

# Lairds at large: the '10 retrospect

It is January already, and time to pause (briefly) and reflect on what has been a very good year for the Lairds – if perhaps a little over-full. We are all hale and hearty, which is something for which we are very grateful. We have provided the year in a nutshell, should you have little time to spare ...

With apologies to Flanders and Swann for our rework of their “Song of the Weather” – our year was spent as follows...

## January in Oz is hot, Su is wielding her paint pot

were busy repainting and rearranging the kitchen and living areas, spurred on by the thought that there would be multiple visitors later in the year.

## February is hot too, But not in Wien for Rod and Su

## March finds Rod in lots of snow Su can't wait to homeward go



The Black Camel

January is the traditional month for veging out on the sofa and watching the tennis on the telly. Of course not so at Chez Laird – we were busy repainting and rearranging the kitchen and living areas, spurred on by the thought that there would be multiple visitors later in the year.

February is when everyone goes back to work just in time to enjoy the inevitable heatwaves. We waved good-bye to all of that and took off for a week in (a little bit snowy but largely cold and dull) Vienna, followed by two weeks of skiing in St. Anton with Rod's ski buddies (Su's brother David, Rod's sister Susan and Ken). Vienna was gorgeous, its museums, cafés and restaurants a treat. The schnitzel at Figlmuller's was definitely bigger than your head (and plate) – and the dress-sense of the maitre-d'Hotel at the Zum Schwarzen Kameel (Black Camel if you couldn't otherwise guess) was, shall we say, “unique”. St. Anton is clearly the destination for young party animals intent on drinking (and screaming) the night through ... and staggering onto the slopes the next morning ... As March rolled in, we managed to drink just a little, probably eat too much – and even fit in some skiing!

March is normally the gradual slide from dry summer into dry autumn. Not so this year – it happened with a bang – an enormous storm ravaged Melbourne, hailstones broke windows and flattened gardens and torrential rain flooded homes. Just in time for us to come home. We found the back garden gone and much of the front garden shredded, so most of the month was spent cleaning up and replanting. Su's nice new car sprouted cute new dimples – and we blessed our excessive insurance coverage. Su also spent much time doing reconnaissance missions around Melbourne as she tried to put a programme together for her international quilting friends.

## April brings out Su's green thumbs; Renovations – Easter bums

In April, the Easter holidays are usually a time to potter around the garden and gorge ourselves on home-made Hot Cross Buns. An activity sometimes carried out furtively in the kitchen – but more commonly with lots of ravenous friends who also seem to make the bubbly disappear at a great rate of knots. Between bun baking (by Su) and bun mampfing (predominantly by Rod and others), the “free moments” saw more frenetic activity in the garden, furious painting of more rooms, and the start of the demolition of The Great Wall of Boxes that has been sulking on the front porch. Anyone who has either moved a lot, or had children moving out and back in again, will know what we are talking about ...

## Drizzle breaks the drought in May tanks are full – so that's OK!

## June's cold in Oz so off we trot back to Europe where it's not

May was wet although unseasonably warm, so much gardening was needed to control the jungle. Rod also took a day trip to Sydney to visit an old friend, John, who is running the world's most exciting research project on implant technologies. James tagged along. Rod provided some consulting inputs while John and his team checked



Tilly inspects Su's painting



The Two Su(e)s



Tits & Bums at Chelsea

out James – with the happy result that James returned to Melbourne with an internship offer. Exhausted from all this to-ing and fro-ing, we escaped to view other people’s attempts to control would-be jungles, first in northern England, with Mary and Sheila, where we visited Bodnant in Wales and Tatton Park near Manchester on the first (and only, we suspect) warm weekend of the year. The profusion and perfection of the blooms was “blooming marvellous”. After a rail detour over the Pennines (as some Bogan-chav had thrown some steel over the main line electricals), we found ourselves in muggy London. Refreshing bubbles with our lovely hosts Jane & Jules restored our energies – which were much needed for our major challenge; the Chelsea Flower Show. A prodigious event, with lavish exhibits ranging from the sublime, through the whimsical to the one egregiously awful.



