

## THE SUDDEN ENCHANTMENT OF NEW ZEALAND WINES



Large-scale wine production in New Zealand began only in the 1970s, but soon its wines, and especially white wines, gained worldwide prestige.

The high temperatures in summer awaken in the oenophiles the desire to drink fruity wines with good acidity and preferably white wines to refresh and accompany lighter dishes and by circumstances New Zealand wines are one of the first to remember.

New Zealand is the most isolated producing region on the planet, being a cluster of islands about 1600 km from distant Australia. Although its production is not very expressive, the quality achieved by its wines in a short time has earned the deserved prominence on the world stage.

There is no wine region in the world that produces wines in such a southern territory as New Zealand. Its production zone lies between the 35° and 44° parallels south latitude and corresponds in European terms to the south of Spain and the Côte-du-Rhône in France.

However, its climate is much colder than that of the Old-World regions, because although the latitudes are the same the lack of continental mass around them makes the temperatures considerably lower which guarantees a quite different vocation in terms of temperatures. grape varieties planted there and the style of their wines.

New Zealand's wine history is quite recent and at least of good quality, since large-scale *Vitis Vinifera* winemaking only started in 1970. However, from 1980 Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay wines began to have international recognition.

### **Whites from the Beginning**

The first vineyards were planted in 1840 at Kerikeri on Bay of Islands North Island by Anglican missionary Samuel Marsden. However, the first wines were not produced until 20 years later, as confirmed by French explorer Dumont d'Urville, who at the Wines and Vineyards of New Zealand reports that from a trellis in which various vineyards flourished with great pleasure one can taste the product of the vineyard.

The explorer was served a very sparkling and delicious palate light white wine that was greatly appreciated. Thus, since that time the great quality of New Zealand wine was foreshadowed between the years 1895 and 1909.

On the other hand, the sequels of the phylloxera plague also struck the distant islands around 1895. The consequences were disastrous, as instead of following the European example of planting *Vitis Vinifera* species grafted on horses of American species in New Zealand. He has chosen to plant simply pest-resistant hybrid American grape varieties that produce very low-quality wines. Thus, in 1960 the Isabella grape known in the region as Albany Surprise was the most planted in the country.

The cycle of ups and downs comes in the 1970 and interest in wine grows and begins an important revolution of quality in the country. The style of New Sauvignon Blancs, Chardonnays and Pinot Noir wines are beginning to be present and the country's prestige as a producer of high-quality wines is now established.

### **Australian Influence**

The wine industry in the region that surprised the world with its rapid rise was heavily influenced by researchers from the University of Adelaide in Australia, where most New Zealand winemakers graduated. In addition, much of the skilled workforce is also of Australian origin, as Australia has a larger wine tradition than New Zealand and has also received many winemakers of European origin.

Only one large winery produces half of the country's wine and another 40%. However, it is in the remaining 10% that the best wines in the region are found and many of the owners of small vineyards follow the so-called lifestyle winery.

Smallholders are usually retirees or young couples looking for an alternative way of life attracted more by the bucolic of their work environment than by business objectives.

### **The Producing Regions**

Some facts conspired that viticulture did not prosper in a desirable way. Firstly, the original population was predominantly English, more beer-oriented, and although the elite appreciated wine. However, the wine had to be a Bordeaux, a Jerez or a European Port.

Secondly, the founding of the New Zealand Temperance Society in 1836, which advocated the prohibition of all alcoholic beverages in the same way as would occur in the next century in the USA, and the power of society was very strong between 1881 and 1918, coming to an end. frustrate the efforts of viticulturist governor Romeo Bragato, who has done much to improve the region's vocation for refreshing white wines.

In New Zealand there are 10 producing or more regions distributed by the two islands that follow named north/south:

**Northland** - The northern location and close proximity to the sea give the Northland region an almost subtropical climate humid, sunny and warm.



Warm spring temperatures, hot dry summers, and calm, clear autumn days allow fruit to ripen early, creating full-bodied and rich wines.

The first vines in New Zealand were planted in the Bay of Islands by the missionary, Reverend Samuel Marsden in 1819.

In the late 1800s, the Croatian gum diggers arrived bringing their European tradition of winemaking.

The region's tropical Chardonnays, popular Pinot Gris and vibrant Viogniers are leading the white wine growth. Red wines produced include spicy Syrahs, stylish Cabernet and Merlot blends, peppery Pinotages and complex Chambourcin.

Stretching from Karikari in the north to Mangawhai in the south, each vineyard in Northland is unique in aspect, soil, and micro-climate.

**Auckland** - This large and very diverse region is home to some of New Zealand's biggest wine companies, as well as numerous high-quality boutique vineyards, offering something for every palate.



