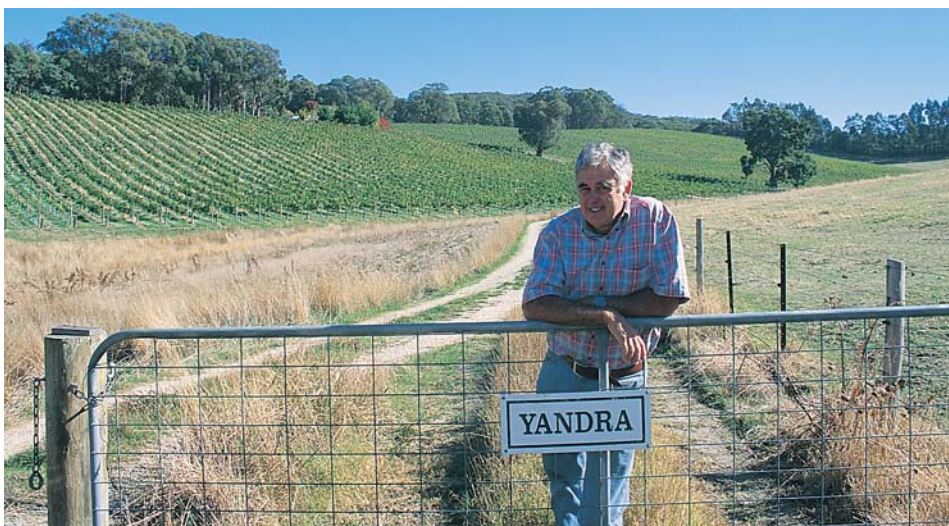
*This ring-tailed possum found a warm spot for a kip up in the eaves of the toilet block next to someone's emergency supply of Church Block being eased to room temperature.*

# Gowers “Yandra” Vineyard

If you wanted hordes of visitors you wouldn't locate your weekender up a kilometer of scratchy track off the romantically named Swamp Road, at Lenswood in the Adelaide Hills.

Thirty years ago that is what probably attracted gentle medico Jeff Gower to this idyllic 60 acre bolthole from the cares of the city. There was the ruins of a house burnt in the 50's bushfires, and the remains of ancient apple orchards partly overgrown with stringy bark forest.

A short flirtation with the cloven hoof taught him that you needed 6000 or preferable 600,000 acres to make sense and any money out of beef. He gave the herd a holiday at Hamburger Hilton and turned his attention to the cut flower industry. With wife Ann he



*Jeff MD, trying to distinguish between visitors who wish to 'wander lonely as a cloud' in the dafs and the pickers due to harvest the merlot.*



*Sometimes in the autumn sunlight you just have to sit and wait - Jeff MD tormented by vintage tension.*

turned a whole hillside over to daffodils and other areas to nerines and roses. Ann deals with the florists while Jeff discovered a love of horticulture and a naturally green thumb. Now, you would have thought that would have been a disadvantage when dealing with the more squeemish patients, but they seem not to have noticed- maybe he wears surgical gloves all the time.

Then a few years ago Jeff fell into conversations with Trott and Riggs that saw him banish the golden 'dills from 20 acres of his sunniest hillside and turn it into a choice vineyard of chardonnay,

merlot and sauvignon blanc. Under the watchful eye of the Wirra Wirra team the sauvignon blanc this vintage is already exciting enough to support the first of the new regional labels. Great things are expected from this lofty (450 to 500 metres above sea level) vineyard and Jeff says there are other areas on the property suitable for planting, with a 5 spring dam to drive the drippers.

Just as well this medico enjoys life among the vines because, if he appears at the surgery with the green digit, the strange glint in the eye of the oenophile, and the red teeth from sampling the merlot juice, he will clear the waiting room.

## Going Into Bat With a New Belfry

As the steel skeleton of the winery extensions grows imposingly, the usual amount of hair is being lost as the construction plods along and is once again ambushed by vintage. Although the stone and brick 'cladding' is yet to be added to this ample new fermenting house and barrel cellar certain events need celebration, foremost being the ascension of the great Wirra Wirra Bell to its permanent belfry tower. The traditional ceremony of 'ringing in the vintage' was chosen as the time for the installation with a suitable gathering of the district's winemakers. The bell spent its first incarnation at the Jesuit church in Norwood tolling out for weddings, funerals and the daily prayer, the Angelus. To comfort the bell in its new surroundings, Jesuit Brother and



*Bro. John May S.J., Their Bushing Highnesses Ben and Annie Riggs and R.G.Trott Esq. inspect the Great Bell before its elevation to the Wirra Wirra belfry*

renowned Clare Valley winemaker John May was invited to bless the bell and ring in the vintage with a proud Greg Trott and Bushing King Ben Riggs.



