

SUSIE & PETER

NEW ZEALAND
WINES
OF THE YEAR

2026
MASTERS OF WINE

Introduction

Welcome to our New Zealand Wines of the Year 2026!

The *hongi* is a traditional greeting among the Māori people of New Zealand, or Aotearoa. Two people briefly lean forward, touching noses and foreheads together. The idea is to share the breath of life in a symbolic show of unity.

In the same spirit, we invite you to lean into this report, and breathe the scented air of New Zealand wine. It's a category that has suffered from many challenges and misconceptions over the years. And yet it has also proved to be the most remarkable success story, having evolved at warp speed by wine standards, and now maturing in ways we're only just starting to appreciate.

For these reasons and many more, now is exactly the right time to be re-considering the state of New Zealand wine. This is something we are very excited to be doing in depth in this report and our dedicated Wine Blast podcast episode on the same topic. We hope you enjoy both.

Why this, why now?

Although vines were first planted in New Zealand in the early 1800s, it wasn't until the mid-20th century that wine really started to establish a toe-hold in the country. Even then, much of it was fortified pastiches or low-grade 'raisin' wine in a culture that championed beer (or abstinence – the temperance movement was strong here).

New Zealand's modern wine era as we know it today only really got going in the 1970s and 80s, turbo-charged by the discovery then rapid expansion of the Marlborough region, largely on the back of its astonishingly vivid style of Sauvignon Blanc. Extrovert and unmistakeable, Kiwi 'Savvy' rapidly became the engine room of New Zealand wine, with serious Pinot Noir (particularly from Central Otago and Wairarapa) later joining the party, together with a handful of other key varieties and regions.

Since the heady days of moving fast and breaking things in the 90s and noughties, challenges have arisen. This was captured perhaps most strikingly in the image of grapes left unharvested on the vine in 2025 because of over-supply due to falling global demand, a cost-of-living crisis and adverse trading conditions like tariffs in the US and rising taxes elsewhere.

A nagging perception has also emerged that New Zealand has somehow stalled in its momentum, defined by an identikit, paint-by-numbers style of Sauvignon and dominated by corporate wine behemoths. Just not the new, cool kid on the block any more.

But this is a fundamental misconception. Sure, there are challenges, and some relate to these very points. The reality, though, is that every wine industry has its growing pains, and New Zealand wine has never been more diverse, more nuanced, more rewarding and more exciting than it is right now.

So to overlook this hotbed of innovation and quality simply because there are other things going on in the world – is a grave mistake. In fact we'd suggest you do just the opposite. We'd urge wine lovers to re-visit New Zealand, or explore further, just as we're relishing doing. In this report and associated podcast, we explain why.

Talking point: PRICE vs VALUE

New Zealand wine doesn't come cheap. The good stuff never has. This is a far-flung nation that is far from the cheapest place to live and do business. They pay people properly. Particularly in the wine industry, they make a point of farming responsibly and taking care of their patch on the planet. They aim to be profitable and sustainable.

So it's rare to find bargain basement New Zealand wine. For example, in the UK, 2025 figures show the average retail price for a bottle of New Zealand wine was £8.05 (versus £6.80 for the wider wine category). That's a price premium of nearly 20%.

That's bad news if you have a limited budget to spend on wine. But other countries and regions have economies of scale that most New Zealand producers struggle to match. New Zealand makes around 1% of world wine - a drop in the ocean. Is it bad to therefore aim for quality in the bottle, with a price to match?

What's more, we'd argue that, while they aren't cheap, New Zealand wines by and large do represent very decent value in the wider context. They rarely charge silly prices - often we're talking £15-30, sometimes a little more. And compared to the competition - Pouilly-Fumé or Sancerre or Sonoma in Sauvignon Blanc, Burgundy or Oregon or Tasmania in Pinot Noir and Chardonnay - these are very fair prices for the quality.

In this context, we'd highlight our 'Value' awards in this selection. It's not about being the cheapest - it's about delivering the most satisfaction for the price in a global wine context. And New Zealand most definitely can and does deliver on this front.

Talking point: SAUVIGNON WONKS

Not everyone likes Sauvignon Blanc. (It's been called 'the gin and tonic of wine,' as well as far more unrepeatable things.) And some people complain that Kiwi Savvy not only dominates plantings (with nearly two thirds of the entire national vineyard), it has also been debased by big players making pale imitations of Sauvignon at knock-down prices which undermine the category.

You can understand these views. But they miss the bigger picture.

Yes, big corporations are involved in making New Zealand (particularly Marlborough) Sauvignon Blanc. With the potential for high yields, strong consumer recognition and swift sales, it's an attractive category for those seeking to make a fast buck.

And yet that's only one side of Sauvignon Blanc (and typically one end of the market). Dig a little deeper, and there's no such thing as 'New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc' any more. These days, there's a whole panoply of Sauvignon styles emerging from Aotearoa, from lower-alcohol to sweet and even sparkling. And that's just the beginning.

At the serious end, forward-thinking producers are using techniques like hand picking, whole bunch pressing, ambient yeast ferments and barrel ageing to excellent effect. What's more, despite what its naysayers claim, Sauvignon is a variety, when well handled, that absolutely can express site and terroir nuance.

Within Marlborough, comparing Awatere with Southern Valleys with Wairau Plains with Dillons Point is a delicious education. This trend has introduced notable diversity to the better wines, something that will only grow over time. As winemaker Ben Glover says of his region, the aim has been to, 'rip the beige quilt off Marlborough.' Blandness no more, in other words.

There's even a voluntary organisation, Appellation Marlborough Wine (AMW), which obliges producers to adhere to a code of conduct in order to display the logo on their bottles. (Many of the wines below are AMW-certified wines, and not just Sauvignon Blancs, either.) Look out for the badge on the labels. It means the wines are 100% Marlborough-grown grapes from sustainable-certified vineyards, bottled in New Zealand, tasted and certified by a panel of independent experts.

This ever-growing expression of regionality, and drive for integrity, isn't unique to Sauvignon, of course. But it is a definite trend and perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of modern New Zealand wine. It's a story very much still in the telling, and one well worth all of our attention. Take a look at our Sauvignon Wines of the Year below, and you'll see what we mean. Even better, buy some of them, and enjoy the report with a glass in hand...

Talking point: GO CHARDONNAY!

Wine lovers tend to like a good Chardonnay. Be it Burgundy, coastal California, Margaret River...there's a reason why it's one of, if not the most planted white wine grape variety in the world. When it's good, it can make some of the greatest white wine on the planet..

In the old days, New Zealand didn't really get Chardonnay. The wines were...decidedly underwhelming. That's if they even got a look-in next to the ubiquitous Sauvignon Blanc.

Happily, the odd pioneer started appearing (Kumeu River being the prime example). And then came the turning point, somewhere between the turn of the millennium and COVID, when the Kiwis finally got Chardonnay. When a groundswell of quality producers moved beyond the lemon-curd-butterscotch, sweet-and-sour spectrum and started to produce wines of savoury complexity and chiselled beauty, all still centred around New Zealand's typically bright acidity.

It's a rapid evolution that's characteristic of New Zealand's restless spirit of innovation and relentless resilience in the face of adversity. These days, our cellar is full of New Zealand Chardonnay. It's a world-beater. The wines aren't cheap but, compared to the competition, boy do they offer sensational value (not to mention consistency, especially given the screw-cap closures).

These days, when people ask us about Burgundy, talk often turns rapidly to New Zealand Chardonnay. (And Pinot, but that's another matter.) In terms of price, reliability, excitement value, quality...it's hard to beat New Zealand Chardonnay right now. It has a very bright future and we'll be hearing a lot more about it in the next 50 years. So don't miss out.

Talking point: HOW SUSTAINABLE?

A lot of work goes into making New Zealand wine. Although it's a wonderfully sunny place, it can also be cold, or windy, or wet. And adverse conditions are becoming more common as extreme weather events occur with more regularity – the intense rains and winds of early 2026 brought back all-too-recent memories of the devastation caused by Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023.

But Kiwis are nothing if not resilient and innovative. They're also proud of their patch. Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand (SWNZ), one of the pioneering sustainability schemes in the wine world, launched in 1995 with just five participating wineries. It's since gained serious traction, with 98% of New Zealand's vineyard now certified. It's the highest coverage for any national industry certification programme – and a statement if ever there was one.

Sure, the scheme isn't without its critics. Some say it sets the bar low to be certified. But being sustainable is just as much a journey as it is an end destination. And it's clear that New Zealanders are world leaders in sustainability, and this is something that is more than just window dressing. From what we see from the good producers, it informs all aspects of the way they grow, make and sell their wine.

Is it perfect? No, but then very few human activities are cost-free in a sustainability sense. Is there more that can be done to make New Zealand wine sustainable? Absolutely.

But as a wine scene, we reckon it's right up there as an example to the rest of the world. And that's worth celebrating.

So what's this New Zealand Wines of the Year thing all about?

We adore New Zealand wine. We drink bucket loads of it. We've visited and toured the wine regions, met the top producers, we've had a family wedding out there, we've worked with the stuff and played with the stuff, we're in touch with its key wine folk and pay close attention to emerging trends.

After we launched our Wine Blast podcast in 2020, its immediate global success caught us a bit by surprise. (It's since gone on to top one million downloads, with listeners in 200 countries.) One format that particularly caught listeners' attention was our Wines of the Year – so we decided to roll this out on a regional basis. And New Zealand, being a firm house favourite, was a natural choice.

It's also timely. We've been feeling (and hearing) that New Zealand wine has been struggling to communicate just how diverse and exciting it is right now. It's also been challenging to get those more progressive wines into people's glasses, to give them a taste of how compelling and rewarding New Zealand wine today can be.

No wonder many New Zealand producers are concerned for the future. We share their frustration. And that's why we decided to do something about it.

How does it all work?

We started by assembling a rough hitlist of wineries and commercially available wines that, from a good deal of applied experience, we thought would be interesting to taste.

With support from New Zealand Winegrowers, more than 200 bottles of wine were assembled, which we tasted in London in November 2025.

From that line-up, we chose the best, most exciting wines to feature as our New Zealand Wines of the Year. Those are the wines that appear in this report.

What does it mean to be a Wine of the Year?

It means they're special. They're worth buying and enjoying. Without exception, these are wines we commend to you.

The selection process is rigorous, as you'd expect from two Masters of Wine with different tastes and perspectives but equally high standards.

Every Wine of the Year is tasted repeatedly, from multiple bottles, and we deliberate over each and every one of them.

In short, they all come with our seal of approval.

Just how good are these wines?

Very. We don't put an artificial cap on the number of wines that can be Wines of the Year – but within our selection, quality is paramount.

To put this into more objective terms, in our tasting, we score all wines out of 100. (As we would in a competition – with 86-89 roughly equating to a bronze medal, 90-94 a silver medal, and 95+ a gold medal.)

A wine has to have a consensus score of minimum 93 to be a Wine of the Year. That's a high bar. So we're talking the crème de la crème here.

How important are the scores?

As important as you want them to be.

We're not big fans of scores. They give the impression of an absolute judgement, a mathematical certainty that's replicable and definitive. That's just not true.

Taste is inherently subjective, and there is no such thing as a conclusive score for something that will mean different things to different people, as well as change over time in the bottle.

That said, scores can be helpful, as long as they're used in the right way.

The scores here are intended as a quick-reference guide to our consensus view on the wines. Think of them as a user-friendly indication that helps communicate our considered opinion on where a wine sits not just in the context of the New Zealand wine hierarchy but also in the broader context of global wine quality.

It's worth noting that our scores do take pricing into account, hence wines offering great value are likely to score that bit higher.

But the scores are not just about us. They're about you, too.

Ultimately, we'd love these scores to act as an invitation for you to explore New Zealand wine more widely. Or for them to initiate a discussion or thought-process that you might not otherwise have had. (And no, we don't always expect you to agree with us.)

The one thing we don't want our scores to do is hinder you from forming your own views on any given wine or producer. That's entirely your call.

What's our personal preference profile?

This is worth mentioning, for context.

We tend to favour wines that are refreshing and balanced. Wines that work well with food. Wines that have savoury appeal rather than just simplistic flavours of sweet fruit or creamy oak.

We like wines that pique our interest, that stimulate debate, that speak of where they come from. Wine is the thing that motivates us professionally and excites us personally. We don't have room in our lives for boring wines. We like wines that keep us coming back for another glass.

One pretty consistent feature of New Zealand wines is their fresh acidity and naturally bright flavours. This is the result of a relatively cool climate with high sunlight hours and strong UV radiation levels. This kind of style – refreshing, characterful, rarely high in alcohol – is right up our street.

About this report

This report sits alongside the dedicated New Zealand Wines of the Year 2026 episode on our Wine Blast podcast. (You can find this on all major audio platforms, from Apple Podcasts to Spotify, YouTube and beyond.)

On that podcast, we hear intriguing opinions and insights from some of the star wine figures in the New Zealand wine firmament. We also throw our own tuppence into the pot, giving an overview on the current Kiwi wine scene and our take on the key trends.

What we can't do on the podcast is list all our Wines of the Year. That's where this report comes in.

Here, you can find details of all the top awards, plus a comprehensive listing of all producers and wines both alphabetically and by score.

The body of the report is made up of tasting notes for every one of our New Zealand Wines of the Year 2026. We've tried to keep it readable and engaging rather than one long list of fruit salad descriptors and arcane wine lingo.

The tasting notes are arranged by style and variety. We've tended to go for the jugular within each category so whites come first, starting with Chardonnay, then Sauvignon Blanc, then Pinot Gris, Riesling and Other Whites.

This is followed by Sparkling, Rosé, then reds, primarily Pinot Noir with a few Other Reds at the end.

Within each section, wines are ordered by descending score (ie most exciting wines first). When scores are the same, listing is in alphabetical order (unless in the very rare event where we feel one of the same scoring wines is marginally better than the others).

The Award Winners

The final stage of our tasting is always the most intriguing – deciding on the top awards.

Yes, we crunch the numbers and some things fall neatly into place. But other times we have to go through a protracted (let's be honest: heated) discussion before we can make a final call.

Either way, these are our top award winners from our New Zealand Wines of the Year 2026.

Best Producer	Pegasus Bay
Best Winemaker	Matt Thomson
Top Red Wine	Two Paddocks Pinot Noir 2023
Top White Wine	Greywacke Chardonnay 2023
Top Sauvignon Blanc	Dog Point Sauvignon Blanc 2024
Top Rosé Wine	Dancing Water Pinot Noir Rosé 2024
Top Sparkling Wine	No.1 Family Estate No.1 Reserve NV
Best Value White	Villa Maria Reserve Coastal Awatere Sauvignon Blanc 2024
Best Value Rosé	te Pā Signature Series Rosé 2025
Best Value Red	Hunter's Pinot Noir 2024
White Discovery	Ata Rangi Chenin Blanc 2024
Red Discovery	Akitu A2 Pinot Noir 2021
Innovation Wine	Domaine Rewa The French Potter Series Pinot Gris 2023
Innovation Producer	Te Whare Rā Wines

This is a quite brilliant line-up of producers, winemakers and wines. With some great stories attached.

Pegasus Bay is a consistently outstanding producer in North Canterbury with a great story. Founder Ivan Donaldson got the wine bug so badly that he started making wine in between seeing patients as a neurologist – and press-ganged his family into helping out. Riesling is its largest production (unique in New Zealand wine) but a wide range of varieties flourish here, including Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, with fair prices attached. The house style, according to Ed Donaldson, is, 'everything dialled up a bit,' and we can confirm that

the wines are just sensational across the range. For this reason, they more than deserve their Best Producer award.

When it comes to winemaking, Matt Thomson does outstanding work. Not just with his own Blank Canvas brand but also historically in the region, and with his consultancy work. (He also works outside New Zealand, having totted up a total of 66 vintages so far across both hemispheres.) What's more, Matt is a tireless champion for New Zealand wine. Based on all of this, and his results in this selection, Matt was the obvious choice for Winemaker of the Year.

As for the individual wine awards, there's more explanation in the main body of the report when it comes to each wine. But we'd throw in a couple of more general observations here.

Firstly, we'd love to see more high-quality sparkling wine from New Zealand. It clearly can be done (the likes of No.1 Family Estate and others have proved that). Sure, it's not as profitable or easy as making Sauvignon Blanc. But it could be a very valuable string to New Zealand's bow in the future (and as champagne, for example, becomes ever pricier).