Auckland is one of New Zealand's oldest wine regions, established in the early 1900s by passionate Croatian, Lebanese and English winemakers.

The local sub-regions are united by volcanic, clay-rich soils, a temperate maritime climate and, proximity to New Zealand's largest city.

Waiheke Island in the Hauraki Gulf is home to stunning Syrah, world-class Chardonnay, intense Cabernet blends and fine aromatics.

West Auckland is renowned for its internationally recognized, elegant Chardonnay and stylish Merlot.

North of Auckland, excellent Cabernet blends, Pinot Gris and Syrah are produced, with numerous emerging red varieties being vinified with great success.

**Waikato/Bay of Plenty** - The Waikato and Bay of Plenty regions south of Auckland



have small pockets of vineyard plantings scattered amidst rolling farmland.

Wine styles are focused mainly on Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, with Sauvignon Blanc occupying third place.

The region enjoys a moderately warm climate by New Zealand standards. Waikato soils are made up of heavy loams over clay subsoils.

Bay of Plenty has a coastal influence.

**Gisborne** - The mix of high sunshine, verdant landscapes, fascinating history and the exciting range of wine styles makes Gisborne a beguiling wine destination.

This relatively remote area rewards those who take a trip east with a diverse range of wines, from full flavored and fruit driven, to critically acclaimed biodynamic classics.



Gisborne is home to a mix of large producers, boutique wineries, and entrepreneurial growers, who are continuously exploring new varieties and vineyard sites.

Chardonnay is the dominant variety and enjoys great success.

Delightfully bright Pinot Gris is the region's second largest wine variety, with

emerging varieties being trialed with great success.

Rich in history, Gisborne claims Captain Cook's first landfall, as well as being the first place in New Zealand to see the sunrise.

**Hawke's Bay** - New Zealand's second largest wine region, sunny Hawke's Bay has been an abundant source of fine wine since 1851.



Grape vines were first planted in the Hawke's Bay in 1851 by Marist missionaries, their legacy is Taradale's historic Mission Winery.

Hawke's Bay has since earned itself an international reputation for producing high quality Cabernet & Merlot blends, Syrah, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and an impressive array of aromatic white wines.

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The warm climate and lengthy growing season also allow for the successful production of dessert wine styles.

A well-established wine tourism trail offers a wide variety of cellar door experiences, regular food and wine festivals, and showcases the region's art deco architecture in Napier city and artisan producers.

Hawke's Bay's temperate climate and plentiful sunshine make the region ideal for fruit-growing.

**Nelson** - This picturesque region, found on the northern tip of the South Island, benefits from high sunshine hours, a sheltered, moderating coastal climate and free-draining, semi-fertile soil.



Nelson is a boutique wine region producing outstanding Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and aromatics, as well as an impressive mix of emerging varieties.

Long renowned for its bountiful crops and orchards, Nelson's wine roots were cultivated in the mid-1800s, when German

settlers planted the areas first grape vines to produce wine.

Pioneering 1970s producers established the modern wine industry – with iconic names such as Seifried and Neudorf still going strong.

Nelson has a vibrant artistic and café culture, with many wineries offering both draw-cards at their cellar doors.

The region's compact size means visitors can get around most wineries in a day, with many choosing to do so by bicycle.

Being slightly off the beaten track a visit offers a wonderful sense of tranquility and relaxation.

**Marlborough** - A combination of a cool yet high sunshine climate, low rainfall and free-draining, moderately fertile soil produces uniquely vivid wines.



Marlborough put New Zealand on the international wine stage with its exquisite Sauvignon Blanc in the 1980s.

Over 20,000ha of vines or around 2/3 of the national total are under the care of local wine producers, making it the country's largest wine region.

Marlborough wineries offer a huge range of varieties, from exquisite Pinot Noir to intense Chardonnay, and vivacious aromatics.

The diverse soils and meso-climates are revealing exciting new sub-regions, and it is within these unique sub-regions that Marlborough's future lies.

Hailed as one of New Zealand's most sunny and dry regions, Maori referred to the Wairau Valley as Kei puta te Wairau or the place with the hole in the cloud.

**Canterbury & North Canterbury** - Where the Southern Alps tumble down to meet extensive lowlands, boutique producers craft outstanding Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and fine



aromatic wines.

The Canterbury wine region spans nearly 200km of the South Island's eastern coastline, with the magnificent Alps to the west and the sweeping Pacific Ocean to the east.

The region has an excellent reputation for elegant and expressive Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and aromatics, with other varieties achieving outstanding results.

The cool, dry climate with high sunshine and a long growing season promotes full varietal expression.

Vineyards were first established on the Canterbury Plains in 1978, with plantings to the south-west of Christchurch and North Canterbury following close behind.