France + Food + Friends = Fabulous!

A quick trip across the Channel (well, under it), brought us to both June and France. There we revelled in the magnificent gardens of first Normandy and then central France. We were briefly again blessed with the company of J&J as we ploughed (figuratively) through 2-3 gardens a day. Fortunately this “arduous burden” was offset by our tenure in a series of lovely Châteaux – and some extraordinary food. We finally wound our way south towards Bordeaux, catching up with Peter and Inge at their modest abode in Marthon (aka the local Château, which probably needs a small forest to fuel the fireplaces this cold winter). We also stayed with our “dual nationality” (French and Cockney) friends, Yo & Gerry on the Atlantic coast. Gerry introduced us to the mysteries



Su wondering whether she wants this big a garden (Château du Champs de Bataille)

of French car clubs and their passion

for the “Apero”; it seems any time is drinking time when you’re in France and behind the wheel. We spent a weekend with the club members visiting the Gers a.k.a. “Home of Armagnac”. Seems they’ve a bit of a glut now since people have gone off the fortified tittle; but nice bottles of the “real” stuff were still expensive. A quick TGV trip to Paris provided the opportunity to catch our breaths before rushing home to “finish” the house. (And Rod to start digesting the 10,000 images that came back with us.) During our absence, James prepared himself for his move to Sydney by getting his driving licence (a major milestone!) and removing a few more boxes from the Great Wall.

## James new job starts in July apple of his parent’s eye

Fresh off the plane Rod found himself driving to Sydney with James; Su’s old station wagon “full to dolly’s wax” with James’ kit. This, nearly 33 years to the day after Rod drove to Sydney to stay with

cousins Jim & Liz preparatory to starting *his* first real job in biomedical engineering. Despite our children vowing never to follow in their parent’s footsteps, the world has some delicious ironies for James was doing just that – with Jim & Liz kind enough to put him up too as he searched for his own digs.

With still the dining room “Makeover” to go and part of the Great Wall still on the front porch (it grew a bit as some of James’ junk moved from his last digs – but not to Sydney), Su gave up the attempt to tame the house as Ornella and Marco arrived from Italy. This provided the opportunity to enjoy some of the wonderful Yarra Valley wines and food together before they disappeared into the “interior” in a tiny car. (Maybe it just looked tiny since Marco is so tall?). Somewhere in all this, Rod also got started on some client work, which has trickled on through the balance of the year.

## August sees Rod in cute tights While Su slaves both days and nights

## For September's Quilting gals; Global club of drinking pals.

Su exhausted herself in the balance of the month putting the finishing touches to the quilting programme – just in time as 16 friends from the International Quilters of Düsseldorf arrived at the beginning of September. This “posse” represents the roughly 30% of the total IQD membership that



Party Animals

assembles itself somewhere around the globe for an action-packed five days of fun and frivolity. This time it was held in leafy Kallista, in the hills on the outskirts of Melbourne. Word has it there was much eating, drinking and making merry – as well as sightseeing (wineries again; no surprise) and shopping.

## October's wet we all agree Su's Garden is on TV

There was definitely one quilt made, since Rod took a photo of it. (So it must be true) The celebrations continued with a trip to Sydney for one of our member's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party. The party animals scaled the heights of the harbour bridge, the morning after the big party bash; a tribute to their fortitude (and recuperative powers).

In October, Su's focus was on getting the garden ready for the November “Australian Open Garden Scheme” (AOGS) opening. Efforts needed considerable acceleration to ready the flora for its debut on national television – the ABC's “Gardening Australia” show... (You can find the segment [here](#)) Rod's clients kept him out of Su's hair – with work for the entity James is now working for being particularly engaging and exciting. John and his team (which now includes a very happy James), are developing technologies and therapies which will revolutionise pain management. You'll hear a lot about this as the business “grows up”; and James is very lucky to be in on the “ground floor”.

