

# THE GLASSHOUSE

## WINE APPRECIATION SOCIETY

### MODULE 15

#### NEW ZEALAND

A SMALL PRODUCER FROM WAY OVER THERE DOING RATHER WELL OVER HERE

In the UK we tend to have a disproportionate view of the scale and importance of New Zealand as a wine producing nation. NZ has been very clever at targeting the UK as its principal wine export market and we tend to see wines from NZ standing side by side, on supermarket shelves, with other Southern Hemisphere countries of the 'new world, each of whom are significantly larger and more established producers of wine.

Some of this can be explained by the fact that NZ has made itself the cheerleader of the new wave of very fresh Sauvignon Blanc wines just as that grape became one of the most popular white wine varieties in the UK and elsewhere.

Whilst NZ only accounts for about 0.7% of the world's wine output it has made some very significant contributions to the modern world of wine - and we will discuss these this evening.

NZ is now a vibrant wine producer punching above its weight in the world of wine. Its other great feature is that it has grown out of the NZ agricultural sector which is the world's least subsidised farming sector!

Another aspect of NZ wine is that many of the wineries are located in some of the most stunningly attractive scenery you will find anywhere – as some of the images here will hopefully attest.



## Geography and Climate

NZ grows grapes in the most southerly location on earth –and also most easterly because of the International Date Line – and if it were in the northern hemisphere its north south stretch would be the equivalent of North Africa to Paris. This might imply a warm continental equivalence too, but being stuck in the middle of the huge Pacific Ocean with the nearest landmass 1,000 miles away, and not that far from Antarctic, means that NZ has a slightly more complex set of geographic and climactic comparisons.

Temperatures in the growing season are around 10°C/ 50°F – which technically classifies it as a 'Region 1' and thus being the same as Bordeaux and Burgundy, but there are significant daily and seasonal variation to this average. The North Island is warmer than the south island but in general NZ is more akin to Bordeaux with Hawkes Bay standing particular comparison and indeed this is where NZ's most notable cabernet sauvignons are grown. Night temperatures can be particularly sharp – and this has helped both Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir production



There is abundant rainfall which, until the 1980s, led to an inhibition of the wine industry as too much rainfall encourages greater leaf and shoot growth than fruit growth. Canopy Management became the technique which allowed wine growers to protect their fruit - dense wine canopies are grown over the fruit to shade the innermost leaves and to delay ripening. This technique alone became the principal factor behind the growth in quality of NZ wine in the 1980s that led to the potential for growth.

## History and Background

Wine was first grown in New Zealand more than 150 years ago but the modern wine industry is a much more recent phenomenon. Indeed when I travelled around New Zealand in the early 1980s there was hardly a vineyard to be seen and the area which is now the most important wine growing region – Marlborough – was still predominantly a soft fruit growing area.

Wine production has seen periods of boom and bust and so the recent surge in production and success is all the more notable.



NZ has had it all – from its earliest days a working class beer drinking culture (NZ produces some pretty unpalatable beers), two bouts of phylloxera, a major change in temperatures in the early 1900s, a flirtation with prohibition in 1919 (it was passed by parliament but not enacted) and bouts of over production. As recently as 1986 a third of all wines were grubbed up because of fears of over production! Even now there is a concern about the rate of growth of production and the need to sell bulk wine – now accounting for over 27% of production. So it's fair to say it's never been easy – but that can also be the case of wine growing everywhere else in the world.

There are three main wine producing areas; Marlborough – in the north of the South Island, Hawkes Bay and Gisborne, both in the North Island. Marlborough is now the largest centre of wine production. Whereas in Europe vines tend to grow on the worst soil in NZ wines are planted on former agricultural parcels of land and yields can therefore be higher than other wine growing countries.



In the early 1980s NZ lost its preferential route into the former Commonwealth countries, most notably the UK, and farmers and the country needed to seek new markets away from dairy and meat. And at the same time NZ entered into a free trade zone with Australia.

The agricultural sector in general and wine producers in particular had to get on their proverbial bikes – and this they have done spectacularly well and wine exports have grown from barely a trickle to be in excess of NZ\$1bn in 2010.

Whilst NZ wine is dominated by two huge companies – Montana (Villa Maria, Esk Valley, Vidals) and the Nobile Group – it was the arrival of technically strong (biologists, bio-chemists and engineers) entrepreneurs from the mid 1980s onward who combined wine growing with a way of life. A number of these entrepreneurs had studied at The University of Adelaide Wine School, but now Wine Studies has become an area of technical excellence in NZ too. Over the years we have got to know some of these families very well, such as the Ibbotsons of St Clair NZ, and tonight our own resident Kiwi – Buzz Cousins will provide a further connection to these great people. NZ wine makers – as much as any in the world, are smart, dynamic and great fun. There are now 697 growers – as well as the giants.

Because the southern hemisphere quiet season coincides with the peak of the northern hemisphere harvest young NZ wine growers and makers became early 'flying wine makers' in Europe, along with the Australians. This cross fertilisation has been a boon to both sides of the equation – and many Kiwis, such as Matt Thompson, to name just one we know, have become as noted for their involvement in boutique European wineries as they are for their wines back home.