Today vines are planted from Waimate in the south to Cheviot in the north and include the micro-climates of Banks Peninsula and Waipara Valley. The latter has drawn critical acclaim for its sub-regional expression.

The exploration into new subregions forecasts exciting depth and diversity for the area's future wine offerings.

Canterbury's stunning Waipara Valley region is one of the unsung heroes of the wine industry.

**Central Otago** - A spectacular landscape and sophisticated tourist culture also home to some of the world's best Pinot Noir, not to mention impressive, vivid white wines.



All of the main winegrowing sub-regions lie within close reach, with the distinctive mountainous terrain providing each with a unique climate, aspect and altitude.

Pinot Noir flourishes in the Central Otago, with a variety of stunning expressions being crafted in the numerous sub-regions.

The region is also renowned for producing excellent aromatics, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

Historically noted as pre-eminently suitable for winemaking (Bragato, 1895), the region's first Gold Medal was for Burgundy in Sydney in 1881.

Stone fruit prevailed until a resurgence in the 1950s, followed by a significant commitment by the 1970s winegrowing pioneers, enduring today in names such as Chard Farm, Rippon, Black Ridge and Gibbston Valley.

Central Otago is a tourism stronghold, captivating visitors with a wide range of excellent cellar door facilities and wine-tourism activities. Soaring snow-capped mountains and glistening rivers nestled deep within ravines (gold rush territory in the 1800s) draw visitors from far and wide.

The extreme climate rewards careful site selection with wines of great intensity and finesse, and encourages an increased focus on sub-regional expression.

**Waitaki Valley, North Otago** - Where the Southern Alps tumble down to meet extensive lowlands, boutique producers craft outstanding Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and fine



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**Wairarapa** - Wairarapa meaning glistening waters in Maori is a compact yet diverse region, with numerous boutique producers offering a range of varieties and producing wine of exceptional quality.



A boutique region, Wairarapa has just 3% of New Zealand's land under vine, and contributes to 1% of its total production.

A range of styles and varieties are on offer, such as standout Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc and aromatics, as well as stylish Chardonnay, Syrah and dessert wines.

The three main sub-regions in the area are Martinborough, Gladstone and Masterton. These sub-regions share a similar climate and soil structures, yet offer subtle differences in character for the discerning palate to explore.

Wairarapa's modern wine history dates from the late 1970s plantings of Martinborough, which included producers such as: Dry River, Martinborough Vineyard, Ata Rangi and Chifney now Margrain.

A short, scenic drive from Wellington, the picturesque region is around 30 kilometers from the sea, and offers a range of wine tourism activities, unique accommodation, and superb dining options.

## **Major Grapes**

**Sauvignon Blanc** - Acclaimed by all as the great grape of the country produces extremely fruity wines with pungent aromas of passion fruit, lime and cut bush and also pineapple of great freshness and persistence. The wines produced with the grape rival and often surpass the best French of the Loire Valley. Grape planting began in Auckland, but spread throughout New Zealand. Currently, two thirds of its production is in Marlborough.

**Chardonnay** - Today is the most planted strain in the country and the great diversity of soils and especially climates and associated with the various styles of winemaking provide a wide range of wines made with the grape. Overall the wines are quite complex, fruity and fresh. Those from warmer regions such as Auckland and Northland tend to be fuller, more mature and with a broad range of aromas, and those in the Marlborough area are more acidic and refreshing, with a marked aroma of peaches and citrus and French and American oak barrels. Chardonnay is the main grape used in the production of sparkling wines.

Pinot Noir - The aristocratic Bourgogne grape that loves the low temperatures and dry climate and hardly adapts to other regions found in New Zealand an ideal terroir. Its wines are surprising for their typicality and elegance and are also widely used in sparkling wines with second fermentation in the bottle.

Cabernet Sauvignon - Produces the best results in the hottest and driest regions of the north. It produces vibrant and elegant wines and is often cut with Merlot grapes.

Merlot - Another Bordeaux grape that appears both vinified in isolation and in cut with its cousin Cabernet Sauvignon and prefers the less cold regions of the North.

Semillon, Riesling, Gewrztraminer and Pinot Gris first-class white grapes that are also successfully cultivated and have great results.

### **Screw Cap**



Another distinguishing feature of New Zealand wine is the use of screw cap, as over 90% of wine bottles use the screw cap instead of the traditional cork stopper.

New Zealand producers believe that the type of screw cap best retains the characteristics of the region's wines.

In fact, there is a New Zealand Screwcap Wine Seal Initiative association that seeks to promote and explain the benefits of using the screw cap.

The screw cap is easy to open, better conserves the wines, is sustainable and if there is loss in the liturgy gains in efficiency.