As we've said above, Chardonnay is currently on fire in New Zealand and we expect to see an ever-greater focus on this grape variety in the future. Pinot Noir works beautifully across New Zealand, and the fine-tuning process is coming along very well indeed. Watch out Burgundy, is all we can say.

Finally, value. We deliberated whether to give these awards or not, given New Zealand wine usually comes with a premium price point. But good value isn't just about being cheap, and time and again we found ourselves reflecting during the tasting on how these wines offered excellent value versus the global competition. So these are awards that need to be taken in context.

We also thought long and hard about giving a Sauvignon Blanc our Best Value White award. Would it send the wrong message given that there's a perception cheap Kiwi Savvy from big companies risks undermining the hard work of more serious, terroir-focused producers?

But our choice of Best Value White, while it's made by New Zealand's biggest producer, is far from being cheap, bland Sauvignon. Quite the opposite: it's a wine that speaks eloquently of its place (Awatere). Ultimately, it's a wine that delivers excellent bang for buck, and one we'd happily recommend as a Sauvignon that over-delivers at its price. And that's exactly what we want to be doing with our value awards: flagging up bottles that are pleasant surprises.

Vintage summaries

2025: A warm, dry spring saw good fruit set. Cooler, wetter conditions in the early summer rattled nerves before benign conditions (warm, dry days and cool nights) set in over autumn. Bumper yields saw some grapes left unharvested given stocks were high due to slow sales. The best growers limited production (some dropped half their fruit), put in the work and waited for full ripeness. The best results are excellent – but there is variability and dilution too. Choose with care. *[374m litres produced off 42,520 hectares (estimated)]*

2024: One of the best vintages in recent memory, described by one producer as, 'nirvana'. An early, small harvest, except in Central and North Otago, saw yields down by up to 40%. Much of the country suffered from drought conditions and summer heat but a cooler autumn together with chilly nights saw good acid retention. Many delicious wines to be had. *[284m litres produced off 41,628 hectares]*

2023: Another La Niña year in which the headlines were written by Cyclone Gabrielle, which wreaked devastation across the North Island including wine regions like Hawke's Bay, Gisborne and Northland, with damage estimated at NZ\$15 billion. But the impact was localised and some regions, including much of the South Island, escaped the worst of it and actually experienced a decent vintage, albeit with low yields (and Central Otago even

suffered water shortages). Lighter wines from the North Island, with whites better than reds. Lower yields in much of the South Island giving fresh, elegant styles. [361m litres produced off 41,991 hectares]

2022: A challenging La Niña year that tested growers' patience, with a cool spring and rainy, disease-beset summer. Yields were up, quality variable but some highlights. [383m litres produced off 41,304 hectares]

2021: Drought was an issue across the country, giving small but high-quality yields of quite concentrated fruit. [266m litres produced off 40,949 hectares]

2020: The COVID vintage – generally decent quality albeit variable. Central Otago had its coolest growing season on record. [329m litres produced off 39,934 hectares]

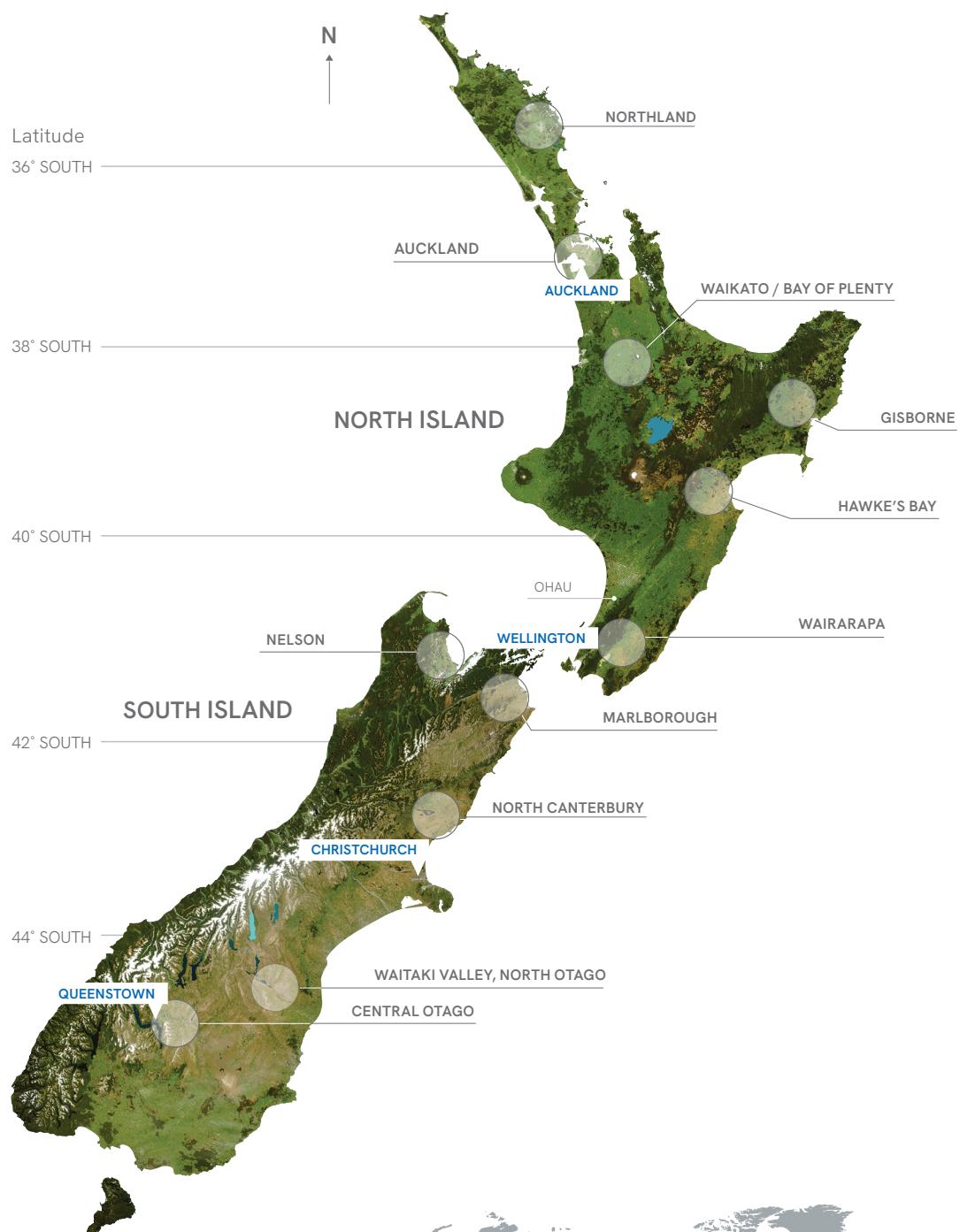
2019: Some producers were calling this their best-ever vintage. A third successive small harvest giving clearly defined wines marked by bright acids and modest alcohols. [297m litres produced off 39,061 hectares]

A few stats

Total production (2025)	374 million litres
Export volume (2025)	289 million litres
Export value	2.1 billion NZ\$ FOB
Producing area (2025 estimate)	42,520 hectares
Sauvignon Blanc (2025 estimate)	28,702
Pinot Noir (as above)	5,331
Chardonnay	2,932
Pinot Gris	2,745
Merlot	894
Riesling	549
Syrah	391
Marlborough (2025 estimate)	30,469 hectares
Hawke's Bay (as above)	4,605
Central Otago	2,106
North Canterbury	1,497
Gisborne	1,265

[Source: New Zealand Winegrowers Annual Report 2025]

New Zealand Wine Regions



* Markers are indicative

A final word

This report isn't intended to be a definitive guide to New Zealand wine. But it does contain plenty of insight, opinion and fact – about regions, grape varieties, winemaking approaches, winemakers and more, all woven into the body of the tasting notes.

Please do also check out the associated podcast episode to hear from the winemakers and more about our take on the current New Zealand wine scene.

We've tried our level best to ensure every detail in this report is accurate. Inevitably, though, we're going to get some details wrong. Apologies if this is the case. Do get in touch if you spot anything that needs correcting via contact@susieandpeter.com.

We'd like to thank New Zealand Winegrowers. Particularly, Chris Stroud and Sarah Shepherd in the UK, and Charlotte Read in New Zealand.

Huge thanks to all the producers who've supported this initiative.

A final thanks to Sensible Wine Services for their logistical assistance.

Here's to New Zealand and its bright wine future!

'As Masters of Wine they are members of the world's oenological elite, yet as friendly wine advisors, Susie & Peter are nothing short of national treasures.'

Foodepedia

About the authors

Susie Barrie and Peter Richards are Masters of Wine who happen to be married to each other. It's a strange old household, with a constant soundtrack of clinking bottles and glasses.

As award-winning TV and radio presenters, event hosts, columnists, podcasters and authors, the pair are renowned for their enthusiastic, thoughtful and articulate style, having been described as, 'Legends: best in the business,' and, 'What a double act: two stars making a killer constellation.' Their global smash-hit podcast Wine Blast has been termed, 'A complete tonic for the heart, mind and soul'. It won the 67 Pall Mall Global Wine Communicators Award for audio in 2024 and surged past one million downloads in 2025.

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Whites

Chardonnay



Greywacke Chardonnay 2023, Marlborough (14%)

98 points – TOP WHITE

Kevin Judd is a man of few words. He tends to let his wines do the talking. (Or his pictures – he's also a brilliant photographer.) Born in England and raised in Australia, Judd studied at Roseworthy College and made wine in Australia before moving to New Zealand in 1983 to make wine at what was a formative time in this nascent wine scene. Famously, he joined forces with Australian David Hohnen to launch Cloudy Bay on a wing and a prayer (first vintage: 1985). It was a wine that would help turbo-charge not just the image of Sauvignon Blanc but the entire New Zealand wine category on the world stage. After 25 vintages, Judd left to set up Greywacke, his own project named after the ubiquitous New Zealand bedrock (and pronounced Grey-wack-ee). Right from the start, these were wines aiming for complexity and nuance rather than stereotypical, simplistic Marlborough flavours. They're regularly some of the most exciting wines coming out of the country – and this Chardonnay is a brilliant example of why. It's primarily Mendoza clone fruit – low-yielding vines that deliver intensity, structure and acidity – from the Wairau Plains and Omaka Valley. Whole bunch pressing was followed by ambient yeast ferments in barrel (20% new) and 11 months ageing. The result is a glorious symphony of savoury complexity, citric tension and magnificent persistence. Flavours include fresh curry leaf, struck match, red apple rind and a gently saline finish. But it's the seamless integration, beautiful texture and sheer effortless class of this wine that won it our Top White award. It's an epic wine that speaks volumes about where modern New Zealand Chardonnay is, and why that's supremely exciting.



Blank Canvas Reed Vineyard Chardonnay 2024, Wairau – Marlborough (13.5%)

97 points – BEST WINEMAKER

'I think Chardonnay is potentially New Zealand's most promising grape right now – it's exciting,' says Matt Thomson when we sit down to taste this beautiful wine (again) with him. And, based on the evidence of wines like this, it's hard not to agree. Thomson, of course, has a privileged insight into these things. He's a veteran of 60+ vintages, overseeing harvests in both hemispheres annually, making wine not just in New Zealand but also in countries like Italy, France, Spain and Chile. Within New Zealand, his Blank Canvas label with wife and business partner Sophie Parker-Thomson MW incorporates wines primarily from Marlborough but also Gimblett Gravels (Hawke's Bay) and Central Otago. Extra consultancy work in Marlborough fills in the gaps – and it's the sheer quality, diversity and personality of these wines that meant Thomson was the standout contender for the Best Winemaker award. As for this wine, it's sourced from growers Pete and Anne Reed on a vineyard that sits in central Wairau, on an elevated terrace near the confluence of the Waihopai and Wairau Rivers. The site allows for slow, even ripening and the development of fine acidity and structure – qualities that were exacerbated by the exceptional 2024 vintage, which naturally gave low yields and vibrant acidities due to low night-time temperatures. Hand picking, whole-bunch pressing, wild ferments in French oak puncheons (40% new) and oak ageing for 11 months has given an exceptionally well defined and compelling style packed full of flinty, citric, nutty, toasty, smoky flavours and a vibrant, tense finish. 'Is this the best one we've made so far..?' muses Thomson while we taste. Irrespective: it's fabulous. And still very young – this is a wine that will age well too, given its natural vibrancy and tension.



Pegasus Bay Virtuoso Chardonnay 2021, North Canterbury (13.5%)

97 points – BEST PRODUCER

Neurologist Ivan Donaldson caught the wine bug when his girlfriend Christine gave him a book called, 'Wine'. He travelled the wine regions of Europe before returning to New Zealand, planting one of the first vineyards of modern times in Canterbury – and marrying Chris. Garage winemaking filled in time between seeing patients and, later on, their four sons were press-ganged into helping establish a new vineyard site in 1985 in the Waipara Valley, North Canterbury, where warm days, cool nights and dry autumns give ample opportunity to make expressive, intense wines. This became Pegasus Bay, still a proudly family owned and run producer whose house style is described cheerfully by third son Ed Donaldson as, 'everything dialled up a bit.' In other words, wines of unashamed complexity, intensity and character – and yet which are moreish, balanced, elegant and insanely drinkable. Pegasus Bay's stellar results in this year's tasting saw it win the Best Producer award, testament to the joy and excitement that emanate from these special bottles, and which we would happily commend to any wine lover. Unusually for a single site producer, Pegasus Bay makes outstanding wines from a whole range of grape varieties, from Sauvignon Blanc to Malbec via Cabernet Franc – but beyond the core varieties of Riesling and Pinot Noir, Chardonnay also shines. This Virtuoso bottling is only made in the best years, a selection of barrels from the oldest plantings in the vineyard. Vinification is Burgundian in style, with 10 months in large French oak barrels or puncheons, 40% new. This is a wine that makes your taste buds stand to attention, with pretty much everything you could throw at a quality Chardonnay in the mix, then with a spicy energetic tension and minerality to tie it all together and make it compellingly drinkable. Toasty, nutty, flinty, smoky, appley...a monumental (and monumentally enjoyable) wine. No wonder Ed Donaldson says: 'I personally think New Zealand Chardonnay is one of the best value white wine bargains of the world.'



ROHE Southern Valleys Chardonnay 2024, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (14%)

97 points

Rohe (pronounced ROAR-hee) means 'territory' and the range was created to express the diversity of Marlborough's various sub-regions. 'Terroir in a bottle,' they say, and the wines are impressive across Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, as their results here attest. The range is made by Rapaura Springs, maybe not one of the best-known Marlborough names, even though it's been going since 1985, when the Neylon family, exporters of green-lipped mussels, joined forces with the fruit-growing Wiffin family. Matt Thomson, this year's Best Winemaker, consults. This Chardonnay was sourced from the Omaka Valley, where the soils naturally restrict vigour and give intense, structured fruit. The wine was oak-aged for 10 months (36% new) and the resulting wine is wonderfully complex and classically proportioned, with a tense lemon-and-apple acidity underscoring toasty, nutty, flinty, fresh curry leaf flavours. Refined, serious, well integrated and long. Quietly sensational. Dangerously drinkable.



Neudorf Rosie's Block Moutere Chardonnay 2023, Nelson (14%)

96 points

We have fond memories of visiting Neudorf in 2010 when Judy and Tim Finn told us cheerfully that, back in 1978, they had an option to buy a plot of land and start a vineyard or go sailing round the world with friends. The yachting world's loss was the wine world's gain, even if Judy freely confesses that it was far from plain sailing, with plenty of hard work, financial insecurity (at one stage they had four mortgages and three jobs each) and hand-to-mouth existence (the old house had no hot water, and electricity in only two rooms). Tim sadly died in 2025 and daughter Rosie has stepped in together with an expert team, focused on retaining the refinement and engaging character that have become a hallmark of the wines over the years. Chardonnay has emerged as the star variety here – Rosie's Block is set apart from the Home Block at slightly higher elevation on Moutere clay gravels, farmed organically. The wine was fermented in barrels (15% new) then spent 10

months on full lees, with 100% malolactic fermentation. The result is typically rewarding and insistent – Neudorf’s wines are rarely blockbusters, instead they beguile you – and here the toasted nut and red apple flavours come together seamlessly with fresh acidity and an elegant texture. Rich yet refreshing, this is beautifully poised and stylish – one for Chardonnay purists.