The NZ wine industry has been well organised from the outset and a flavour of this can be seen by looking at the NZ Wine Industry Annual Report which provides one of the best insights of a wine industry – with its trials, tribulations, objectives and worries – and fabulous statistics - from anywhere in the world.

## Styles of Wine and Current Trends

In 2010 there were 31,000 hectares of land under wine cultivation and 265,000 tonnes of wine were produced. This was a drop of about 11% over the previous year. Worryingly, as noted by the Chairman of NZ Wine 27% of wine was now being sold in bulk – often at prices below the cost of production. Sustainability and profitability are the twin objectives of the NZ wine industry. The wine industry expects to be 100% 'sustainable' by 2013 – but profitability is now proving to be more challenging.

The breakdown of wine output in 2010 was as follows:

Sauvignon Blanc	66%
Chardonnay	10%
Pinot Noir	9%
Pinot Gris	5%
Merlot	3%
Other	7%

Total 265,000 tonnes

NZ is famous for its Sauvignon Blancs. This is the same grape as that of Sancerre but only in France is this white grape variety only referred to as sauvignon – everywhere else in the world it is SB. Here in NZ the wines combine the well-preserved pure fruit flavours of the best of New World wine making, with the natural grape acidity associated with northern Europe. The crispness sometimes piercing and a characteristic of New Zealand reds as well as whites, is a feature markedly lacking in the great majority of other New World wines – Australia included – and I believe accounts for the switch to SB from the ABC brigade at the end of the 1990s!

The fruit has been the goal of the wine producers in the early stages of the NZ wine development but increasingly with the greater planting of Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris and Riesling – terroir is beginning to assert itself. NZ has been able - until the recession of 2007 in keeping prices at 'premium' levels. The fall in average selling prices in the past two years is contributing to plans to capitalise on the very good premium name of NZ wines as they develop more premium terroir based boutique wines.

That NZ makes exceptional wines is perhaps seen through their success in international competitions. One such competition is for Bordeaux style wines in which Cabernet Sauvignon wines from Gimblett Gravels in Hawkes Bay took three top 5 places sandwiched between 1<sup>st</sup> growth Bordeaux's – and at a fraction of the price.

There has been a surge in Pinot Noir plantings and a growth in Riesling and Pinot Gris. Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot are more problematic and tend only to do well in the relatively warmer climate of Hawkes Bay on the gravels that are compared to those in Bordeaux.

NZ adopts new techniques and processes to maintain a high level of quality. From the vineyard management and its prowess in canopy management, which helped to develop the wine industry here in the first place, to the adoption of the Stelvin Closure (screw cap). Not invented by a Kiwi but adopted with great gusto the Stelvin Cap will be found on pretty much every bottle of NZ wine. This aluminium closure is ideal for the fresh wines that dominate the NZ wine scene and are becoming the preferred form of closure for all but the most expensive fine wines.

## **The wines we will be drinking tonight**

I am delighted to introduce Buzz Cousins this evening – as well as our stalwart Daniel O'Keefe. Daniel, Buzz and I have selflessly travelled around the world drinking wine and meeting wine growers. In 2002 we travelled around NZ together and stopped off at a number of fabulous wineries, the wines from some of these we will taste tonight.

### **St Clair Sauvignon Blanc, 2010**

Neal and Judy Ibbotson are real pioneers in Marlborough. Originally a biochemist and then a bulk wine grower Neal and Judy began the St Clair estate in 1994. When we first started selling these wines in 1999 they sold 4,000 cases of wine a year. That figure is now in excess of 400,000 cases!

Their St Clair SB is the epitome of a great NZSB – fresh, crisp, well made and very drinkable

### **Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc**

Planted first in 1996 this is the iconic NZ SB. In NZ for perverse reason the locals do not like the wine nor its success. This is probably the most recognised SB in the world. Formerly made by leading wine maker Kevin Judd – there are some who believe that this wine has lost some of its real quality in recent years since he left.

### **Faultline, St Clair Sauvignon Blanc**

Made from the production of various of the family owned vineyards -this is an excellent everyday drinking SB, but this is an interesting example of NZ bulk wine.

### **St Clair, Omaka Chardonnay, 2009**

100% chardonnay and barrel fermente in /American oak – compares well with the best white burgundies

### **Woollaston Riesling, 2009**

From Nelson and good mates of Buzz – he can explain a bit about Phil Woollaston and his family. His Dad was called 'Tosser'! Founded as recently as 2000 but not fully operational in their new state of the art winery until 2006. The vineyard will shortly be fully sustainable and organic.

These are hand harvested organic grapes.

### **Southbank Estate Merlot, Hawkes Bay, 2009**

An example of a new trend of growing Bordeaux style wines in the Hawkes Bay area, a warm climate and gravelly soils. Very smooth and plummy.

### **Rockburn, Pinot Noir, Central Otago, 2009**

Otago is the Burg8indy of NZ. The most southerly vineyards are proving ideal for Pinot noir and Pinot gris. This is a major ward winning wine producer.

1005 Pinot noir with handpicked grapes and after maceration and fermentation are aged for 10 months in French oak barrels.

### **St Claire Noble Riesling, 2009 – Marlborough**

100% botrytised Riesling made from hand picked grapes. This 2009 is considered to be one of their best vintages for this dessert wine.