

Tyson Stelzer, Wednesday, February 20, 2008

Old Barossa Vines Moved to New Vineyard

Successful 18-month-long process of digging up, moving and replanting century-old vines has caught the attention of Australia's big producers



Langmeil Estate

Carl Lindner used a custom-built spade digger to remove 140-year-old vines.

What do you do when your vineyard is sold for a housing development? You rip out the vines and replant elsewhere. But one Barossa Valley winery, [Langmeil](#), believed that its 140-year-old vines were too valuable to rip out, and decided to try a transplant rather than a replant. Next month, Langmeil will harvest fruit from its 140-year-old Shiraz vines, 18 months after the operation to dig up, move and replant each vine from the block began.

The transplanting operation got underway in 2006, after the vineyard owner sold the land. "We tried to convince the owners not to sell the vineyard," explained Langmeil sales and marketing manager James Lindner. "We tried everything—even tried to get them drunk—but it just didn't work! We looked at those 140-year-old vines and thought, 'We can't just burn them all on the fire.' So we asked if we could move the vines to a fertile patch on the banks of the North Para River," he explained. The new site is approximately 800 meters from the old one.

Each of the 320 vines was painstakingly moved one at a time. The vines were first sprayed with vegetable oil to reduce evaporation, and then ground was broken to free the roots. Langmeil founder Carl Lindner used a custom-built spade digger on the back of a tractor, designed to break

off the taproot and dig out the vine. Taking a large root ball with it, the same machine replanted each vine in the new site. Any vines that didn't survive the process were replaced.

"It took a lot of time and a lot of patience," said Lindner at the conclusion of the process. "We didn't know what was going to happen but it was definitely worth the chance." He attributed the 85 percent survival rate to the large root clump removed with each vine.



Langmeil Estate

The new vineyard is called the Orphan Bank.

Fruit from 2007 was cut off to encourage the vines to regrow their roots in the new site. As the second vintage approaches, Lindner reported that the vines are holding up well. "We will be keeping a close eye on the fruit, and see what the result will be once it's picked and on the weigh bridge. We will assess it every year, as we do in every vineyard. Our objective is to get this vineyard to survive and be healthy."

At the same time, Linder is trying to remain realistic. "We understand that we can't recreate the full benefits of the vines' age, and it will take some years for them to come into balance and for the roots to fully develop," he explained. "It might even take 10 or 15 years before the fruit is of sufficient quality for our Orphan Bank Shiraz." As the roots establish themselves over the next few years, Lindner postulates that

there might be more seasonal variation in the fruit than usual.

What is clear already is that the process has been more successful than anyone expected—and other growers are taking notice. A team from [Penfolds](#), the winery that produces [Grange](#), visited to observe the transplanting process, Lindner said. Australia has some of the oldest producing vines in the world, planted in locations increasingly under threat from housing development. So Penfolds' interest could signal more vine transplants for Australia in the future.

"We've now set up a reliable system of transplanting so there is a proven option for people," Lindner pointed out. "If it inspires others to give it a go, then it's a bloody good thing. If you can do it here, you can do it anywhere in the world. But only ever as a last resort—we fought hard to keep the vines in the ground in the first place."