Greystone Erin's Chardonnay 2021, North Canterbury (14%)

95 points

The Thomas family planted 13 blocks of vines into the limestone undulations of Waipara's Omihi Hills in 2004, having spotted their wine potential. These days the estate practises both organic and regenerative viticulture, making Chardonnay and Pinot Noir with some Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Syrah. Under winemaker Dom Maxwell, they've made a bit of a name for themselves, so it's no surprise to see a few of their wines making an appearance here. Erin's Chardonnay grows on the steepest and highest slopes on limestone soils. The block is all Mendoza clone and its natural intensity was exacerbated by a harsh frost at the start of the 2021 season, which reduced yields. Gentle whole bunch pressing followed by French oak barrel fermentation, full malolactic and 16 months of maturation, with only just over 2,000 bottles made in total. It's an unashamedly rich, bold style, with flavours of caramelised red apple, apricot and honeyed yoghurt. The golden buttery mealy richness is accentuated by the bottle age. Tons of wine here.



Tony Bish Golden Egg Chardonnay 2024, Hawke's Bay (13.6%)

95 points

Speaking at the Chardonnay conference in Gisborne in 2016, Tony Bish's first words were: 'I'm a huge fan of Chardonnay – I love it.' Shortly afterwards he said: 'Egg wines are wines with soul...' It was an intriguing conference and tasting, to be sure, with the experienced Bish full of passion and knowledge about what is clearly something close to his heart. Bish, an experienced winemaker, launched his eponymous winery in 2013 – and it should perhaps come as no surprise that it focuses on one grape variety: Chardonnay. (With seven different iterations, as things stand, including the 'Fat & Sassy' bottling...) This is a proud Hawke's Bay producer, with Bish crediting the long sunny growing season, cool nights and diverse soil types for giving expressive premium styles of Chardonnay. As for how this wine is made, the clue is in the name – free-run juice was fermented in concrete eggs, which kept the yeast lees in suspension due to naturally-occurring convection currents. This maintains fruit purity while building richness and texture into the wine, giving minerality and subtle complexity. On first glance, you might be fooled into thinking this is a restrained style – but it's not. The fruit is next level, with succulent ripe peach, honeydew melon and red apple, and then there's an intensity of minerality, freshness and salinity that's utterly engaging. Something a bit different – and which reflects the passion and experience behind the wine.



Greystone Chardonnay 2024, North Canterbury (14%)

94 points

Where the Erin's Chardonnay (see above) is a richer, bolder, mature style, this straight Chardonnay from Greystone is altogether fresher and lither. The vineyards lie in the Omihi Hills of Waipara and this wine is a blend of two distinct vineyard blocks – one rooted in limestone, the other in clay. The clay from the lower slopes gives richness and fruit intensity while the limestone from higher elevations delivers vibrancy and length. Each block was made slightly differently (the clay block was foot-crushed, for what it's worth), before the wine was aged in French oak barrels (22% new) for 10 months. The 2024 vintage was naturally low yielding and intense, and this wine definitely has a mouth-watering acidity and lip-smacking finish, with elegant mealy toasty nutty complexity as well as orange rind hints to boot. A refreshing, elegant, mineral style with a touch of salinity on the finish.



Lawson's Dry Hills Reserve Chardonnay 2023, Wairau – Marlborough (14%)

94 points

Ross and Barbara Lawson planted their first vineyard in 1982, before setting up their own brand, Lawson's Dry Hills (LDH), in 1992. The estate made its name with meticulous work across a range of grape varieties, and was subsequently taken over by hoteliers Tim and Pauline Evill. These days, LDH sources grapes from 120 hectares of vineyards, roughly half estate-owned, across Wairau, Southern Valleys and Awatere. Sustainability is an important driver, the winery being a member of the Porto Protocol and with an impressive range of certifications to its name. This wine is sourced from a block on the banks of the Wairau Diversion, from a coastal vineyard where sea breezes moderate temperatures and give freshness and salinity to the wines. The wine underwent whole-bunch pressing and barrel fermentation and maturation (10 months in French oak, 22% new). It's a bold style, with salted popcorn, butterscotch and roasted nut aromatics complemented by a tangy lemony acidity and layered flavour profile. Upfront and very drinkable.



Novum Chardonnay 2024, Wairau – Marlborough (14%)

94 points

We've been fans of Novum's refined, complex style of Pinot Noir for a while now (see below), so it was good to see the Chardonnay delivering in this tasting as well. Novum is the brainchild of Will and Rachel Hoare – Will's first love is apparently Pinot, while Rachel fell in love with Chardonnay while working with Burgundy greats Véronique Drouhin and Dominique Lafon. The pair have been resolutely ambitious in terms of quality right from the outset, and you definitely get a feel for that with this subtly crafted, classy Chardonnay. It's sourced from a block in the central Wairau Plains that's reputed to be one of the oldest in the region, possibly planted around 1979 or 1980. It's entirely Mendoza clone, which gives naturally intense, structured fruit, and the site is relatively warm, so good for ripening Chardonnay properly. The 2024 vintage was a warm one but low-yielding and with cool nights, hence depth of flavour but good underlying freshness. The wine spent 13 months in barrel (10% new). Aromatically it's relatively restrained, with hints of roasted nut, baked fennel and creamy citrus rind. The acidity is mouth-watering, and flavours of roasted peach are framed by a creamy texture. (Oh, and in 2024, the winery experimented with putting some large Greywacke stones, the same that litter the vineyard, into 5% of the barrels prior to fermentation. They're not entirely sure what difference this will make – so let them know if you pick anything up...)



Pyramid Valley Chardonnay 2022, North Canterbury (14%)

94 points

'Something about this property just feels incredible,' gushes Steve Smith MW as we chat to him about Pyramid Valley in Waikari, North Canterbury. It's the combination of 'amazing soils – a true combination of limestone and clay' and a cool-climate site with, 'bristling sun' that makes wines that, 'taste like they could come from nowhere else.' It was this passion for the place that led Steve, together with his (Texan, tech entrepreneur, wine-loving) business partner Brian Sheth, to persuade Mike and Claudia Elze Weersing to sell. Mike and Claudia had established Pyramid Valley in 2000, after searching the globe for 15 years to find the perfect place to make wine. Smith and Sheth took over in 2017, and in 2018 estate manager and winemaker Huw Kinch came on board. Smith had identified Chardonnay as the strongest suit in this terroir – and this wine is sourced from old-vine Mendoza-clone Chardonnay fermented with ambient yeasts before ageing partly in new French oak barrel and partly in concrete 'tulipe' vat. In addition, a small percentage of first-crop Chardonnay from the winery's newly acquired vineyard in Lowburn (Central Otago) was included in the blend. It's a bold style that's maturing nicely, with flavours of toasted nuts, roasted citrus fruit, fresh bread and lemon curd. The vibrant tangy acidity and crystalline, spicy finish is impressive.



Tony Bish Heartwood Chardonnay 2024, Hawke's Bay (13.5%)

94 points

Tony Bish claims that Chardonnay runs through his veins, and you wouldn't bet against it. This is a man who knows Chardonnay, and Hawke's Bay, inside out. His family operation (the next generation is very much involved) makes seven different Chardonnays. This one is sourced from two vineyards (Two Terraces and Kokako Farms) and fermented in French oak barriques, where it remained for 11 months. Aromas of toasted cashew nuts, roasted apple, citrus zest and baked cream lead into a beautifully textured, layered palate profile and lingering finish.



Blank Canvas Tano Chardonnay 2023, Marlborough (13%)

93 points – BEST WINEMAKER

Where Blank Canvas' epic Reed Chardonnay (see above) is more in the Meursault/Puligny-Montrachet spectrum, Tano speaks with more of a Chablis accent. At least, that's how winemaker Matt Thomson prefacing the wines, clarifying that Tano naturally has, 'a purity and acidity to it' due to its cool, windswept site. It just goes to show how Chardonnay has the capacity for diversity as well as quality in Marlborough, is Thomson's point. Part of this is the place, of course: where Reed is grown in central Wairau, Tano is sourced from the Anandale Farm Vineyard in the coastal Blind River sub-region south of the Awatere Valley. This naturally gives more freshness and lift to the fruit, which was aged mostly in one 25-hectolitre botte (ie big oak vat), with the remainder in French oak puncheons. Slow fermentations on full solids with ambient yeasts was followed by maturation on the lees for 15 months. The result is definitely more in that green apple, mealy, yeasty spectrum with a gently creamy texture and ripe lemony acidity. Something a bit different for Marlborough Chardonnay and very rewarding for it.



Domaine Rewa Chardonnay 2023, Central Otago (14%)

93 points

Domaine Rewa is a small organic estate first planted in 1999 in the foothills of Central Otago's Pisa Range. From here the Fouberts, Philippa (a native Kiwi from just down the road) and Yannick (a Frenchman) make a range of highly individual wines from Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris. Just 20,000 bottles are produced from their 10-hectare estate and we're thrilled that two of them have made it into our Wines of the Year. These are wines that cry out to be served by the glass in a natural wine bar setting. They're artisanal, oxidative in feel, and full of unabashed personality. For the Chardonnay, winemaker Pete Bartle left the juice to wild ferment in a mix of new and used French oak where it stayed on lees for around 8 months. Although the alcohol is relatively high, you'd never know it, and there's a Chablis-esque feel to its yoghurty, mealy, red apple flavours.



Escarpmment Martinborough Chardonnay 2024, Wairarapa (13.5%)

93 points

This is fresh, complex, self-assured Chardonnay from a well-known name in Wairarapa. Escarpment was established in the late 1990s, with Larry McKenna championing a distinctive style of Pinot Noir made on the Te Muna Road in Martinborough. Later dubbed, 'The Prince of Pinot,' McKenna oversaw the sale of Escarpment to Australian winery Torbreck in 2018/19, with winemaker Tim Bourne and viticulturist Rowan Hoskins currently overseeing production. This Chardonnay is sourced primarily from the alluvial terrace of home block on Te Muna Road – and 2024 is celebrated by the winery as, 'one of the great Martinborough vintages' given its warm dry summer, very low yields due to poor flowering, and high fruit quality. The grapes were whole bunch pressed, fermented in French oak puncheons (22% new) with ambient yeast, then aged for 11 months. Aromatically, there are ripe red apples, honeydew melon and roasted nuts. The palate shows lovely vibrant acidity, red apple, white peach and fresh custard flavours, and a lifted, moreish finish. A well-integrated, relatively restrained, very refreshing and appealing Chardonnay.



Neudorf Rosie's Block Amphora Chardonnay 2023, Nelson (13.5%)

93 points

If you'll excuse the Burgundy reference, where the Moutere Chardonnay (above) is more Côte d'Or, this Amphora Chardonnay is more Chablis. Both are serious expressions of the Upper Moutere terroir, which does a fine line in elegant Chardonnay. But they are also intriguingly, wonderfully different. Much of this stems from the winemaking – hence the wine's name. Where the Moutere Chardonnay is barrel fermented, this wine sees no oak. Instead, the ambient-yeast, high-solid fermentation takes place entirely in clay amphora, with 10 months on the gross lees followed by two months on fine lees, with full malolactic fermentation. The basis of the wine is beautifully refreshing, crunchy apple, pear and peach fruit, but giving it textural weight and complexity are layers of yeasty, creamy, stoney, yoghurty flavours from that lees-ageing. Mouth-watering and elegant – yet another utterly winning Chardonnay from this outstanding Nelson producer.



Tatty Bogler Chardonnay 2019, Waitaki – North Otago (13%)

93 points

Where to start with a wine like this?! Perhaps with the intriguing name: Tatty Boglers were scarecrows that Otago's early Scottish settlers used to protect their crops from the hungry New Zealand birds. And yes, we're in Otago here, but not Central Otago – Waitaki is North Otago, a relatively new region on the Kiwi wine scene, developed around the turn of the millennium and which has made a name for itself with its tense, fresh styles from what is a notably marginal climate. Forrest – the Marlborough-based winery owned by medics-turned-vintners John and Brigid Forrest – made some of the first wines from the region in the noughties, and today they make this Tatty Bogler range too (which also includes Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir). The range is dedicated to the memory of Howard Patterson, who planted the first vines in Waitaki. Though the wine was aged in seasoned French oak barrels, it's not a weighty, oaky style. Instead, it's reminiscent of a Chablis style, constructed around a core of fresh lemony acidity, with plenty of mealy, stoney, apple-rind and honeyed yoghurt complexity. It's wonderfully understated and moreish – a different register in the symphony of New Zealand Chardonnay, and all the more welcome for it.



Tiraki Chardonnay 2024, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (13.5%)

93 points

Longfield Farm in Marlborough's Southern Valleys was bought by the Hammond family in 1870 and, since then, six generations have worked the land. Vineyards were first planted in 1999 and the current operations team includes winemaker Josh Hammond, together with his siblings Tyler and EllaRose, and parents Rob and Lynne. Tiraki is B-Corp certified and the brand feel is very modern and engaging, with wines tending to be accessible and easy-going in style. This Chardonnay was sourced entirely from the clay-rich soils of the Longfield Farm and was aged in 25% new oak. Fruit-forward, with an attractive creamy complexity, it's a relatively understated and easy-going style, soft and succulent – a well-balanced, accessible style of Marlborough Chardonnay.



Villa Maria Keltern Chardonnay 2022, Hawke's Bay (13.5%)

93 points

If you like your Chardonnays generous, with a slightly hedonistic edge, this is the one for you. Villa Maria is a prominent name in New Zealand wine, rightly so given Sir George Fistonich got started in 1962 and built the company into a benchmark within the category. In 2021, New Zealand's largest wine producer, Indevin, acquired Villa Maria ahead of its 60th anniversary (which fell on the same year as this vintage of Keltern). The Keltern Vineyard was planted in 1999 and hugs the western edge of the Bridge Pa Triangle and the Ngaruroro River. The 2022 season was warmer than usual in Hawke's Bay so picking was early, before the grapes were whole bunch pressed, ambient-yeast fermented and aged

for 15 months in French oak barrels (55% new). Complex aromatics feature ripe melon fruit, toasted nuts, butterscotch and honeyed cream. The palate is rich in profile with baked red apple and roasted almond flavours, but enough juicy acidity and a savoury, mineral dimension to balance it out. A richer, perhaps slightly more obvious style but accomplished in this context and very drinkable.



Walnut Block Nutcracker Chardonnay 2024, Wairau – Marlborough (13.6%)

93 points

The Sowman family planted the Walnut Block vineyard in 1996 in the Rapaura sub-region of Marlborough, which tends to give generous fruit and extrovert character in the wines. The vineyard is farmed organically and Gordon Ritchie makes the wine, with brothers Clyde (direction/management) and Nigel Sowman (viticulture) helming operations. Nutcracker is their top range and this Chardonnay is pure Mendoza clone, whole-bunch pressed into 500-litre French oak puncheons and matured for 12 months. Aromas of red apples and toasted cashew nuts lead into a relatively rich palate profile but balanced with vibrant fresh acidity and a salty lick on the finish. An enjoyable, rounder style.

Sauvignon Blanc



Dog Point Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (13.5%)

96 points – TOP SAUVIGNON BLANC

Some people love it; others love to do it down. It probably goes without saying that we sit squarely in the former camp when it comes to Sauvignon Blanc, or 'Savvy' as it's affectionately known in NZ. Whichever side of the fence you sit, there's no denying that Sauvignon Blanc was the variety responsible for catapulting New Zealand onto the world wine stage a mere 50 years ago. In that time, New Zealand has effectively gone from zero to hero in wine terms, and the lion's share of that success is due to the popularity of Sauvignon Blanc. What's more, that momentum continues, with Sauvignon Blanc currently covering a whopping 68% of New Zealand's grape-producing area. The pre-eminence of Sauvignon makes it only fitting to give this stellar variety its own award in this report, so here you have it. But why Dog Point? Beyond the fact we gave this wine one of our top scores, it's one we've followed and loved for years, even before we first visited the (then very modest) winery back in 2010. The operation was set up by Ivan Sutherland and James Healy, who had worked closely together at Cloudy Bay. Crucially, Dog Point doesn't make any old average style of Sauvignon Blanc. Both this and the oak-aged Section 94 have always been highly individual takes on Sauvignon: they're new wave, and certainly not your classic punchy, crunchy explosion of fruit you might expect from New Zealand. At the time we visited, Healy memorably stated, 'if I want passion fruit, I'll go and buy a passion fruit.' (Sadly, James Healy died in early 2026.) And that sums up what's different about Dog Point. By taking a lead from Burgundian Chardonnay makers and experimenting with leaving solids in the juice rather than settling them out, Sutherland and Healy found it was possible to move away from a fruit-forward style to a wine with a much more flinty, mineral, struck-match character. Going beyond fruit, in other words, to make the wines more savoury, complex and appealing. Today, Dog Point is managed day-to-day by the next generation of Sutherlands, who continue on the same path, making Sauvignon that demands your attention. Matt Sutherland talks of hand picking and whole bunch pressing to tame the aromatic compounds, then leaving the wine on lees, all with the aim of working for flintiness, restraint and texture. This one is indeed flinty – it's also smoky, saline, vivacious and compelling. The 2024 vintage is perhaps a wee bit tamer, smoother, and consequently easier to fall for than some of the more challenging vintages we've tried. But still, it's fabulously complex, with very much its own unique personality. Beyond the two Sauvignon wines, Dog Point also produces a Chardonnay and a Pinot Noir that are both equally delicious and often to be found in our cellar.



