

FROM CAMEL VALLEY VINEYARD

(January 2010)

A prolonged wet period in late November and early December made a miserable start to winter pruning this year. Day after day of getting drenched wasn't pleasant, with fingers soaked and cold from touching the wet vines. Fortunately we persevered and got a few thousand vines done during the rain and gales, because far, far worse weather was to come.

Incredibly we've endured a second consecutive year of arctic weather, with day after day of sub zero temperatures, snow and ice. I think it's been even worse than last year, but we've soldiered on, enjoying the occasional sunny day which has lifted the temperature and spirits. Which is worse – pruning in the wet or cold? I'd say the cold, but then I feel the cold terribly even wearing layers and layers of clothes.

A welcome respite is a trip to Verona in Italy in early January to receive an award for our sparkling wine from the Bollicine del Mondo – World Sparkling Wine Competition organised and run by Italy's wine magazine Euposia. Camel Valley Pinot Noir Brut 2007 featured in the top 10, also winning the competition's award for 'Best of the Rest of the World.' There were 52 entries, including many prestigious – and extremely expensive – Champagnes, and a 2003 Nyetimber from Sussex was the overall winner, showing that English wines can compete on the world stage.

Now in its second year, Bollicine del Mondo attracts sparkling wines from around the globe as a competition open only to traditional method, traditional varietal wines. Last year Camel Valley gained Silver in the competition, second only to Champagne Bollinger. The competition is sponsored by Banca Popolare di Verona (Banco Popolare Group is one of the biggest banks in Italy); the Italian wine trade Fair Vinitaly; the Italian Association of Sommeliers and Verona Confcommercio.

The wines were tasted blind by a panel of oenologists, winemakers, sommeliers and journalists led by AIS Veneto President, Mr Dino Marchi. The competition is based at the wonderful Bottega del Vino in Verona, which Bob and I were fortunate to visit last year while we were on holiday in Verona. Established in 1890 it is a wine lover's dream, with over 3,400 different wines on the list, many available by the glass, and a restaurant serving local fare. Some people visit Verona just for Bottega del Vino's wine list. If you're staying in the city it's hard not to go every evening to try the delicious wines.

Last year competition organiser and journalist, Carlo Rossi, visited the vineyard during English Wine Week in June to present our award to us. He was most impressed with the quality of food he ate in Cornwall during his visit, particularly the local cheeses, and this is praise indeed from an Italian gourmet. This year it's our turn to travel to receive the award, and it will make a welcome break from the pruning and the cold – if the weather doesn't stop us getting there!