Wirra Wirra Vineyards

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# 'Hand Picked Riesling Gets Screwed'

With the new release of the 2001 'Hand Picked' Riesling (July), you will notice that every bottle will have a Stelvin Closure, as well as a neck tag explaining why. Before expanding on this, you may well ask what a Stelvin Closure is? Well, it's basically a fancy name for a Screw Cap..... Yes, the same Screw Cap used on the \$3.50 mini bottle of wine you get when flying Economy. (Before you even think it-NO, the screw, neither cap nor coital, has not been implicated in causing Deep Vein Thrombosis).

So why use them? Aren't they only for cheap wines? Well, the reality is quite the reverse of the perception in this case.

- They eliminate the possibility of your wine being "corked" or "tainted".

- They virtually eliminate any chance of the wine being prematurely or randomly oxidised.

- They preserve the freshness and aromatics of the wine, which means it will age better and for longer.

- They are really easy to open.

- Quality wise, they are the best possible closure for Riesling that is available today, and this is why they are being used.

This then begs another question. Why haven't Stelvin Closures been used before? The quick answer is that they have. Back in the late 70's, Stelvins were widely and successfully trialed from a quality perspective, but consumers did not seem to be able to get past the "Screw Cap" thing. Negative perceptions of Screw Caps defeated the attempts to introduce them commercially, and

history shows that corks prevailed.

So why are we doing this now, 22 years after Stelvins were first used on 'Hand Picked' Riesling? In August last year, the Clare Valley winemakers announced that 14 wineries were moving to Stelvin Closures (some 100%, some only a portion) for their vintage 2000 Rieslings. Like many outside observers, we applauded this move but collectively held our breath. The good news is that the reaction has been very positive, and in many cases, the wines under Stelvin have outsold those under cork. This has given us the confidence to join the cause, and every bottle of 'Hand Picked' Riesling from the 2001 vintage will be bottled under Stelvin.

So why has there been success this time, when 20 years ago, Stelvins failed. There are two key reasons. Firstly, the collective nature of the move to Stelvin by the Clare winemakers. Secondly, education. Today's wine consumers are better educated than they were 20 years ago. And more importantly, the drive last year from our colleagues up north, coincided with a huge PR effort, which helped overcome many of the negative perceptions.

For our part, we are doing our best to continue the education process. Amongst other things, we are investing in neck tags on every bottle, using Stelvin in all overseas markets (not just Australia) and our commitment to this is 100%. We feel it is important to acknowledge the risks taken by those



*The newly released 'Scrubby Rise' twins protectively escort the finely screwed 'Hand Picked' Riesling to their debut.*

Clare winemakers who participated in last year's trial, and we hope our step furthers the cause.

As a Bell Ringer you can contribute by spreading the word. Stipulate Stelvin when ordering Riesling. Take a bottle to dinner with friends, crack it open at the table, and fend off the questions! Above all, drink Riesling under Stelvin for your own benefit, safe in the knowledge that you are drinking the wine in the manner that was intended from the moment it went to bottle.

## Every Little Bit Helps. New Discount Structure

You may notice from the order form, that we have simplified the way we apply discounts.

From now on, every Bell Ringer will receive 5% off any order, whether it be 1 bottle, or 3 dozen. This will apply both at Cellar Door, and if you telephone, fax, post or email us your order.

Freight charges will not apply for even dozens. They will however, apply to any component that does not make up 12 bottles. For example, if you were to

order 17 bottles, freight would not be charged on the first dozen, but it would still apply to the unfilled carton of 5 bottles.