Greywacke Wild Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Marlborough (13.5%)

96 points

There are three Greywacke wines in our report this year. Such was the quality and unadulterated joy each bottle brought to the table that they came within a whisker of winning Producer of the Year. As it was, they took away the prestigious Top White award for their outstanding Chardonnay (see note above). But they also do a fine line in Sauvignon Blanc – perhaps unsurprisingly given Greywacke is the brainchild of Englishman Kevin Judd, Cloudy Bay's first winemaker back in the mid-1980s. Judd remained at Cloudy Bay for 25 years before taking the leap and establishing his own family venture, Greywacke, in the Omaka Valley (Southern Valleys) in 2009. Whilst at Cloudy Bay, Judd worked closely with Ivan Sutherland and the late James Healy (co-founders of Dog Point) with whom we'd say he and his team share a similar approach to style when it comes to Sauvignon (see Dog Point note above). In the case of this particular Sauvignon, fermentation was spontaneous (hence 'wild') and carried out in new and used French oak barriques over an extended period with occasional lees stirring. Around two thirds of the wine underwent malolactic fermentation and, once out of oak, it remained on lees for 6 months. It's a wine that effortlessly radiates class, and one that prioritises complexity and savouriness over up-front fruit. Think smoky, creamy, nutty and spicy, think beautiful length on the back of an oyster shell finish.



Zephyr MKIII Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Wairau – Marlborough (13%)

96 points

Ben Glover is an intriguing character, not to mention an impressive winemaker. You get the sense of a restless soul keen to disrupt (a word he uses often) the status quo and bring a bunch of new winemaking talent along with him. In 2018, he and fellow winemaker Rhyan Wardman established The Coterie, a contract winemaking facility with a difference based on the former site of the Seresin Estate in Marlborough's Wairau Terrace. Deliberately focussed on premium, organic, small-batch wines, it's all about collaborative innovation, a melting pot for new ideas and experimentation with the aim of, 'ripping the beige quilt off Marlborough,' as he delightfully puts it. Zephyr is Glover's family-owned wine brand, and the wines are made at The Coterie. We first tasted the MKIII 2023 at the end of 2024 and it stopped us in our tracks. Fast forward to 2026 and it's just as arresting. This is a wine that absolutely does disrupt the normal expectations you might have of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Like so many of the most intriguing examples of new wave Savvy, the fermentation is spontaneous and takes place in oak, albeit old and neutral. The result is a wine with swagger and style – beautifully nutty and mineral-laden on the nose with just a hint of celery below the surface. Steely, succulent and saline, a wine to linger over.



Catalina Sounds Sound of White Barrel Fermented Sauvignon Blanc 2022, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (12.5%)

96 points

Planted 20 years ago with the audacious aim of 'producing the best wines in Marlborough', Catalina Sounds' Sound of White vineyard sits high in the Waihopai Valley. Here, the climate is relatively cool and dry, and the growing season that bit longer, leading to what we particularly love about The Sound of White: its uniquely herbal, exotic style of fruit. Winemaker Matt Ward ferments this single-vineyard bottling in French oak with wild yeast, and the result is intriguing. It's a distinctive wine, one that exudes scents of acacia honey, wild thyme, sage and kumquat, along with electric acidity and a beguilingly smooth, rich texture. Highly individual, top-drawer Marlborough Sauvignon. And just in case you're wondering, the image on the eye-catching yellow label is of the iconic Catalina boat plane, after which the winery was named.



Auntsfield Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (13%)

95 points

It's impossible to talk about Auntsfield without mentioning the fact that this is believed to be the site of Marlborough's first proper vineyard, planted in the late 19th century to Muscat, by a Scotsman no less. Located in the Southern Valleys, just southwest of Blenheim, Auntsfield today is a family business and those early vines are long gone (though careful restoration has ensued – see the sparkling Muscat note below). Now owned by the Cowley family, it's run by second-generation brothers Ben and Luc, who respectively look after the viticulture and the winemaking. Although Pinot Noir is the estate's most planted variety, they also have Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc on their 65-hectare vineyard. So what can you expect from this historic plot? Well, the aim with this 'hot off the press' 2025 Sauvignon is to make a typical Marlborough Sauvignon with a bit of added texture and length from extended lees aging. And they've definitely achieved that. There's certainly a whiff of gunflint reduction on the nose, but that's balanced by juicy, ripe grapefruit and citrus fruits in the mouth, as well as a long and satisfying finish.



Blank Canvas Abstract Three Rows Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Wairau - Marlborough (13.5%)

95 points - BEST WINEMAKER

When we ask winemaker Matt Thomson what the secret to making great Marlborough Sauvignon is, he replies: 'not cutting corners'. That means a focus on growing the grapes well, then making the wine with care and sensitivity. Not to mention a fair bit of elbow grease all the way through the process. This wine is an excellent example of not cutting corners. It's grown on the Holdaway Vineyard, just three kilometres from the coast at Dillons Point. The Holdaway family farm using regenerative viticulture, prioritising soil health through practices like zero tilling, cultivating cover crops and composting. The Abstract block is dry farmed (unusual in Marlborough) and canopy management is meticulous. The result of all of this is a naturally intense, vibrant, zingy baseline fruit character, which is then wild-fermented in French oak puncheons (15% new) and matured on the lees for 15 months. A nutty, toasty, creamy complexity overlays the whitecurrant, citrus and passion fruit profile and leads into a leesy, saline finish. Juicy and mouth-watering but also savoury and elegantly textured. A very cultured, accomplished style that's testament to smart farming and clever winemaking.

ROHE Dillons Point Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Wairau - Marlborough (13%)

95 points

ROHE is a brand made by Rapaura Springs (see above for the note on their equally impressive Southern Valleys Chardonnay). It's not one of the best-known Marlborough brands but, on the basis of this kind of quality, it's heading in the right direction. Winemaker of the Year Matt Thomson consults, and the aim of the ROHE range is to highlight the differences between Marlborough's various sub-regions. What we love about this wine is its limpid translation of pristine, ocean-influenced Dillons Point fruit into bottle. It's elegant and grassy, yet with plenty of paprika and white stone fruit concentration. The acidity is spine-tingling and the finish long and saline.

Villa Maria Reserve Coastal Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Awatere - Marlborough (13.5%)

95 points - BEST VALUE WHITE

Villa Maria has been owned since 2021 by New Zealand's largest producer, Indevin, and here they deliver a wine that not only speaks of its place, it also massively over-delivers on its price point. Hence winning the Best Value White award. It's not cheap, it's just fabulous value for a wine that's full of flavour and verve - not to mention Awatere typicity. Vibrant aromas of fresh gooseberry, tomato leaf, paprika and jalapeño pepper lead into a palate profile that's crunchy, invigorating and moreish, with an engaging saline finish. Clean as a whistle, clear as a morning bell. Very expressive, with excellent concentration at the level. A delightful double whammy of enjoyment value and value for money.

Catalina Sounds Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Southern Valleys - Marlborough (13%)

94 points

Whereas the Sound of White (see above) is a single vineyard wine, this wine is a blend of Southern Valleys and Wairau fruit, about half from Catalina Sounds' own vineyard and the remainder from partner growers across the region. The 2023 vintage was a good year for Marlborough and it certainly shows in this wine. It's classic Marlborough fare: wonderfully expressive and pure, with peapod, asparagus and gooseberry on the nose, juicy passionfruit in the mouth and a bright, salty lick to the finish. Although there's a touch of oak here, you'd never know it - it simply adds texture to what is a classic, refined New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. From a lesser-known producer, with smart packaging and a very acceptable price tag, this is great option to share with Sauvignon-loving friends.



Jules Taylor Sauvignon Blanc 2025 – Marlborough (13.5%)

94 points

It's perhaps no surprise that the two Jules Taylor wines in our line-up this year are both Sauvignon Blancs. Although Jules also makes Pinot Gris, Grüner Veltliner, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, it's Sauvignon that has a special place in her heart. Jules was born and bred in Marlborough and, as she puts it, 'grew up with Sauvignon Blanc', and her love for it shines through her wines. Her classic Sauvignon is a pan-regional blend that we admire most for its elegance, integrity and understated charm. Yes, it's full of typical Marlborough grassy, gooseberry flavours, but they're not shouty. Instead, they're engagingly woven into a wine that draws you in and leaves you wanting more.



Jules Taylor OTQ Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Awatere – Marlborough (13.5%)

94 points

Jules Taylor's OTQ range started life when Jules decided to keep a particularly good parcel of Sauvignon Blanc in an old barrel at the back of the cellar 'on the quiet'. She didn't even tell her husband and business partner Georges, until the wine was ready. But the risk paid off and the OTQ wines, of which there are now two, are single-vineyard bottlings made in the best vintages. There's currently a Pinot Noir and this recently-released 2023 Sauvignon from Awatere in the range. The Altimarloch vineyard is in the Upper Awatere and it's a site that gives fruit with a particularly intense and varied flavour profile. Whole cluster pressing and wild fermentation in old barriques, followed by partial malolactic and occasional lees stirring, has yielded an unashamedly hedonistic take on Sauvignon, deeply coloured and creamy on the nose with savoury, glazed-nut intensity in the mouth and a long saline finish.



Kim Crawford Small Parcels Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Marlborough (13%)

94 points

It's hard to believe that Kim Crawford Wines started out in a little cottage in Auckland thirty years ago. After finding success on the global stage, the brand was bought out, and is now owned by US-based Constellation Brands. (Kim Crawford himself now makes wine elsewhere – see Loveblock, below.) The brand continues to deliver, though, with this expressive, classic Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc an excellent example. Small Parcels 2025 is sourced from Rapaura and Southern Valleys and it's a total riot of smoky, reductive, tangy citrus-rind flavours. It's a, 'take no prisoners' style that may not appeal to everyone. But if you're in the mood for something with a bit of oomph, this is just the ticket.



ROHE Rapaura Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Wairau Valley – Marlborough (13%)

94 points

Coming from central Wairau, further inland than Dillons Point (see above for that note and site description), this wine shows a more smoky, citrus-rind character and a rounder shape. There's still plenty of concentration and depth of flavour, though. One of the founding families of Rapaura Springs (the winery behind the ROHE brand) the Neylons, used to grow and export green-lipped mussels. And what a partnership this vibrant wine and those mussels would be – maybe with a big knob of butter and a grating of fresh wasabi.



Saint Clair Wairau Reserve Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Wairau – Marlborough (12.5%)

94 points

Saint Clair is a Marlborough stalwart that consistently delivers characterful, satisfying wines at fair prices. It's a name that often crops up on casual dining restaurant and bar

lists in the UK. When it does, it's generally met with a sigh of relief, especially if we're with friends and desperately in need of a good bottle of white with broad appeal. Neal and Judy Ibbotson were some of the first to plant vineyards in Marlborough back in 1978. Initially they sold the grapes to other producers but later they decided to create their own brand, hence Saint Clair Family Estate was born in 1994. Today they own 160 hectares across ten locations in Marlborough. This Reserve Sauvignon is sourced from the lower Wairau, close to the ocean, where nights are a little cooler and hang-time a little longer. Winemaker Stewart MacLennan and his team select the best batch of wine from each vintage to make into the Reserve and in 2023 it's a really pungent, pea-shoot and whitecurrant style, with lovely crunchy freshness and a lifted, invigorating finish.



te Pā Signature Series Barrel Fermented Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Marlborough (13%)

94 points

te Pā roughly translates as a traditional Māori settlement, and it's a name chosen to reflect the estate's heritage. Owner and founder Haysley MacDonald traces his ancestry back 800 years to early Māori settlers on the Wairau Bar, and there's a definite sense of pride and respect for that heritage running through the whole te Pā operation. It all started back in 2003 with the decision to convert the family dairy and crop farm to vineyards. Initially 100 hectares (ha) were planted on the Wairau Bar and today the family own nearly 500 ha, mainly in Wairau Bar and Awatere. There are different brands within the range and within te Pā itself, with this Barrel Fermented Sauvignon sitting somewhere in the middle in terms of price. It's an ambitious wine for the money, with fermentation and aging over 11 months in a mix of new and used French oak cigar barrels (the shape apparently increases the surface area of the lees which in turn builds weight and texture). It's a creamy, spicy style of Sauvignon, with pronounced acidity and an almost Bordeaux-like character.



te Pā Reserve Seaside Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Wairau – Marlborough (13%)

94 points

This is one of te Pā's top wines and it's all about the vineyard. Grapes were sourced from two of the best performing blocks on the MacDonalds' Wairau Bar Home Vineyard. 'Seaside 4' is just 200 metres from the sea and gives a fresh, crisp, citrus and saline character to the blend. 'Block 2', meanwhile, is situated close to the Wairau River and lends a splash of ripe, fleshy fruit to the mix. Winemaker Sam Bennett keeps things minimal with this wine, using only stainless steel for fermentation and a bit of time on lees to build texture. The result is a beautifully pungent, tomato leaf and gooseberry style but with an elegant, salty palate structure and a smoky finish.



Tohu Marewa Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Awatere – Marlborough (12.5%)

94 points

Tohu is a Māori-owned wine business that's been going since 1998. A partnership between three tribal groups, today it produces wines from two vineyard sites, one in Upper Moutere (Nelson) and the other in Upper Awatere (Marlborough). Both Tohu wines in this report are from the Awatere site, with this single-vineyard bottling coming from the Arapoto block and named 'Marewa' (meaning to rise or lift up) in recognition of the vineyard's situation at 200 metres above sea level, overlooking the Awatere River. From the superb 2024 vintage, this is an unmistakeably Awatere Sauvignon in its crushed blackcurrant, green pepper and fresh tomato leaf style. About a third of the blend undergoes wild fermentation in 500-litre French oak puncheons, lending the final wine an appealing textural complexity and length. Not the cheapest wine but plenty here.



Astrolabe Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Marlborough (13%)

93 points

We've long been fans of Simon Waghorn's Astrolabe wines - they're reliable, they invariably show good typicity and they look really smart too. Astrolabe is a family business in all senses. Simon's wife Jane and daughters Libby and Arabella work with him, and the winery also sources grapes from ten grower families across Marlborough, making several sub-regional and single-vineyard wines as well as pan-regional blends such as this. Some wines from the high-yielding 2025 vintage are notably dilute and wan - not this one. Perhaps it's slightly more understated than your typical Astrolabe Sauvignon, but it's also wonderfully crunchy, elegant and refreshing.



Babich Classics Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Marlborough (12.5%)

93 points

Babich is a historic name in New Zealand wine. Josef Babich planted vines in 1912 and the family have been making Kiwi wine since 1916 across four generations. Nowadays the company has grown and the Babich family makes a lot of different wines across several ranges, from both the North and South islands. They describe this wine as a, 'classic Sauvignon Blanc with all the hallmarks of Marlborough, produced in a fuller, riper, softer style'. And that's exactly what it is. Yes, there's a touch of residual sugar here that makes it very easy drinking and commercially appealing. But there's also enough concentration of white peach, gooseberry and lemon-rind flavour in this pan-regional blend to make it unmistakeably New Zealand Sauvignon. As a value shout, it punches above its weight, hence inclusion here.



Isabel Estate Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Wairau - Marlborough (13%)

93 points

Isabel Estate in the Wairau Valley was one of Marlborough's first, established in 1980 by pilot Mike Tiller and his wife Robyn. It's home to some of Marlborough's oldest vines, on their original rootstocks. This single-vineyard Sauvignon is a blend of different blocks of the home vineyard in Wairau and it's an elegant, mineral style. Winemaker Jeremy McKenzie uses a small proportion of French oak in the fermentation for texture, but essentially this a pure, subtle take on Sauvignon with bright acidity, notes of paprika and a tense saline finish.