## Melbourne Cup runs in November Open Garden we remember

Over the past few years we have had a burst of high summer in November – enough to kill the tender young shoots and brown off the lawn. This year every second weekend saw torrential rain and freezing temperatures. By strokes of good luck, we had a fine day for our annual Melbourne Cup BBQ – and the weekend of the AOGS garden opening was sunny and warm, for which our helpers were especially thankful. The Melbourne Cup provides an opportunity for ladies to wear high heels and silly hats, BBQ's across the nation to be pulled out of winter hibernation – and for the population generally to skive off work. How Australian indeed; and we certainly were not letting the side down.

Su's Garden opening was a fantastic success, with nearly 600 SOB's (Souls Over Boundary) over the weekend and lots of sales of plants as well as Su's ceramics

The National Gallery of Victoria again hosted the Renaissance Dance group, with four performances through August. Against a backdrop of 17<sup>th</sup> century art, the group did look rather fetching. Any excuse for dressing up and prancing about I guess...



Renaissance Rod



ABC's Gardening Australia film crew yuck it up Chez Lairds



and textiles. (And a handful of Rod's photo-cards). Lots of money raised for our favourite charity and much fun had by all.

**December Katja moves house then: Gosh -- January again!** December is always frenetic, despite our best intentions to prepare well beforehand. Su, above all, needed a bit of a breather from the exhausting conference + garden event marathon of the preceding

months. By now, James has settled into a highly valued role in his research team – and has actually organised the commencement of his PhD. (In truth he's been working on the material for months, but can only start formally in early 2011.) Katja is finishing up an arduous but on the whole excellent year; taken as a "gap" between her first and second Uni years. She's worked the year in a variety of jobs (though resigned from a call centre where she was dinged for being too nice to customers), predominantly in the Melbourne's "cult coffee" sector. She's also worked hard at her art, building a *folio* and *reputation* along the way – culminating in a number of significant commissions and works in 3 different exhibitions. During the year she moved from a Class 1 dump (roof falling in) in the suburbs to a Class 2 dump (dysfunctional housemates) in trendy Carlton. While the trendy Uni precinct adjacent to the CBD was favourable, the housemates eventually became unbearable – culminating in Katja's decision to move house the evening before Christmas Eve. A typical parental challenge; "drop everything you're doing and spend all your time helping me immediately". But the domestic transmogrification proceeded smoothly and she is now happily ensconced in a semi in Yarraville, waiting to hear if she can transfer to a different (and more challenging) art degree, while continuing to earn her keep working at her favourite *coffee-cult-café* in the city.



The Three Wise People come from afar; Katja, James and Moorey (their best mate)

Christmas found the family very happily together. James left his new lady love to come down from Sydney. Katja joined us from exotic Yarraville – along with her housemate; who just happens to be James best friend. We all enjoyed Xmas eve and morn together very much. And yes, Santa did come for us all...

2010 clocked over into 2011 painlessly, with the help of a few wonderful friends and a considerable quantity of excellent French bubbles. The interstitial quiet time between old and new working years is a traditional time for most Australians to a) hit the sales and b) relax and catch up with friends, read books and do stuff that you

just did not find time for the previous year. We skipped a) and went straight to b). This included getting this newsletter together as a joint effort – as well as Su getting stuck into some heavy duty dress-making and Rod clearing some of the backlog of unprocessed photos from our Europe trip. The "Austria Book" will hit the presses when Su finishes polishing the text, and the "Great Garden Gadabout" will take some months more – as the image sorting is still not finished let alone getting the text together... So much to do, so little time as Astrid always says... More can be found at our *joint*, *Su*, *Rod*, *Snaps* and *F&F<sup>1</sup>* sites – when we update them!



<sup>1</sup> Note: you can click on italicised text to take you to the related web site