

June 2008
New Zealand Revisited

When I last visited New Zealand in 1999 there were in my memory serves me correctly around 130 wine estates throughout the country. Today the figure has virtually doubled and the number continues to grow as each month passes.

New Zealand remains a tiny producer however, when one considers that any village in Bordeaux, Loire or Burgundy there will be upwards of fifty producers.

Significantly in New Zealand 12 producers account for 90% of total production, boutique wineries, these are plenty.

Grape growers who previously sold fruit to one or another of the giants now find it more profitable (probably) and more satisfying (certainly) to create their own label.

Some rely on others to vinify their fruits under contract; others invest in a winery complex or perhaps share with 2 or 3 neighbouring growers.

Vineyard planting continues apace and I was amazed at the number of newly planted blocks, particularly in Hawkes Bay and Marlborough.

Chardonnay boasts the highest area under vine followed by Sauvignon Blanc, which is favourite, as these are the most sought after by an eager consumer. Chardonnay is here to stay, but Sauvignon Blanc? Well Sauvignon Blanc is certainly flavour of the past 5 years in the UK, but I have a hunch, a sneaking suspicion that its bubble may burst.

When Sauvignon Blanc is good, it is unquestionably delicious, but some are so searingly alcoholic and profound in flavour that one glass is enough. I believe that many growers share these fears for I was frequently asked to give my view of the marketing possibilities of numerous other varieties. Alsace wines, Pinot Gris, Pinot Blanc and Gewurztraminer one on several growers short list as is the Northern Rhône speciality Viognier, a difficult vine but one which may well be successful.

There is a long awaited resurgence of interest in Riesling in the UK; the consumer appears to have been convinced that not all tall bottles contain dreary liquid masquerading under the name wine. Australian Riesling can be wonderful and now some brilliant kiwi examples can be found. Riesling is completely at home in New Zealand's long cool growing season and I well foresee that Wairarapa, Marlborough and Nelson will see increasing demand for their Riesling, particularly the drier versions.

As for the Red, Pinot Noir is the biggest potential in New Zealand producing Burgundy look alike. New Zealand has come a long way in vinous terms during the last 20 years and I would clearly love to see this recognition continuing for it couldn't happen to more hospitable people.

Cheers,

Xavier Le-Bellego
Forbury's restaurant

Wine Recommendations:

Alan Scott Sauvignon Blanc £9.99 enquiries@forburys.co.uk

St-Clair Riesling £11.50 sales@hallgarten.co.uk

Zell Chardonnay, Waihike Island £12.50 sales@hallgarten.co.uk