Lake Chalice The Raptor Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Wairau - Marlborough (12.5%)

93 points

Established in 1989 and owned by the Ibbotson family of Saint Clair since 2015, Lake Chalice produces wines from three vineyard sites in the Wairau Valley. Dillons Point in the Lower Wairau is the fruit source for The Raptor. It's a sub-region close to the coast that's gained quite a reputation for producing intensely-flavoured Sauvignon with vibrancy and panache. Made with minimal skin-contact and fermented in stainless steel with selected yeasts, The Raptor is a lesson in purity, crunch and precision that feels surprisingly young for a 2023. Lime cordial, fresh herb and blackcurrant leaf notes combine with lively acidity and a bright, tangy finish.



Loveblock Sauvignon Blanc 2023, Awatere - Marlborough (13.5%)

93 points

Slightly crazy label, slightly crazy wine - and why ever not?! Based in the Awatere Valley, Loveblock is the project Kim Crawford began with his wife and viticulturist Erica following the sale of their highly successful eponymous brand to Constellation in 2006. You only need to take a brief look at their website to know this is a project with a difference. At the

more extreme end of the range, Kim and Erica produce a, 'no sulphur added' Sauvignon, for which green tea extract is used as a preservative. This is the other of the Sauvignons in their current range. It's organic, made in a variety of vessels including stainless steel, concrete eggs, amphorae, and neutral French oak (with wild yeast fermentation). It's unashamedly artisanal and a touch oxidative in style. You've got passion fruit, bruised apple, roasted peach and baked cream evolution. It's certainly not like any other Marlborough Sauvignon we've come across, but if you're looking for something different, this is it.



Matawhero Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Gisborne (13%)

93 points

This is one of only two non-Marlborough Sauvignons in our line-up this year, and the only one from New Zealand's North Island. Just a bit of history to set the context. Matawhero celebrated its 50th vintage last year (2025), the vineyard having originally been established by New Zealand wine pioneer Bill Irwin. Bill's son Denis joined the family business in the mid 1970s and led the charge to bottle wines under the Matawhero label. Fast forward 30 years and in 2008 Kirsten (ex-Villa Maria) and Gisborne-born Richard Searle bought the business, which was no longer producing wine. The Searles have since built it back into a fully functioning contemporary wine business, complete with cellar door and accommodation. Dry farming is a big part of the philosophy at Matawhero, and it's something we'd highlight as an interesting focus at a time when water availability is such an increasingly hot topic in wine. (This wine has 'Naturally Dry Farmed' proudly on its front label.) The wine itself reflects its origins, despite the fact this is the first fruit from these Montanne vineyard vines. A different register to the classic Marlborough style, it's bold, ripe, tropical and succulent.



Misty Cove Tamāhine Sauvignon Blanc 2024, Wairau - Marlborough (13.5%)

93 points

Founded by ex-cricketer Andrew Bailey in 2008 and built into a global brand via a lot of upbeat messaging, innovative product creation and glitzy marketing, Misty Cove is an ambitious, energetic brand that captures the zeitgeist for the younger generation. It's a company that's deliberately sought to do things differently, perhaps not surprising given Bailey was the man who introduced canned wines to New Zealand. Bailey also initially chose to build a distribution network for Misty Cove before turning his focus to the wine. Subsequently he released Grüner Veltliner, Gewürztraminer and Pinot Gris from Sauvignon's stomping ground of Marlborough. The Limited Release Tamāhine Sauvignon is from Marlborough but it's a bit different too, spending seven months in a mix of new and used French oak. There's an ambitious feel to its bold, spicy, creamy flavours which won't suit everyone, but if you like a bit of oak flavour in your Savvy, this is certainly worth a try.



Tiki Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2024, North Canterbury (13%)

93 points

At 320 hectares, Tiki is one of North Canterbury's largest vineyards, producing a range of wines of which an impressive three appear in this report. The first vintage of Tiki Single Vineyard Sauvignon was the first wine to be released from the estate, in 2009. It's the only North Canterbury Sauvignon in this year's report. What we liked about it was its blend of crunchy green flavours and bright acidity. There is a touch of residual sugar that softens the finish but in general it offers good value and plenty of zippy Sauvignon flavours.



Tohu Awatere Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Awatere – Marlborough (13%)

93 points

Whereas the single-vineyard Marewa is from Upper Awatere and partially fermented in oak (see note above), this Sauvignon from Tohu's less expensive Manaaki Range is made with fruit sourced from Upper and Lower Awatere sites, and fermented entirely in stainless steel. The result is less expressive than the Marewa but it's still a beautifully refreshing wine and a joyously easy-going style of Sauvignon. Think gooseberry, pink grapefruit and general citrus loveliness.



Wairau River Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Wairau Valley – Marlborough (12.1%)

93 points

After first planting Müller-Thurgau grapes in Marlborough in 1978, Phil and Chris Rose of Rose Family Estate produced their first wines under the Wairau River label in 1991. By this time, it was Sauvignon Blanc that was on the agenda – the vineyard having been replanted by the early 1990s following the government vine-pull scheme and phylloxera arriving in Marlborough. Today Wairau River is a brand that delivers reliable, good value wines with typicity and broad appeal across a fairly wide range. This pan-regional blend from the estate range is no exception and offers plenty of punchy Marlborough-style flair.



Yealands Single Block L5 Sauvignon Blanc 2025, Awatere – Marlborough (13%)

93 points

We're great admirers of winemaker Nat Christensen, not just for her undoubted abilities in the cellar but also because she's one of life's positive people, with an infectious smile and engaging personality. That upbeat nature is perfectly reflected in this L5 Sauvignon, which has always been a favourite of ours. Coming from the coolest, most extreme part of Yealands' Seaview Vineyard, it's pure Awatere through and through. Flinty, tomato leaf aromas give way to green herbs and vegetal flavours in the mouth, all underpinned by crisp, mouth-watering acidity.

Pinot Gris



Domaine Rewa The French Potter Series Pinot Gris 2023, Central Otago (13.5%)

95 points - INNOVATION WINE

Wow. Just wow. This is definitely not your average Pinot Gris, as you can tell from the moment you stick your nose in the glass and take a sniff. French-born co-owner of Domaine Rewa, Yannick Foubert, is a potter by trade and has built an on-site *atelier* (workshop) where he makes his own 350-litre amphorae. This innovative take on Pinot Gris sees around 50% of the wine fermented in two of Yannick's clay amphorae, with the balance put into mixed-age oak. One of the amphorae is filled with whole berries, fermented and aged on skins for six months, then drained off without pressing. This is then blended in with the other wines prior to bottling. The result is fabulously characterful: from its antique gold colour, to its ginger biscuit and pear fruit aromatics and bruised red apple flavours, this is quite some wine. Yes it's rustic and oxidative, but it also dares to be different, something that's well worth celebrating in the New Zealand wine context.



Te Whare Rā Single Vineyard Pinot Gris 2024, Wairau – Marlborough (13.5%)

95 points - INNOVATION PRODUCER

There were a few contenders for our Innovation Producer Award but we chose Te Whare Rā (pronounced Tay-far-ee-rah) because it's just an inspirational story. In 2003, winemakers Anna and Jason Flowerday bought one of the oldest vineyards in Marlborough and, rather than grub it up and start again (as they were told they'd need to do), they chose to adopt organic and biodynamic farming methods to gradually coax the soil and the 24-year-old, 11-hectare vineyard back to life. Their focus is weighted towards aromatic varieties and making small-batch wines in as natural a way as possible. As a South Island Pinot Gris, this is one of the more restrained styles in our line-up, but once in the mouth there's a succulence and underlying concentration of juicy red apple and pear fruit that's spot on.



Astrolabe Pinot Gris 2024, Marlborough (13.5%)

94 points

What we like about New Zealand Pinot Gris is its potential versatility. And if you're looking for a wine to pair with lightly spiced fusion dishes, it's hard to beat. The best examples, to our mind, are those with a touch of residual sugar, or at the very least some kind of textural richness or succulence – which this wine definitely has (5.3 g/l residual sugar for the geeks out there). It's a pan-regional blend, made with fruit from grower families in Awatere, Kēkerengū Coast and Southern Valleys. The bunches are mostly hand-picked and whole-cluster pressed, with only the highest quality fraction of free-run juice used. The result is quite a unique take on Pinot Gris. Subtle spiced pear aromas and bruised red apple flavours combine to give a wine that keeps you coming back for more.



Ata Rangi Pinot Gris 2024, Wairarapa (14%)

94 points

Ata Rangi is one of New Zealand's most celebrated wine names (and, in Te Reo Māori, means 'dawn sky' or 'new beginning'). Although most famous for their benchmark Pinot Noirs (see below), they apply the same exacting standards to several other varieties, Pinot Gris being a long-standing one. One of our special wine memories is enjoying a bottle of five-year-old Ata Rangi Pinot Gris at winemaker Helen Masters' house, where it made the most beautiful match for a home-cured ham – the honey and spice richness offsetting the elegant minerality and refreshing acidity, and everything marrying wonderfully with the savoury ham. More recently, we opened a 14-year-old bottle of Ata Rangi's Pinot Gris – and it was sumptuous: bursting with baked pear, ginger, honeyed cream, all succulence and warmth and spicy texture together with grounding mineral acid. One key point to flag

up here, though, is that Ata Rangi's style of Pinot Gris has evolved over time – Helen says it used to be inspired by Alsace (with a touch more residual sugar in the mix) but now it's evolved, 'into our own, uniquely Martinborough style.' And what's that? Well, as shown here, it's fundamentally dry and fresh, but with an engaging succulence to the texture and beguiling characters of rich spiced pear, honey and nutmeg. It's relatively understated but with serious structure and tons of energy, and will age well in its own way.



Framingham Pinot Gris 2023, Wairau – Marlborough (13.5%)

94 points

There was a time (and we're talking decades ago now) when New Zealand Pinot Gris was somewhat underwhelming as a category, and you wondered why the nation's winemakers had gone down this particular route. How times, and wines, change. Pinot Gris is currently New Zealand's third most widely-planted white variety. At 2,745 hectares, it's almost as widely planted as Chardonnay, with about half of these vines to be found in Marlborough. More importantly though, producers are making some cracking wines from Pinot Gris, in a variety of styles that range from light and pear-fruited to full-on, concentrated Alsatian lookalikes. This Wairau example falls squarely into the latter category. The fruit was sourced from four vineyard sites and 50% was whole-bunch pressed with the remainder destemmed and given a bit of skin contact. Fermentation was spontaneous in 50/50 old oak and stainless steel, and the wine then underwent five-months aging on lees. It's a serious, off-dry style (8 g/l) with aromas of blanched nuts and ginger. In the mouth, it's succulent and long, with a lifted spicy finish.



Kim Crawford Pinot Gris 2025, Hawke's Bay (13.5%)

93 points

In terms of sheer range of locations and styles, Pinot Gris as a variety wins hands down in our WOTY line-up this year. There are nine Pinot Gris wines in our listing, from no less than seven regions/sub-regions (from Gisborne in the North Island to Central Otago in the South) and they're made in a dizzying array of styles. Although we personally love that diversity, the downside is that it can be hard for wine drinkers to know what they're going to get when they buy a bottle of New Zealand Pinot Gris. Knowledge is therefore power. What we'd say about this Hawke's Bay wine is that it's probably the closest thing to what we'd describe as a 'classic', easy-going New Zealand Pinot Gris, and it's a good starting point for newcomers to the category. It's made in a protective way, fermented in stainless steel at cool temperatures with selected yeast, and is the absolute antithesis of the likes of Domaine Rewa (see above). The flavours are clean and reminiscent of honeyed pear, there's a hint of residual sugar for succulence, and the finish is gently spicy. A versatile and food-friendly wine.



Matawhero Single Vineyard Pinot Gris 2024, Gisborne (12.7%)

93 points

OK so bear with us on this, because we're going to dive straight in with a geeky factoid. But it's for a specific reason. This particular wine is made from two clones: one is 457 and the other the 'Barrie' clone (who knew Susie has her own clone?!). It apparently, 'has larger berries and gives texture to the wine', whereas 457 is smaller-berried and adds to the aromatics. So there you have it. Pinot Gris, as we all know, comes in many different styles, weights and sweetness levels. This one sits firmly in the young, simple, pear-fruited camp. It's got a touch of residual sweetness, it's lifted and fresh, and it's just a very easy drinking, enjoyable wine.



Tiki Single Vineyard Pinot Gris 2024, North Canterbury (13.5%)

93 points

Royce and Sue McKean's vineyard lies in North Canterbury's Waipara Valley and was named 'Tiki' as a nod to Royce's Māori heritage. As with the Tiki Sauvignon, this is the only North Canterbury Pinot Gris in our line-up and, like all the Tiki wines, it's made under the watchful eye of consultant winemaker and fellow Master of Wine Alastair Maling (ex Villa Maria). The 2024 vintage was a hot, dry season that gave moderate yields of good quality fruit, and you can taste that in the smoky, green apple and red pear flavours. Although most of the fermentation for this single vineyard wine takes place in stainless steel, 9% was fermented in old French oak for texture and there's also a touch of residual sugar (6 g/l) which rounds out the finish.



Whitehaven Pinot Gris 2024, Marlborough (13.5%)

93 points

This was definitely a contender for our Value White award and frankly it knocks the socks off many other comparable whites with higher price tags. Whitehaven is a family company, originally established in 1994 after Sue and Greg White had fallen in love with Marlborough during a two-year sailing trip. Though Greg died in 2007, Sue has continued to helm the winery, with daughter Sam working alongside her as brand ambassador. Over the years, Whitehaven has grown, now with 35 sites spanning Marlborough's three sub-regions and access to 670 hectares of fruit, both growers and estate owned. This particular wine is a blend of Wairau and Awatere fruit, dry in the mouth and a touch phenolic, with zesty citric flavours and a hint of spice.

Riesling



Pegasus Bay Bel Canto Dry Riesling 2024, North Canterbury (13.5%)

95 points - BEST PRODUCER

Pegasus Bay is unquestionably one of New Zealand's standard-bearer producers, consistently making characterful, elegant wines across an impressive range of styles from their base in Waipara, North Canterbury. Riesling is one of the core varieties at the estate, accounting for around a third of the home-vineyard plantings, and when we asked Ed Donaldson about the house style of Riesling, he smiled: 'everything is kind of dialled up a bit.' By this he means the deliberately long hang time of the grapes on the vine (and late picking) gives intense flavours, while the site gives vibrant acidity. Plus, there's often a phenolic component to the wines, lending sinew and structure. The Rieslings usually have a touch of botrytis in the mix too – though interestingly, there was no botrytis in 2024, so this is a slight difference in the wines from this year. Bel Canto is a drier style (they make five different Riesling iterations as things stand) but this is still a fleshy, pithy, flinty, smoky style with vibrant acidity, phenolic grip and engaging hints of ginger, roasted lemon and orange peel. There's definitely a purity to this vintage but it should develop well in the short to medium term.



Te Whare Rā Single Vineyard Riesling 'D' 2022, Wairau – Marlborough (12.5%)

95 points - INNOVATION PRODUCER

A couple of explainers here before we get to the actual wine. The number 5182, which appears on the label of all the Te Whare Rā wines in our WOTY line-up, refers to the vineyard's Biogro organic certification number. TWR's farming is all done according to organic and biodynamic principles. ('Made with cowshit not bullshit', they like to say.) The 'D' is a simple way of differentiating this dry Riesling from TWR's other 'M' or medium style. One of the secrets to this wine is the fact the grapes come from the oldest Riesling vines in Marlborough, planted in 1979, and the fruit has incredible intensity, which perfectly suits this dry style (3.2 g/l). There was a bit of skin contact in the winemaking mix, plus long lees aging and no fining. We feel there's more than a nod to Australia's Clare Valley in the lime rind and green-apple aromatics. The texture is soft and yoghurty and the overall balance and harmony of the wine superb.



Pegasus Bay Riesling 2024, North Canterbury (12.5%)

94 points - BEST PRODUCER

Pegasus Bay has a way with Riesling that's hard to resist. (Riesling, in fact, is their largest production white, probably the only New Zealand winery to do this.) This estate version is their calling card: harvested a little earlier than the Bel Canto (see above), hence higher natural acidity that is then counter-balanced by higher residual sugar (around 25 g/l). The result is a delectable balance of fleshy appley honeyed indulgence. It's slightly purer than some previous vintages (there was no botrytis in the 2024 vintage) but this is still classically extrovert, intense Pegasus Bay Riesling, with a flinty edge, phenolic sinew and exotic ginger spice. Despite the sugar, it's still pretty dry on the finish, just with extra fleshiness and a fine textural counter-balance to the vivid acidity. This has to be one of the great Riesling bargains of the world – it's certainly a firm fixture in our wine racks at home. What's more, it ages beautifully, and if you don't have the patience or self-control to do this yourself, the winery now offers aged releases. (The 2015 Estate Riesling was tasting beautiful in 2025.) Ed Donaldson describes how Pegasus Bay's Rieslings have evolved over the years, away from imitating lighter-bodied German styles to embracing the natural intensity, zestiness, richness and 'orange peel' character that their site gives. It's a winning formula.