If you have any queries regarding the order form, any comments on the changes, or any questions regarding Cellar Door, please do not hesitate to contact Kym Pilkington at the cellars, direct line to Cellar door is; (08) 8329 4701



*Discovering local pruner James Boag tidying up the new viognier and petit verdot in the Finnis vineyard, Trott asks how the brewery is going and cops 'a thousand yard stare' in reply.*

# Finding Forrester In 'The Salopian'

For the last decade or so Wirra Wirra has had the great fortune to have one of the country's best restaurants virtually on its doorstep. Built in the 1850's the inn was a ruin due to be demolished when it was rescued by Kerry and Zanny Flannagan and launched as a restaurant in 1985. It was taken over in 1988 by Phillipa Forrester who, with the help of some great chefs and the enthusiastic patronage of many a ratbag winemaker, has made the place, and incidentally herself, into one of McLaren Vales' institutions.

Apart from being Wirra Wirra's canteen for entertaining visitors Pip caters brilliantly for many of the functions at the winery. Now, with chef Peter Hogg, Pip has also taken on the management of another institution, d'Arry's Verandah.

Peter and Pip have generously provided the following recipe, typical of the Salopians cuisine, so that adept Bellringers can whip up a repast that will justify opening a bottle of their best Wirra Wirra red, or maybe two or....quick, hide the keys to the cellar.

## Fillet Of Venison With Roasted Kalamata Olives, Spanish Onion, Garlic and Sage

4 Venison Fillets, trimmed  
3 tablespoons Olive Oil  
100 grams Kalamata Olives, pitted  
4 cloves Garlic, thinly sliced  
1 Medium Spanish Onion, quartered  
2 large sage leaves  
1 tablespoon Butter  
2 Medium Vine ripened Tomatoes, skinned and seeded  
150mls meat glaze (see recipe below)  
Italian Parsley, chopped  
Freshly ground Black Pepper

### Method

Sear/Cook the Venison in Olive Oil in a pan on the top of the stove. Cook to medium rare at the most and remove from the pan and allow to rest in a warm place. In the same pan (clean if necessary) put olives, garlic, onion and sage leaves lightly coated in olive oil, when warm add a dab of butter and freshly ground black pepper. Put the pan in a 180°C oven and roast for about 10 minutes. Remove pan from the oven and on the stovetop add the tomatoes, parsley and meat glaze and heat through.

### Assembly of Dish

Slice the rested Venison, put onto warm plates (or platter) and cover with the roasted olive sauce.



*Ex chalkie Forrester stands guard over the al fresco section of her four star tuck shop waiting for that very naughty Wirra Wirra mob to arrive for recess*

### Meat Glaze

2kgs Veal Bones	}	
2 Medium Carrots	}	Roast Together
2 Medium Onions	}	
3 Medium Tomatoes	}	
200ml Red Wine		
5 Litres Water		

Place the roasted bones and vegetables in a stockpot and cover with the water and wine. Simmer for 6 hours (do not boil; top up if necessary). Strain the stock through a fine filter. Refrigerate the liquid for 12-24 hours to allow it to settle and set. Remove any fat from the top. Place the stock back on the stove and reduce to about one litre. Taste the liquid whilst reducing.

## New Tantalising Titties For 2001

There's a collection of interesting new wines coming up later this year, as well as some changes to a few old favorites. Whilst Riesling is getting the Stelvin treatment, it is not the only innovation which Bell Ringers should look out for. We will keep you posted as the year progresses but, the following is just a taste of what is to come from our 750ml stalwarts.

**July:** Popular 'Scrubby Rise' White will be joined by a new sibling - 2000 'Scrubby Rise' Red (Shiraz- Cabernet Sauvignon- Petit Verdot.)

2001 'Hand Picked' Riesling released under Stelvin. Our new series of regional wines kicks off with the release of -2001 Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc

**August/Sept.:** 2001 'Scrubby Rise' White (Sem/SB/Chard)

and 2001 'Sexton's Acre' Unwooded Chardonnay.

**October:** The Hunt for Reds in October.....Another special release in the Vineyard Series - a 1998 Coonawarra Cabernet - Sauvignon

The 1999 'RSW' & 1999 'The Angelus',

New Regional Series  
1999 McLaren Vale Shiraz  
and 2000 McLaren Vale Grenache Shiraz,  
2000 'Church Block'

And - wait for it-at last ,the long rumoured splurgundy- 'The Anthem' a Sparkling McLaren Vale Shiraz

Apologies for teasing you so early in the year. But don't worry, July is just around the corner, and October is only 6 months away!



*Trott comes down from the mountain bearing tablets of stone and sending fear into the sinful hearts of builders and architects." I think it would look better if we shifted the whole thing 18 inches to the left....."*

# Vintage Report 2001 Of The Best

A wonderful mild but wet winter with a dry spring has made for an ideal growing season that allowed for textbook fruit formation.

