



Source: Julian Borger, 'Nuclear agency finds US spy reports on Iran baseless', *Guardian in Sydney Morning Herald online*, 24/02/07.

Tags: food, home, plants, nostalgia

Writer/s: Patsy Vizents

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

The richer the red, the stronger the flavour. Enrichment comes from the skins over time; from the tannins. These, along with instructions on filtration and containment, were the words of wisdom passed to me by Dominic and which now I am using to make my own wine.

Like Jamshid of ancient Persia, I want to make wine that makes sad people happy, that would be beautiful in colour and could be given to all my friends who have sustained me over the years. Less benevolently, I just want to make it. I want to note the changes from the sweet, juicy fruit to the dark, flavoursome wine. I also want to know about the fermentation process, what you can and can't do, what to add and what not to add and when. And I want shiraz grapes. I want to make the wine of history, the wine of legends, I want the wine to bring forth phrases of ecstasy from those who drink it but I really want the wine of my youth that was made in the backyard of my neighbours, Dominic and Maria.

Ready for conversation, welcoming of strangers, Dom and Maria would bring out a plain dark bottle of wine, place it on the table under the grapevines, provide glasses recycled from the breakfast table, and bread and olives from their kitchen. In late summer the smell of fermenting grapes from the vine or from Dominic's shed cast a spell over me. He showed me how to check the grapes and tread them, how to sift through the mush and filter some, but not all of the twigs and skins into a barrel for the first stages of fermentation. His laboratory was simple, clean and magical.

It was Dominic who told me about Persia, about Shiraz, the original location of the shiraz grape and how the Romans perfected the wine making process, and he took pride in producing his rough but thoroughly drinkable version of shiraz wine, fondly labelled Hermitage. He brought history into everyday life and made you look at the glass and what you were drinking in a very different light. As if transported back hundreds of years, he would discuss the various processes and vintages of his youth, explain the tricks and techniques that were passed down from his father and uncles, from generations of their ancestors. It was a rich education in science and society.

Food always accompanied the drinking of Dom's Hermitage. Maria's home preserves made in their kitchen or backyard materialised on the table. Those evenings with olives, figs, bread, oil and wine have matured over the years and guided many of my own backyard landscape designs. This was what I wanted for my own vintage, an enriched memory of people and place.

Easterly winds of summer have bleached bones, scorched earth and seared vines. The grapes matured early; they are sweet, red and ripe. The call came from the vineyard in the valley that the grapes were ready, six boxes of them. I prepared the place of making: cleaning and lining the floor, sorting the bottles, the barrel and bringing

chairs. This would be a morning of great activity. My niece Chisca agreed to tread the grapes and I would prepare her feet, stack the grapes and filter the juice into the barrel. The shiraz grapes were picked the day before I collected them and they were perfect.

Clean feet.
Select music.
Position chairs.
Grapes ready.
Begin.

Chisca and I got into the rhythm of her easy, strong treading. Her toes turned purple through the process. I sorted, piled and filtered. We talked about her new university course, her moving away from home, the grapes, the wine process, the boyfriend, the friends she will miss, the year she had in Spain and the new year ahead. Summer is almost over but it is still very warm. Will the wine ferment easily, too fast, too slow? Will the grapes be sweet enough? What's the difference between white and red wine making? How much wine will come from six boxes of grapes?

All is unknown, all is in the hands of Dionysus. I am confident that I have done the right preparations and have extracted juice and colour from the skins, infusing the wine with red and purple and of course the tannins will have been released from the seeds, skins and stems of the pulverised bunches. Dom explained that the longer you leave the tannins in, the more robust the flavour, the more enriched the wine. Creating something so powerful from something so sweet and generous as the bunch of grapes is a wonder. Dom's Hermitage changed every year according to the amount of tannin and sugar available in the grapes, even though he used the same grape vine, the vintages were always slightly different. Would I be able to create a drinkable version myself with only the barest of instructions from my great winemaker friend? My memory of his activities is my confidence booster.

At the end of the grape treading morning there were 40 litres of wine juice in the barrel and a good 'skin' of tannin-containing debris sat on the top of the juice. I dutifully pushed the skin down through the juice twice daily for two weeks or 'until the colour was good' which was how Dom decided the timing. The second stage of the process involves syphoning the juice from the first barrel into the demijohn, discarding the skins and hard debris. Extracting the juice is quite difficult and it is only now I see that I could have used a barrel with a tap at the bottom for this process. Syphoning will leave a deficit of wine below the skins that may not be removed easily.

Perhaps with the remains I will make a libation to Dionysus for a favourable vintage.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Patsy Vizents.