Three Miners Herringbone Riesling 2022, Central Otago (12%)

93 points

This brand is named after a trio of European miners who came to Central Otago in the mid 19th-century for the gold rush and established the Earnscleugh Grand Junction Mining company. Now owned by plant scientist Kirsten Wright and her husband Paul, the estate was first planted to vines in 2000 and the wines are made by New Zealand veteran Matt Connell. What we like about this particular Riesling is that it's a bit different. It's made in more of a rustic, baked red apple style than most, which is not to take away from its crisp, juicy freshness. There's a touch of residual sugar (7 g/l) and a pure, clean-as-a-whistle finish.



Zephyr Riesling 2024, Wairau – Marlborough (10%)

93 points

In the same way that the Glover family's Zephyr feels like a brand for modern times, so this Riesling with its bright lime-cordial aromas, lowish alcohol and subtly off-dry nature (12 g/l) is well suited to modern tastes and lifestyles. Made from the Brawn single vineyard in Marlborough's highly regarded Dillons Point sub-region, this is an easy-going, uncomplicated and zesty take on the variety. The Opawa River, which runs to the south of the family vineyard, is apparently home to scores of whitebait, a local delicacy that the Gloves say is perfect with a glass of their Zephyr Riesling. Sounds idyllic.

Other Whites



Ata Rangi Chenin Blanc 2024, Wairarapa (13%)

96 points - DISCOVERY WHITE

Chenin Blanc certainly isn't new to New Zealand, but this particular wine is. And it stopped us right in our tracks. We've long known what a terrific winemaker Helen Masters is, and she's certainly created something extra special with her first ever Ata Rangi Chenin Blanc. We've tasted a few New Zealand Chenins over the years, and we've generally been impressed – but this is something else, and for that reason we couldn't resist giving it our White Discovery award. The fruit is sourced from a couple of different Martinborough vineyards and the winemaking incorporates older, large-format oak barrels, as with other varieties in the Ata Rangi range. In terms of the actual wine, there are shades of white Burgundy here. It's hugely engaging and just glides seamlessly across the palate, offering layer upon layer of unadulterated refinement and charm.

Forrest Chenin Blanc 2024, Marlborough (13%)

95 points

As we say above, Chenin Blanc has history in New Zealand – indeed, John Forrest himself planted it back in 1988. It's a variety that's well suited to the country's cool climate and high sunshine hours, which allow Chenin to retain its hallmark acidity whilst also developing riper red apple flavours and richer texture. And yet plantings currently sit at a paltry 22 hectares, half of what they were in 2008 and just a quarter of the 100 hectares that existed in 2004. This makes no sense – and we'd certainly love to see that planting figure rise again. Whereas the Ata Rangi wine is made in a dry style, the Forrest is a touch sweeter. It's rich and plush in style, with roasted nuts, vibrant acidity and a bold spicy finish. Ata Rangi offers seamless refinement, this is more delightful shock and awe, so take your pick.

Te Whare Rā Single Vineyard Toru 2023, Marlborough (13%)

95 points - INNOVATION PRODUCER

The third and final WOTY wine from this estate really cements its right to the Innovation Producer award. Toru was first created 17 years ago and, according to owners Anna and Jason Flowerday, it was the first of its kind in New Zealand. Today it's a flagship wine in the range – a field blend of Gewürztraminer (53%), Riesling (34%) and Pinot Gris (13%) which are co-fermented to allow better integration of the three varieties. It certainly has a New World Riesling tone to its vivid lime-cordial nose and off-dry palate profile (5 g/l), but there's also an exotic rose petal note from the Gewürztraminer, and then the Pinot Gris completes this harmonious trio by adding texture and phenolic elegance. Some wines like this veer into disconcerting and bombastic aromatic territory reminiscent of granny's bath oil. This deftly made wine avoids the trap – instead its exotic aromatics ring clear and true, and the palate presence is what ends up defining it, and singling it out as a serious, rewarding blend.

Forrest Albariño 2024, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (13.5%)

94 points

According to the New Zealand Winegrowers' 2025 Vineyard Register, there are 65 hectares of Albariño planted in the country, making it the seventh most planted white variety. On the basis of wines like this, we'd love to see more. It makes sense given this is a variety that suits a moderate maritime climate, can cope with damp conditions – and makes a fabulous partner for seafood. New Zealand's first commercial bottling of Albariño was in 2011 and, from the limited number of wines we've tasted, there is quite a range of styles currently being produced. Admittedly, some are a bit simple and pear-fruited. But the best marry classic Albariño characteristics of fresh acidity, fruitiness and floral overtones with the kind of concentration you'd generally expect from a top Iberian example. John Forrest

planted Albariño in 2011 and the first vintage of this wine was 2015. It's a bold, almost Viognier-like take, yet with more acidity and wonderful length. Concentrated, spicy, herbal and full of apple rind and fresh peach fruit, it's extremely impressive.



Lawson's Dry Hills Gewürztraminer 2024, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (14%)

94 points

It's not easy getting the balance right with straight Gewürztraminer – it's often something of a high-wire balancing act trying to juggle heady aromatics with acidity, sweetness and phenolics. This one from Lawson's Dry Hills manages the task pretty successfully, showing classic rose petal, cardamom and lychee aromas, followed by a succulent palate balanced by a welcome touch of bitter phenolics and gentle acidity. There's decent texture and flesh here (with 8 g/l of residual sugar) but it doesn't lapse into excess, and there's a mineral feel as well as a nicely spicy finish. The fruit was grown at the start of the Southern Valleys on heavy clay soils; most of the wine was made in stainless steel but the pressings were fermented in old French oak barrels before being blended back in. A cleverly made wine.



Misty Cove Landmark Albariño 2025, Gisborne (14%)

94 points

Doug Bell was the first to plant Albariño in New Zealand, and the fruit for this wine is sourced from his Gisborne vineyard. Misty Cove's South-African born, French-trained winemaker Emmanuel 'Manu' Bolliger uses stainless steel (60%) and a mix of new and used acacia wood puncheons (40%) for fermentation. The idea being that acacia adds texture and can enhance floral characteristics in more aromatic varieties, without imparting oaky flavours. It's fresh and juicy but also smoky, ripe and saline, a truly gorgeous example of classic Albariño with a little extra concentration and weight.



Zephyr Gewürztraminer 2024, Wairau – Marlborough (13.5%)

93 points

Plantings of Gewürztraminer in New Zealand have been in gradual decline and are currently half what they were in 2008. Today's figure of 160 hectares, however, has been stable for a few years, which is good news for a variety that is capable of producing expressive, balanced wines with plenty of varietal character and regional variation. As a low-acid variety that naturally produces wonderfully exotic aromatics, it suits the relatively cool climate and high sunshine hours New Zealand has to offer. We found Ben Glover's Zephyr wine to have everything we want from a young Kiwi Gewürztraminer. It's beautifully exotic on the nose with classic ginger and Turkish Delight aromas, mid-weight in the mouth with just the right acid balance, and almost imperceptibly off-dry.

Sparkling



No.1 Family Estate No.1 Reserve NV, Wairau - Marlborough

96 points - TOP SPARKLING

New Zealand clearly has the potential to make excellent traditional method sparkling wine. The reason we can say that owes much to the pioneering work of Daniel Le Brun, a 12th-generation vigneron from Champagne who was dazzled by the potential in New Zealand and launched his first Marlborough fizz in 1985. While traditional method sparkling wine had been made in New Zealand prior to his arrival, Daniel Le Brun brought vital *champenois* expertise, and his pioneering efforts in Marlborough sparked a surge in fizz production. He later sold his initial (eponymous) winery and launched No.1 in 1997, with his wife Adele and daughter Virginie very much involved (hence the 'Family Estate') together with winemaker Lee Dobson. We've long been impressed by these characterful, elegant wines, and wondered as a result why more Marlborough producers aren't going down the fizz route. (Perhaps it's a question of New Zealand having too many good options on the wine table, and traditional method sparkling is a time- and cost-intensive product, especially when you compare it to Sauvignon Blanc.) But this kind of wine shows why it's tremendously worthwhile. Every year, a small amount of the Cuvée No.1 Blanc de Blancs is set aside for extended lees aging - this then becomes the Reserve. This iteration is 91% Chardonnay and 9% Pinot Noir, aged six-and-a-half years on lees, disgorged June 2024, with an Extra Brut designation (2.3 g/l residual sugar). As with great champagne, this wine is a beautiful blend of vibrant fruit freshness with savoury autolytic richness - fresh bread, rich biscuit and brioche complexity. Very refined but also enjoyable. We'd love to see more New Zealand sparkling wines of this ambition and quality.



Huia Blanc de Blancs 2019, Wairau - Marlborough (12.5%)

95 points

Everything about this wine makes us smile: the sunny label and lack of fussy packaging, the fact it's organic, the price...but most of all the taste. It's just brim full of character and flavour. Huia's winemaker, Josh Lee, has a pretty stellar CV, having worked for the likes of Greywacke and Dog Point. He also spent time honing his craft in Europe and, given the quality of this wine, it'll come as no surprise to learn he worked for a time with the team at sparkling specialist Nyetimber in the UK. The fruit for this traditional method blanc de blancs comes from both the Huia home vineyard in central Wairau and from grower fruit sourced from the Lower Omaka Valley (Southern Valleys). Fermentation takes place in neutral French oak and the wine is aged on lees for four years. We just love the artisanal, biscuit and bruised red apple flavours, the creamy texture and the fabulous drinkability of this fizz. In a world where champagne at this price can be a bit identikit and flavourless, this is a very welcome alternative.



No.1 Family Estate No.1 Cuvée NV, Wairau - Marlborough

94 points

As a dedicated traditional-method sparkling wine specialist, and with the champenois expertise of founder Daniel Le Brun to hand, No.1 Family Estate is right at the forefront of fine fizz production in New Zealand. (For more background details, see the note on the Reserve, above.) They're also proud members of the Méthode Marlborough group, a voluntary collective aimed at promoting high-quality traditional method Marlborough fizz, with members signing up to quality parameters such as minimum 18 months ageing on lees, uniquely Marlborough production and only using Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. No.1 makes a variety of different traditional method styles - and this Cuvée is one of their better value options, a non-vintage Chardonnay-based blend (here with 6% Pinot Noir), more than 20 months lees ageing and a Brut designation (7.2 g/l residual sugar). At its core is a tangy, vivid green apple and pink rhubarb acidity, which is complemented by a biscuity, bready autolysis and a mineral, gently saline finish. A wonderfully mouth-watering, gratifying aperitif style that won't break the bank.



Auntsfield Méthode Ancestrale Muscat 2025 – Marlborough (11.5%)

93 points

As mentioned in the Auntsfield Sauvignon Blanc note (above), Muscat was the first variety to be planted on this property by Scotsman David Herd in the late 19th Century, in what is believed to be Marlborough's first proper vineyard. This wine pays tribute to David's pioneering efforts. It's made from the same Muscat clone, grown on his original vineyard site, and trained along wire and Manuka posts as the vines historically were. Just a quick re-cap on the *Méthode Ancestrale* (aka Pet-Nat). Essentially it involves just one fermentation rather than the two required for traditional method wines. For this particular wine, when the fermentation is nearing completion and a small amount of sugar remains, the wine is chilled, racked, clarified and bottled under crown cap. Gradually the fermentation kicks off again and, once complete, the yeast is left in the bottle. The result is an aromatic, grapey fizz with floral hints and a faint odour of fermentation. With just 11.5% alcohol, it's a lighter, upbeat style, with an endearing touch of rusticity and plenty of old-school charm.



Hunter's MiruMiro Reserve 2020, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (12%)

93 points

Ernie and Jane Hunter planted their first vines in 1979. Their dedication to quality and communication saw them gain swift recognition – though adversity soon materialised in the form of Ernie's sudden and untimely death. Undaunted, Jane was determined to carry the legacy on, teaming up with her brother-in-law, Peter Macdonald ('Mac') and, later, his sons Edward and James Macdonald, who lead the winery today. (Jane would later be made an OBE for her services to the New Zealand wine industry.) Hunter's is undoubtedly a cornerstone of the modern Marlborough wine scene – setting the bar high on numerous fronts, from Sauvignon Blanc to sustainability via sparkling, which was added to the portfolio in the 1990s. MiruMiro is a consistently impressive traditional method sparkling wine (the name translates as 'bubbles' in Te Reo Māori) which delivers excellent complexity for the price. The 2020 vintage is 77% Pinot Noir and 23% Chardonnay, matured on its lees for 47 months, and with a final residual sugar level of 9 g/l. The style is an engaging blend of lemon pith freshness and bready richness, with a fine mousse and lively, creamy-textured finish. Smart stuff.

Rosé



Dancing Water Pinot Noir Rosé 2024, Central Otago (14%)

94 points – TOP ROSÉ

Rosé is becoming something of a speciality for Dancing Water, which is based in Waipara, North Canterbury. The team, under owner and managing partner Kim Schofield, has created various rosé styles over the years, including a Blanc de Noirs Pinot and a pink Scheurebe, winning awards and accolades along the way. This rosé is made from Clone 5 Pinot Noir, whole bunch pressed and tank fermented, yielding a wine that treads a fine line between bright cherry fruit intensity and savoury, herbal restraint. It's juicy, ripe and fragrant, with wild strawberry and sun-baked herbal complexity. A rounded, food-friendly style with a touch of spice. New Zealand Pinot Noir really can make some serious rosé.

te Pā Signature Series Rosé 2025, Marlborough (12%)

93 points – BEST VALUE ROSÉ

We're all for championing fine age-worthy rosé wines with character and complexity, but quite frankly you sometimes just want something fun and smashable that isn't going to break the bank. This cherry-hued Wairau rosé from te Pā is exactly that. It's easy-going, it's got a touch of residual sweetness, and it does actually smell like Pinot Noir... Although we're not fans of putting rosé in clear bottles because of the very real risks of light strike (both these rosés are in clear flint glass), it's hard to knock this joyful wine that's thoroughly deserving of our Value Rosé award.

Reds

Pinot Noir



Two Paddocks Pinot Noir 2023, Central Otago (13%)

98 points – TOP RED

For those rare people who don't know the name, Two Paddocks is a Pinot Noir specialist in Central Otago with some of the most southerly vineyards in the world. Sure, it makes a bit of Riesling too, but Pinot is the true headlining act – well, alongside proprietor and celebrated actor Sam Neill, that is. (Not forgetting the scene-stealing Saddleback pigs that form part of what is a wider farming estate.) A self-declared Pinot Noir 'obsessive', with a family background in the wine trade, Sam told us about an early, formative experience tasting Burgundy with actor James Mason – fast forward to early 1993, when a chance encounter with a wine friend led him to plant his first vineyard in Gibbston. Since the first wine was made in 1997, the estate has grown to four vineyards, all organically farmed, with the sub-regions of Alexandra and Bannockburn joining the party (see notes on the Last Chance, Fusilier and First Paddock below). Although Central Otago initially made its name on the back of intense, structured, often quite dark-fruited and alcoholic Pinot Noirs, these wines prove there's another side to the region. This Pinot is their 'flagship' blend of all four vineyards, from a relatively warm vintage but which finished in cool conditions. Winemaking involved 50% de-stemming, ambient yeast ferments and 11 months in French oak barrels (18% new). When we tasted it initially in the Wines of the Year line-up, it was immediately bright and engaging but with a definite brooding, autumnal, peaty, savoury dimension, insistent tannin, revitalising acidity and suggestive finish that hinted the wine was just getting going. So we left it. Then we came back. Then we opened another bottle and did the same, eventually tasting it up against all the other top Pinots in the line-up (including its sibling single-vineyard wines). And the truth is, it just kept getting more vibrant and winning and complex and rewarding. On a light frame, it delivers one hell of a performance, pulling together so many different threads of the great work being done on this estate. Two Paddocks' strapline is: 'In the Fine Wine & Cheering Up Business Since 1993.' And this has to be the epitome of a cheerful fine wine.