With very little rain from September to December except for a little burst in November, some irrigation was required, but this allowed foliage development to be just right.

We got hammered with a record breaking hot spell in January that allowed for concentrated development in the fruit with only Sauvignon Blanc in the McLaren Vale region feeling some negative effect.

McLaren Vale whites are showing a range of quality from outstanding Chardonnay and excellent Semillon to very good Riesling.

Reds from the district are shaping up to be akin to the great vintages of 1990, 94 and 98...this one is a contender for similar standing. There have been large, even crops showing exceptional quality and concentrated varietal character. Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Grenache are all black and inky with phenomenal colour development due to the growing season and optimum yields of 3 to 4 tonnes to an acre.

The shiraz could be spectacular, huge colour and excellent flavours at a sensible 13 1/2 beaume.



*The Vintage Crew for 2001 gathers in amazement as they discover the inconveniences they have been working round is actually a new winery and not an 'installation' by some art welders. The team surrounds the Leaning Tower of Riggs performed to counteract the preponderance of perpendiculars in the new belfry. Back row LtoR: Cristiana Cantarina, Phil Le Messurier, Ben Riggs, Craig Hill and Colin Stone Front row: Annabel Ingoldby, Jack Walton, Craig Vivian, Ben Tanzer and Sam Connew. All supervised by Jesse the Labradoodle. (Absent is the Night Crew of Ben Maurice-Jones and Mark Heapy who have to get back into their coffins as soon as the sun comes up)*

Our Adelaide Hills fruit, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay are top notch! Thick, tough skins and intense varietal characteristics.

Kuitpo fruit is just starting to come in and is lining up to be the same calibre. Extremely strong varietal characters and thick skins...just have to wait and see.

Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Shiraz, Grenache, Semillon and Chardonnay

are all shining standouts!

So far 2200 tonnes has gone through the winery, 1800 of which are Wirra Wirra's. All I can say is -it's been short, fast and furious, one of the most compact vintages in memory....Thank God it is starting to tail off ! I can't wait to see what these sleeping beauties blossom into, - there's going to be some stunners.

**Ben Riggs**

## The Napa Connection

Our recently appointed distributors for the United States paid the cellars a visit just prior to vintage to see exactly what the fabled "Wirra Wirra" is all about. In disturbing American fashion it was a lightning fast tour with only three days up their sleeves to try and soak up and learn all that we have to offer. Fresh off the plane from the International Pinot Noir conference in New Zealand, Ted Reimer, the Director of International wines and James Harder, the director of Marketing for Wilson Daniels Ltd. launched themselves into the "Aussie" experience.

After a day in the cellars being inducted into the Wirra Wirra philosophy through verbal, visual and liquid pathways, the boys were lulled into a false sense of security and comfort staying at Trott's fortified compound the first night. It was our job to present the quintessential Australia of wilderness, isolation and gastronomic riches, so we arranged a close friend to take a group of us on a century old wooden river boat named the 'Fairy Queen', through the mouth of the Murray river and into the Coroong overnight.

The Coorong is a narrow, deserted stretch of water in the Murray delta, stretching for 100 kilometres, separated from the ocean by a band of massive sandhills. It is a paradise of tranquility, fish and birdlife.

A quick trek over the dunes to the thundering surf of the Southern Ocean left them awestruck. As we sat around an open fire under the stars of the Southern Cross we were doing what aboriginal Australians of the local Narrinjeri nation had been doing for 20,000 years or more - feasting on the abundance of fish and cockles. We drank some great South Australian wine and dined upon a wider commissary of local specialities such as double smoked porkchops and kangaroo prosciutto



*Timeless tranquility- fishing from 'Fairy Queen' in the Coorong wilderness as part of Wirra Wirra's lifestyle coaching for visiting Yanks.*

from Hamlets of Willunga, Kangaroo Island cheeses and mustards, olive oils and dukkah from cottage producers, to the point to true bliss.

The boys have been initiated to the tribe (Wirra Wirra's, not the Narrinjeri-which would be a lot more complicated and a bit more painful!-Ed.) and on departure assured that they will preach to the masses all their new learned 'gospel'. As the rest of their clan is soon to visit our shores, we have other miracles planned to ensure they are similarly converted.