Greywacke Pinot Noir 2023, Southern Valleys - Marlborough (13%)

98 points

Another one of Greywacke's wines that sits right at the top of the tree of these Wines of the Year (see their Chardonnay and Wild Sauvignon, above, for more details). As with the other Greywacke wines, and as you might expect of this supremely skilled former Cloudy Bay winemaker, the secret is in the combination of intensity, harmony and elegance. Easy to say; not easy to do. The biggest part of the equation, as owner Kevin Judd says, is getting the best possible fruit. This was all sourced from hillside plantings in the Southern Valleys, which naturally give structure and intensity to Pinot. The talented Richelle Tyney oversees the winemaking these days, and she's a firm believer in minimal intervention and letting the wines express their *turangawaewae* (Māori: a place to stand). One of her greatest wine passions is Southern Valley Pinot Noir and this wine definitely speaks of both its place and sensitive, deft winemaking. Evocative autumnal aromas of dried plums, woodsmoke and fresh summer berries lead into a complex, layered palate profile featuring fine grippy tannins, sweet spice notes and a long, classy, textured finish. Very self-assured, beautifully poised and with a winning combination of energy, vitality and grace, it's a show-stopping wine that has the structure to age well to boot.



Akitu A2 Pinot Noir 2021, Central Otago (13.5%)

97 points – DISCOVERY RED

Akitu is a label we've admired for a while. Founder Andrew Donaldson dedicates his entire production to Pinot Noir and sustainability is central to his approach – perhaps inspired by the stunning surroundings of his Wanaka vineyard, which covers 12 hectares of pristine, picture-perfect landscape at 380 metres altitude in Central Otago. The site lends itself to elegant yet complex Pinot – both the A1 (see below) and A2 come highly recommended. The A1 is nominally the more serious and age-worthy wine, the A2 typically more accessible (Andrew talks of its, 'gay abandon'). So how come this A2 is our Discovery Red? Simply because it's well worth discovering, especially given its more affordable price point (in the context), and particularly because of its endearingly outlandish, gloriously wild style. We went back to both the A1 and the A2 repeatedly while tasting – but this wine just continued to sing, with its vivid aromas (rosehip, dried flowers, wild berry fruit, woodsmoke, pomegranate seed) and notable evolution (bloody, dried fruit and tobacco leaf). Great Pinot should be sensual, shocking, risky and compelling – and that's exactly what this wine is. Great Pinot should go way beyond simple fruit – and that's what this wine does. We urge you to discover this fragrant, fascinating Pinot for yourselves, especially now given it seems to be at a real peak in its evolution. Our notes included the phrases: 'Wow that's delicious in a can't-put-it-down kind of way,' and 'I'd drink the hell out of this.' Enough said.



Ata Rangi Kotinga Pinot Noir 2021, Martinborough - Wairarapa (13.5%)

97 points

Clive Paton was a true pioneer in Martinborough when he started planting vines in the early 1980s, having sold his milking cows ready to take a punt on wine. He was subsequently joined by his sister Alison and wife Phyll, as well as long-term winemaker Helen Masters. The project remains thoroughly down-to-earth and family-oriented, and the wines – particularly the Pinot Noirs – have become some of New Zealand's most celebrated and sought-after. Typically, these are Pinots with weight and gravitas, imbuing a fresh dark fruit character with earthy, sappy, herbal, savoury, autumnal complexity and firm, structuring tannins. Pinot for grown-ups, essentially. It's a style that rewards ageing, so it was a treat to be able to include two different Ata Rangi Pinots with four years of bottle age (see below for the Masters Pinot). This is only the second release of Kotinga, a wine sourced from Dijon clones 115, 667 and 777, which apparently gives it, 'high energy', before being aged in large-format oak to retain the fruit purity. The result is highly distinctive, with notes of rich berry, smoked rosemary, charcuterie, tea tree and pot pourri (a captivating bouquet, all told). The palate is dense, with insistent fine tannin, incredible tension and wonderful presence and intensity. Next-level Pinot, with delightful maturity – one for the table.



Two Paddocks The Fusilier Pinot Noir 2022, Bannockburn – Central Otago (13%)

97 points

The Fusilier in question is Sam Neill's father, Major Dermot Neill, a soldier in the Royal Irish Fusilier Regiment for 20 years before he returned home to Dunedin (New Zealand), where he ran the family wine and spirit business, Neill & Co. Sam Neill, although best known for his stellar acting career, started Two Paddocks as a wine passion project in 1993, assembling various vineyards in the southern and western parts of Central Otago, before adding this one, in more central Bannockburn, in 2013. The rolling north-facing terraces over alluvial silt, sand and gravel, typically give a darker-fruited expression of Pinot than some of the lighter Two Paddocks bottlings, exacerbated by a relatively warm vintage in 2022. Winemaking involved 82% whole bunch, wild yeast ferments in large-format oak, then a further 12 months of ageing in oak (23% new). The perfume is instantly attractive, with smoky, flinty red and black berry fruit and charred herb notes. On the palate, it's tense and grippy, with chalky tannin – complex and long, with a wonderful flow and presence. It's a wine with tremendous resonance and a light touch despite the complexity. As with the estate Pinot (see above), this wine just kept getting better the more we revisited it. Fabulous stuff.



Akitu A1 Pinot Noir 2020, Central Otago (13.5%)

96 points

Both the A2 (see above) and A1 are consistently impressive wines from this Pinot Noir specialist in Wanaka, Central Otago. Our tasting offered further proof that top New Zealand Pinot Noir can and does age with excellent results – the A2 is the 2021 vintage, this A1 from the 2020 vintage, so roughly five years old when we tasted it in November 2025. Both wines major on a compelling mix of vivid, wild aromatics and tense, savoury, highly complex palate profiles. This A1 shows definite evolution to the hue, with leaping aromas of rosemary, blood orange, fresh and dried berry fruit, with hints of leather and gamey meat. The elegantly bittersweet Campari theme continues on the palate, which is savoury, tense and spicy, with tremendous energy and savoury depths. For some reason good Morey-St-Denis sprang to mind. On the day, it didn't quite sing as compelling a song as the A2, hence the small difference in points, but make no mistake: these are wines any Pinot lover should try.



Pegasus Bay Pinot Noir 2023, North Canterbury (13%)

96 points – BEST PRODUCER

'There's a lot going on with our Pinots,' muses Ed Donaldson, and he's not wrong. Pegasus Bay has made a laudable name for itself by crafting wines of serious, sometimes even outrageous personality and winning swagger. This Pinot brings together aged vines and a mixture of 12 different clones plus a range of winemaking techniques (including 40% whole bunch and 30% new oak barrels). The result is a serious, expressive, intense jolt of autumnal energy, packed full of wild berry, woodsmoke, ferruginous flavour and with a grippy yet elegant tannic framework. As with so many of the Pegasus Bay wines, it's fundamentally gastronomic, so one to put with food, and it will also age well. (The 2015 Aged Release was showing wonderfully truffle-maturity and complexity in 2025.) Coming back to the vineyards, part of the reason for the intensity in Pegasus Bay's wines is the low yields – sometimes painfully so. Ed explains that they're regularly getting half the quantities that other comparable New Zealand Pinot Noir vineyards will be achieving, sometimes significantly less. Such are the lengths that this quality-oriented producer will go to in the search for personality and age-worthiness in their wines.



Schubert Block B Pinot Noir 2022, Wairarapa (13%)

96 points

It was quite the journey for Kai Schubert and Marion Deimling from the student classrooms of Geisenheim University in Germany (viticulture and oenology, naturally) to making wine in Martinborough. Their quest to find a place to make great Pinot Noir took them from Germany through other parts of Europe to the likes of Oregon, California and Australia – but it wasn't until they arrived in Wairarapa that they felt they'd found what they were looking for. In 1998, they bought an established vineyard in Martinborough (hence some of the more eclectic varieties they make, including Syrah, Merlot and Müller-Thurgau) and also acquired 40 hectares of bare land in Gladstone just north of Martinborough, which they planted in 1999 and 2000. Plantings now total 14 hectares and the duo make a range of wines – but Pinot Noir definitely takes centre stage. There's a wonderfully earthy, savoury wildness to Schubert's Pinots that is reminiscent of the Old World (or perhaps old school), and in this Block B it's matched with juicy acidity and rosemary, malty, stemmy complexity. It's a wine that seems to inhabit a different register from many Kiwi Pinots – the fruit brightness is dialled right down and instead you have this wellspring of fresh earth, dried meat, tobacco and berry fruit complexity that maybe speaks of its makers as well as the land.



Two Paddocks The First Paddock Pinot Noir 2022, Gibbston – Central Otago (13%)

96 points

So this is where it all began for Sam Neill's wine adventure – the first vineyard he planted, back in 1993, in the upper Gibbston reaches of Central Otago. As a wine, it exemplifies the vision for Pinot Noir that shines through all this estate's wines: complexity and intensity but also, above all, elegance and drinkability...and a cheeky sense of light-hearted fun at the same time. The first vintage off here was the 1997, and as the coolest and latest-harvested site of the four estate vineyards, it tends to give delicate, perfumed styles. That said, in this vintage, perhaps because of the slightly warmer conditions, there's a fair bit of dark fruit and depth to this wine, with an inviting smoky, roasted herb complexity. The palate is relatively muscular too, with layers of flavour and elegantly drying tannins. Maturing nicely.



Ata Rangi Masters Pinot Noir 2021, Martinborough - Wairarapa (13.5%)

95 points

Since the early days, and on the back of global acclaim for its grown-up style of Pinot, Ata Rangi has diversified its Pinot Noir range. These days, in addition to the straight Ata Rangi Pinot Noir, there are four other bottlings: Kotinga (see above), McCrone, Masters and the more affordable Crimson. Exploring the nuances of the different sites and expressions through an ethereal grape variety like Pinot Noir is always a joy for wine lovers, particularly when it involves a producer at the level of Ata Rangi and a winemaker as gifted as Helen Masters. The vineyard source for this wine is owned and farmed by Helen and her family, having been established in 2002 over alluvial gravels mixed with clay, which retains moisture and keeps the soils cooler than the more gravel-dominant sites around Martinborough village. The 2021 vintage (the second release of this wine) suffered from early frosts, meaning low yields, but which ripened serenely to give expressive, balanced wines. Plantings are a mix of clones and the vinification used 70% whole bunch, ambient-yeast fermentation then 11 months in French oak (30% new). Aromatics are relatively restrained, showing leafy red berry fruit, damson and subtle earthy tones. It's on the palate where this wine comes alive, with grippy chalky fine tannin, savoury complexity and serious tension at its core. Real energy, vibrancy and composure here – it's a wine that masters the tricky combination of power and elegance effortlessly well.



Blank Canvas Upton Downs Pinot Noir 2023, Awatere – Marlborough (13%)

95 points – BEST WINEMAKER



Sophie Parker-Thomson MW and her husband and business partner Matt Thomson are the formidable team behind Blank Canvas. Their ambition to not only craft elegant, complex, site-specific wines but also then communicate and enthuse and engage on the back of that is proving beneficial not just for their own wines but also New Zealand as a whole. Until recently, Sophie and Matt sourced their fruit from growers – but then in late 2025, the duo took the plunge and bought a nine-hectare property in Marlborough's Omaka Valley, from which they will make Pinot Noir, Syrah, Chardonnay and Nebbiolo. One of the many tasks at hand for Blank Canvas is proving the potential in Marlborough for great Pinot Noir – and that's all about finding the right site, according to Thomson. This Upton Downs is sourced from over the hills in inland Awatere, where the dry, cool climate, complex soils and Dijon 777 clone give a wine style that's pale and perfumed, with a vibrant freshness and lift. There's an intriguing earthy, gamey, dusty character here, with dried herbs and pomegranate seed. It's definitely on the lighter end of the spectrum – more Volnay than Gevrey, if you will – but with an upbeat vibrancy and drinkability that speaks very much of Awatere.



Hunter's Pinot Noir 2024, Southern Valleys - Marlborough (13.8%)

95 points – BEST VALUE RED

As Marlborough's oldest independent winery in continuous family ownership, Hunter's has set the benchmark on many fronts (see the MiruMiro sparkling note above for more background). They haven't been afraid to innovate over the years – with sparkling, for example, or more recently introducing the excellent Offshoot range. Within all of this, the wines tend to deliver solid value for money, and this Pinot is an excellent case in point. It's sourced from the Southern Valleys for structure and intensity, then aged 12 months in French oak barrels. Sure, it's not the cheapest bottle out there (New Zealand wine rarely is), but pound for pound, it definitely over-delivers. There's no lack of aromatic complexity, with beguiling notes of woodsmoke, pot pourri and dark berry fruit. The palate profile is serious, with tension and fresh acid at its core, but also a classic Southern Valleys presence and structure, with fine insistent tannin. A bold but balanced style with earthy, peaty complexity that should also mature well in the short to medium-term.



Novum Pinot Noir 2024, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (13.5%)

95 points

Will and Rachel Hoare make a mean Pinot (in the best possible sense). They also do a fine line in Chardonnay (see above). The experience, sensitivity and ambition that both bring to their craft is undoubtedly key in shaping a wine like this, which is seriously impressive. The grapes are sourced from the Quarters Vineyard in the Brancott Valley, where the heavy clay loam soils and warmer daytime temperatures give a richness and intensity to the fruit. That said, this wine is far from being all about power. There's an ethereal, lifted quality to the wine, with wonderful stemmy, sappy, earthy, floral complexity, and a fundamentally mid-weight body, all of which means this is more ballet dancer than boxer. The savoury, earthy, forest-floor appeal is offset by an underlying brightness of fruit and makes for a compelling package. One for Pinot classicists. (Also because it's a rare New Zealand wine that's sealed with a cork rather than screw-cap – 'new generation' cork, specify the Hoares, which makes the wines softer on the palate, in their experience.)



Q Pinot Noir 2024, Waitaki – North Otago (13%)

95 points

Q Wines was established in 2003 on a former sheep paddock by wine lover Jules Stephan and businesswoman Jules Matthews. Six hectares comprising Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay are planted in the cool (in both senses of the word) Waitaki Valley in North Otago. The emphasis is on small-production, single-vineyard wines – and the 2024 vintage was a special one in Waitaki, a warm and dry season (the second warmest in the past 15 years) allowing an early harvest. This intriguing juxtaposition of a cool site and a warm year is reflected in this engaging Pinot, which shows fresh acidity and fine-boned tannin but also a richer dark fruit profile and brooding character. Smoky, herbal tones add to the complexity, as does a touch of flinty reduction. Refreshingly different.



Schubert Marion's Vineyard Pinot Noir 2022, Wairarapa (13.5%)

95 points

Schubert makes excellent Kiwi Pinot with what might be termed a subtle German accent from their base in Martinborough (see the Block B note above for more background). Like the Block B, Marion's Vineyard (named after co-founder Marion Deimling) is sourced from the Gladstone vineyard, and is a selection of predominantly two clones: Pommard and Abel. It was hand-picked and 100% destemmed before 18 months of ageing in French oak barrels (35% new). If that all sounds fairly predictable and straightforward, the wine is anything but – it's a roller-coaster ride that whizzes through a panoply of ways in which Pinot Noir can go beyond fruit to create a captivating experience. Pungent aromatics incorporate woody, stemmy, herbal, dried berry, floral and earthy notes in a heady, high-toned mix. The palate shows energy and spice in a complex, savoury profile, finishing

with juicy acidity and an autumnal feel. Gloriously mature, one to drink up and savour at leisure.



Two Paddocks The Last Chance Pinot Noir 2022, Alexandra - Central Otago (13.5%)

95 points

Visiting the Last Chance vineyard, perched in bright clear air above the Earnscleugh Valley, with its panoramic views and perky Pinot Noir vines, is one of life's great wine experiences. So it's wonderful to be able to experience this special spot vicariously through the wine, too, one of many impressive Pinot Noirs from the Two Paddocks stable. This is one of the world's most southerly vineyards and its name comes from the watercourse that runs through the heart of the property, hand dug by gold miners in the 1860s. Soils are schist gravels and winemaking in this vintage involved 85% whole-bunch fermentation then 12 months in French oak barrels (18% new). There's real intensity and energy here, from the dark plum and wild berry fruit to the flinty, baked thyme notes and mineral, structured palate profile. A bold, heart-warming style that develops in the glass.



Coal Pit Tiwha Pinot Noir 2022, Central Otago (13%)

94 points

Coal Pit is a family-owned operation in Gibbston, Central Otago, based around a 12-hectare vineyard first planted in 1994. These are some of the oldest vines in Gibbston and the vineyard is farmed organically. The first Coal Pit wines were made in 2006 and Pinot Noir now takes centre stage. This particular cuvee, Tiwha, which sits at the top of the range, is named after owner Rosie Dunphy's late father. (The coal pit name, meanwhile, is from a local site where miners and pioneers would load up with fuel on their journeys.) The 2022 vintage gave good yields of concentrated fruit and the wine was made using 20% whole bunch, ambient-yeast fermentation and then 10 months of ageing in 30% new French oak barrels. The result is a serious but engaging style of Pinot with plenty of dark berry fruit and spicy energy but also a dried flower, bloody, faintly ferruginous complexity. Hints of the Côte de Nuits here, with fine detail as well as impressive vitality. The winery's suggested food match is beef tartare, anchovy cream and salt and vinegar chips. Which all sounds pretty heavenly to us.



Dancing Water Artist Series Pinot Noir 2023, North Canterbury (14%)

94 points

One of Dancing Water's key USPs are its old, dry-grown, ungrafted Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vines planted in the limestone-rich soils of Waipara in the early 1980s. The project was originally established in 1981 and was bought by the current regime in 2017 – it's now headed up by owner and managing partner Kim Schofield. Viticulturist Dr David Jordan has undertaken a seven-year restoration programme focusing on vine health, frost management and long-term sustainability. The wines are typically made along low-intervention lines – this Pinot was sourced entirely from the ungrafted vines and spent 12 months in barrel. It's definitely on the richer, more voluptuous end of the Pinot spectrum, with plenty of red and black fruit core together with an almond, creamy richness. An expansive style but with some appealing tannic grounding.



Greystone Pinot Noir 2021, North Canterbury (14%)

94 points

This stylish, complex Pinot shows elegant maturity as well as a touch of bloody, gamey intrigue. Pinot is something of a speciality for Waipara-based Greystone, whose name refers to the unique limestone conglomerate that forms the bedrock for the vineyards. The 2021 vintage started with a severe frost which reduced yields significantly, before a dry autumn allowed even ripening. Winemaking is fairly straightforward, with 7% whole bunch fermentation and 16 months maturation in French oak barrels (25% new). Black and

red fruit aromas meld with hints of charcuterie and baked herbs; on the palate, there's no shortage of intensity and firm tannin, with a full body for the variety and a spicy, energetic finish. Lots of wine here, but also grounded with freshness and sinew. Drink up.



Lake Chalice Plume Pinot Noir 2019, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (13.5%)

94 points

We're firm believers in the ageability of fine New World wines, and we're thrilled to be able to feature two 2019 Pinots in this report which more than demonstrate that. The Plume is a range that includes a Chardonnay, Sauvignon, and Pinot, all of which are deliberately made to be released with bottle age. For this Pinot, from the small but excellent 2019 harvest, grapes were sourced from the Eyrise Vineyard in the Waihopai Valley. Winemaker Chloe Gabrielsen fermented 20% of the fruit as whole clusters and the wine was subsequently aged for 10 months in new and used barriques. What we particularly love is this wine's harmonious combination of earthy, gamey development and juicy, plump, succulent fruit.



Marisco Emma Marris Pinot Noir 2023, Southern Valleys – Marlborough (13.5%)

94 points

Brent Marris is a well-known figure in the Marlborough and New Zealand wine scenes. His father John was involved in planting some of the first vineyards of the modern era in Marlborough, with Montana in 1973. Brent made Oyster Bay for Delegats in the 1980s, then established Wither Hills with his father in the 1990s before selling to Lion Nathan. Having planted a vineyard in Waihopai in 2003, he branched out on his own, launching the commercially successful The Ned brand, among others. Brent's wife Rosemary is his business partner, and the eldest of their four daughters, Emma, is now Production Winemaker. Emma sourced this Pinot from the Leefield Station Vineyard in the upper Waihopai Valley. The 2023 vintage was relatively long and cool, and that definitely shows through in the wine, which is very much in the red not black fruit spectrum: an elegant, sappy, tense style that's drinking beautifully right now, given it's showing signs of evolution in bottle. Think pomegranate, cherry and dried flowers. A lighter but rewarding style.



Mohua Pinot Noir 2020, Central Otago (13.5%)

94 points

Owned and managed by two generations of the McLachlan family, Mohua was established in 2009 and makes Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough and Pinot Noir from Central Otago. This 2020 vintage was sourced from various Central sub-regions: 27% Bendigo, 43% Pisa and 30% Gibbston. It was 100% destemmed then aged for 10 months in used French oak. There's great energy here – it seems younger than a 2020, with juicy berry and cherry fruit, and a vibrant spicy finish. There's a smoky, wild herb character too. Fresh, friendly, very gluggable and with a touch of complexity to boot.



Palliser Single Vineyard Hua Nui Pinot Noir 2024, Wairarapa (13.5%)

94 points

Palliser was established in the mid-to-late 1980s when vines were planted in Martinborough and a group of shareholders banded together to form an unlisted public company. The format has proved enduring and Pinot Noir has become the main focus, with an increasing emphasis on organic and even biodynamic cultivation. This Pinot is sourced from the (organic) Hua Nui vineyard, a 6.5-hectare plot planted entirely to six clones of Pinot in 1998. The fruit is hand-picked, ambient-yeast fermented then aged in French oak barrels (23% new) for 10 months. Initially, it comes across as somewhat reserved or restrained in style, with gentle aromatics of chalky red and black berry fruit and a certain earthy, floral character. It's on the palate where it starts to shine, full of juicy bright fruit, with gently integrated spice and a serious structure.



Tiki Single Vineyard Pinot Noir 2023, North Canterbury (13.5%)

94 points

The Tiki name doesn't just refer to co-founder Royce McKean's great-great-great grandfather, Chieftain Tiki Tere Mihi. It's also the word for a hand-carved Māori treasure that bestows good fortune and love on its recipient - a fine analogy (or perhaps ambition) for the winemaking process. Tiki has one of the largest vineyards in North Canterbury and the 2023 season was relatively cool and long. Around 10% of the fruit was whole-bunch fermented before barrel ageing. It's a slightly wilder style than the Kiwi norm, with quite heady, high-toned, floral aromatics and gamey, malty, smoky flavours together with juicy red and black fruit. The tannins and fresh acidity give the wine a sinewy, edgy feel, which works well with food.



Whitehaven Pinot Noir 2023, Marlborough (14%)

94 points

Taking advantage of Whitehaven's access to 35 sites across Marlborough's three main sub-regions, this is a blend of fruit (and clones) from the clay-based soils of Marlborough's Southern Valleys with vineyards in the cool, windy Awatere Valley. As such it's a wonderfully elegant Pinot that manages to deliver a beautiful balance between scented, leafy, red fruit aromatics, and then succulent, savoury complexity in the mouth. Although the alcohol at 14% feels a bit high, like its sibling Sauvignon it offers terrific value for money given its quality, length and sheer drinkability.



Escarpmment Kupe Pinot Noir 2022, Wairarapa (14%)

93 points

Pinot Noir was very much the grape on which Escarpment built its (enviable) reputation. (For more on the winery background, see the Chardonnay note above.) This was one of the first vineyards the newly-founded winery planted in 1999 on the alluvial Te Muna Road terrace in Martinborough. And it exemplifies the intense-yet-elegant style on which co-founder Larry McKenna built his 'Prince of Pinot' reputation. The wine is made purely from the Abel clone, one of the older New Zealand selections and responsible for a fair few of the country's top Pinots to date. It's famous for lending an earthy, savoury complexity to the wines, as well as a hint of spice, and it's often found in Martinborough. This wine was fermented in open-top fermenters with ambient yeasts before being aged in French oak barrels (42% new) for 20 months. Despite this being a cooler vintage, the wine doesn't lack for intensity or energy, with firm tannin, plenty of earthy red fruit, smoky autumnal complexity and a spicy, warming finish. There's a bittersweet edge too that will make it a fine match for food.



Folding Hill Ballasalla Pinot Noir 2023, Central Otago (14%)

93 points

Established by former doctors Tim and Nikki Kerruish, Folding Hill was first planted to vines in 2003 and the focus here has always been firmly on Pinot Noir. A decade ago, a small amount of Chardonnay was added and today the fruit for all Folding Hill's wines is estate-grown. The 4.5-hectare vineyard is organic and situated in Central's warm, dry Bendigo sub-region, where yields (particularly those of Pinot) are kept deliberately low. The aim is to take an 'Old World' approach to winemaking with hand-picking and whole berry ferments, where different clones are kept separate until final blending. A mix of new and older François Frères medium toast oak is used, and the wines are bottled unfined and unfiltered. Ballasalla is the less expensive of the two Folding Hill Pinots in our line-up and it spends a shorter time in oak, 11 months (10% new). That said, there is a similarity of style here with both wines showing malty, autumnal notes and woody complexity. There's also tense red fruit acidity and gravelly tannins in the Ballasalla that suggest it will benefit from time in bottle.



Folding Hill Orchard Block Pinot Noir 2022, Central Otago (14.2%)

93 points

Only 80 cases of this wine were made, as opposed to 300 of the Ballasalla. Although the clonal material is different, winemaking is similar, with de-stemming followed by fermentation with indigenous yeast. The other key difference is that the Orchard Block spends 18 months in French oak, 30% of which is new. There's definitely more evolution in this slightly older wine and a lovely Burgundian feel to its earthy, foresty dried red fruit aromas and flavours, more Nuits-Saint-Georges than Chambolle. The extra oak influence is also apparent in its creamy, rounded texture.



McArthur Ridge Southern Tor Pinot Noir 2024, Central Otago (14%)

93 points

McArthur Ridge broke ground with its first plantings in 2002 and over the next five years gradually built that to a substantial 175 hectares, making the vineyard one of the largest in Central Otago. It lies at 200-300 metres altitude in Central Otago's most southerly and driest sub-region, mountainous Alexandra, where the extreme climate offers big diurnal shifts in both summer and winter. The first vintage of Southern Tor was 2006 and in 2020 Matt Connell took over the winemaking, making a few changes along the way. He now sources French oak from a range of suppliers and uses a combination of wild and cultured yeasts. The 2024 is still young and currently offers smoky sweet spiced bramble and summer berry fruit, fine tannin and evident creamy oak. There's good intensity here and a long finish that bode well for its further development.



Nanny Goat Vineyard Pinot Noir 2023, Central Otago (13.5%)

93 points

Named after the wild goats that roam Central Otago's rugged mountainous terrain, Nanny Goat released its first wine, a Pinot Noir, in 2005. The estate's organic vineyard is in Central's Queensberry sub-region and is planted mostly to Pinot Noir with a small amount of Chardonnay and Pinot Gris. Although owner and winemaker Alan Peters-Oswald produces single-vineyard wines solely from estate-grown fruit, this particular wine is a pan-regional blend, a mix of estate-grown and grower fruit sourced from Queensberry, Bendigo, Pisa and Bannockburn. Following open top fermentation with indigenous yeast, the wine spends 24-32 days on skins before pressing into 225-litre oak barrels for maturation. It's a dark fruited take on Pinot with evident, grippy tannin and a bold muscular finish.



Nautilus Southern Valleys Pinot Noir 2022, Marlborough (13.5%)

93 points

Nautilus is so serious about its Pinot Noir that it has a winery dedicated to the variety, with a second next door for its white wine production. Built in 2000, the Pinot-dedicated facility was apparently one of the first in the southern hemisphere based on gravity flow. This particular wine is from the Southern Valleys, where the clay soils are well suited to producing fleshy, textural Pinots with fine-boned tannins, and this is a really good example of exactly that. Winemaker Clive Jones uses a proportion of whole bunch to add stem tannins and the fermentation is carried out with ambient yeasts. The ageing takes place in new (around 25%) and used French oak barriques and there's a rich, smoky feel to this classic take on Pinot. Very self-assured and traditional in style.



Peregrine Pinot Noir 2019, Central Otago (13%)

93 points

With no fewer than 13 out of 32 Pinot Noirs in this report coming from Central Otago, it's a region that clearly punches above its weight when it comes to this variety in New Zealand. Around 1,750 hectares (ha) of Central Otago's 2,150 ha total planted area is given over to Pinot Noir, and the region's semi-arid, continental climate with short sunny summers has become renowned for its ability to produce wines that are intensely flavoured and elegant. What it's also capable of, as this wine proves, is Pinot Noir with the ability to age. Peregrine makes the most of Central Otago's varied sub-regions, blending fruit from warm, dry Bendigo for its dark fruit and tannic structure with early-ripening, semi-arid Pisa and then cooler Gibbston for the red fruit and spice notes. Smoky, peaty and woody, this is a fully mature Pinot with fine, resolved tannins and lovely integration.

Other Reds



Aotea by the Seifried Family Cabernet Franc 2021, Nelson (13.5%)

94 points

There isn't that much Cab Franc planted in New Zealand - currently just 88 hectares, equivalent to a tenth of the Merlot vineyard. And yet you can see a future for it here, with its naturally leafy, lifted tones supported by bright red and black fruit within an elegant tannic framework. So it's good to see Seifried aiming high with this variety - Aotea is their top range, and this fruit comes from their Brightwater Vineyard at the southern end of the Waimea Plains, where the stoney soils hold the warmth of the Nelson sun and help ripen the grapes. The wine was aged in oak and has had plenty of time to mature since vintage, showing a developed hue, aromas of red plum, woodsmoke and tobacco, with a dried floral hint. The palate is elegantly mid-weight with an autumnal feel and very much ready to drink now.



Čuvar Guardians Cornerstone Vineyard Cabernet Merlot Malbec 2023, Hawke's Bay (13.5%)

94 points

First, a bit of background. Čuvar (pronounced chu-var) is a Croatian word meaning 'guardian'. The winery is the brainchild of Sir George Fistonich, one of the titans of New Zealand wine and of proud Croatian descent, who built Villa Maria up to become one of the best-known names in Kiwi wine (before Indevin took it over in 2021). Čuvar sits as the flagship brand of Fistonich Family Vineyards, which Sir George founded in 2021, and it's helmed by his daughter Karen Fistonich. Fruit is sourced from different vineyard sites including Hawke's Bay - and Cornerstone is an established vineyard over alluvial stones in prime Gimblett Gravels territory. The result here is glorious cool-climate Cabernet: elegantly mid-weight, with gravelly dark fruit, roasted pepper, blackcurrant leaf and pea pod notes. There's juicy red and black fruit on the palate together with tense, grippy tannins and creamy oak texture. An elegantly linear style with a certain rugged charm. One for classic Cabernet lovers.



Esk Valley Artisanal Syrah 2020, Hawke's Bay (13%)

94 points

Syrah is the third most widely planted red variety in New Zealand, with around 400 hectares. But that makes it less than 1% of the national vineyard. Truth be told, Syrah has struggled to emerge from the long shadow of Pinot, which is a shame given it can show glimpses of greatness here: vivid wines full of cracked black pepper, tangy dark fruit and svelte tannins. That said, quality can be variable, and there's nothing more dispiriting than mediocre Syrah. We were hoping to be able to champion more Syrahs in our Wines of the Year, given we're huge fans of cool-climate Syrah, but it wasn't to be. This Esk Valley was a bright spot, though. (Esk Valley is part of the Indevin empire, the biggest wine producer in New Zealand.) It shows smoky, peppery evolution and notes of eucalypt, dark berry fruit and savoury tones. A brooding, mature, bittersweet style that would work best with food (think: venison loin).



Mission Estate Huchet Syrah 2019, Gimblett Gravels - Hawke's Bay (14%)

93 points

The bold, creamy, dark-fruited tones of this impressive red will appeal to lovers of richer, plusher style of Syrah. Mission Estate is known as New Zealand's oldest wine producer, whose origins can be traced back to 1851, when a group of French missionaries brought vines and winemaking know-how to Hawke's Bay. This wine is named after Brother Cyprian Huchet, son of a Loire Valley vigneron, who became Cellar Master and made history by making and selling New Zealand's first recorded commercial wine. Since then,

Mission Estate's commercial operations have grown, including vineyards in Marlborough, but this Syrah is sourced from the prime Gimblett Gravels terroir in Hawke's Bay famous for making complex, refined reds. Given it's a 2019 vintage, it's still remarkably youthful and vibrant, full of rich dark fruit and toasty oak flavours, with fine structuring tannins. A bold, heart-warming red with plenty going on.

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