

WINE News

*Australia, New Zealand
and South Africa.*



APRIL 11, 2016 FEATURES

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From Strength to Strength

By Ryan Woodhouse

This month's Wine News is packed with wines from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. All these categories continue to gain momentum here at K&L, hence the extra shelf space in our new San Francisco store and the expanded 8-page edition of Wine News! We continue to build our Direct Import portfolio from these countries, always looking to cut out the middlemen and bring you stellar values direct from some of the most highly renowned estates of the southern hemisphere. Our wine buying trips, aka "scouting missions," continue to turn up hidden gems.

New Zealand's wine imports into the U.S. continue to grow steadily, with the U.S. now being the world's largest consumer of Kiwi wines. Australia is also going from strength to strength, with old stalwart producers continuing to do what they have done for over 150 years, but also an exciting new generation of winemakers reinvigorating the industry, making classy wines with beautiful fruit, balance and purity.

South Africa might just be the most exciting country that I work with—some of the wines coming from this often-overlooked land are simply mind-blowing. The old vine material and nuanced, delicate winemaking going on there is second to none, in my book. I think the Badenhorst Family wines that feature in this edition are a perfect example of what is going on in South Africa and why we all need to be paying attention to it.

In the following pages we will explore some of the best bottles coming out of Barossa with wine from Sons of Eden and Hentley Farm. Both are superstar boutique properties making some of the most awarded wines in South Australia, and we have a direct relationship with both!

With New Zealand Gimblett Gravels producer William Murdoch, we will check out wines that I challenge anyone to pick from traditional Bordeaux in a blind tasting! This small, organic estate has a winemaker who honed her craft for 12 years at one of K&L's perennial favorites, Château Sénéjac in the Haut-Médoc. After "Keeping it Fresh," with a discussion of the ever-diversifying and evolving world of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, we will check out the magical wines of Grant Taylor at Valli, a new Direct Import partner of legendary status but very limited availability. Last, but certainly not least, we will peruse the flashy and delicious wines of SoHo Wine Co. from New Zealand's exotic Waiheke Island, a place I like to call the "Sicily of the South Pacific." I hope you enjoy the newsletter, and the wines even more. Cheers!

Ryan Woodhouse is K&L's New Zealand, Australia and South African wine buyer.



Power and Elegance from Sons of Eden

Sons of Eden is a very special project. We have been selling their wines for a few years now, and as of late 2015 we are working with them as a Direct Import partner. Sons Of Eden is a labor of love for two serious wine guys, Simon Cowham (a 20-plus-year viticulturist) and Corey Ryan (a winemaker who has worked for some of the biggest names in Australia, including Henschke). Their day job is tending to some of the finest old vine vineyards in Barossa and Eden Valley for some of the most prestigious wine estates in the country. They know these vineyards intimately, with knowledge that only decades of hands-on experience can instill.

From all of these vineyards and special old blocks, Simon and Corey hand-pick some of their favorite parcels of fruit (often literally row by row) and make very small amounts of their own wines. Year after year they win gold medals and trophies at the Barossa Wine Show, their wines cleaning up in every category (including Best Small Producer). When I first tasted the wines I knew I had stumbled upon something truly special. The wines are unabashedly Barossa/Eden in style, and have magnificent fruit concentration, richness and power. They are also very finely structured, with precise balance and elegance.

Here we have the perfect illustration that we need to push aside the dated stereotype that wines from this much-maligned region are all over-the-top-fruit bombs. While these wines show the power and prestige of old vine Barossa fruit, at the same time they highlight how meticulous vineyard work and winemaking can result in wines of great complexity, balance, length and energy.

2014 Sons of Eden “Freya” Riesling Eden Valley (\$16.99) A classic, quintessential, dry Eden Valley Riesling. Juicy, mouthwatering limy acidity, white flowers, cut herbs, fine chalky texture, tons of wet stone minerality and energetic drive on the palate. Hand-picked from vines dating back 40-plus years. Free-run juice only. 95 points JH.

2013 Sons of Eden “Pumpa” Cabernet-Shiraz Eden Valley (\$16.99)

Only 400 cases produced. This wine, from vines dating back over 50 years, is composed of 52% Cabernet, 44% Shiraz and 4% Tempranillo from vines in the cooler, higher elevation Eden Valley. Cabernet gives stunning blue and black fruits, spice, cedar and fine-grained tannins. The Shiraz component fills the mid-palate with more red fruit and succulent, ripe flavors and textures. Exceptional value. 90 points WS.

2013 Sons of Eden “Kennedy” Grenache-Shiraz-Mourvedre (\$16.99)

Composed of 55% Grenache, 35% Shiraz and 10% Mourvedre, from vines dating back over 100 years. Such a beautifully generous and opulent wine, overflowing with rich, smooth fruit, ripe tannins and scorched earth. All the richness and opulence is channeled by juicy acidity and a lick of oak. Awesome stuff. 94 points JH, 92 points WS.

2013 Sons of Eden “Remus” Old Vine Shiraz Eden Valley (\$39.99)

The Remus and Romulus bottlings offer a perfect illustration of Eden vs Barossa sub-regional characters. Remus was sourced exclusively from Eden valley vines exceeding 50 years of age, some close to 100 year old. It is crafted to accentuate the lifted, bright, blue fruited, floral nature of Eden Valley Shiraz. Still a hugely powerful wine with fruit and structure to last decades in the cellar, yet very refined and elegant. Raised in French oak hogsheads, mostly new, for 22 months. Drink now to 2025 and beyond. 94 points WS.

2013 Sons of Eden “Romulus” Old Vine Shiraz Barossa Valley (\$39.99)

The counterpoint to Remus is Romulus. This wine showcases the bigger, more muscular, red and black fruit of Barossa Valley old vines. The warmer sub-region provides a broader texture and more saturated, fleshy, mid-palate. This is a big wine, with iconic Barossa power but lovely balance, natural acidity and without residual sweetness. 20 months in mostly new American oak hogsheads. Drink now to 2025 and beyond. 92 points WS.



Key: RP Robert Parker's Wine Advocate WS *Wine Spectator* VN Antonio Galloni's Vinous JS James Suckling JH James Halliday's Australian Wine Companion
BC Bob Campbell SK Sam Kim (Wine Orbit) RC Raymond Chan



Cellar door at Hentley Farm.

Hentley Farm: Good Things Come to Those Who Wait

“Hentley Farm has a single-minded focus on producing what is as close as you’re ever going to find in Australia to a Grand Cru Burgundy or a First Growth Bordeaux.” —James Halliday

Back in August of 2014, boutique Barossa Valley producer Hentley Farm was awarded the prestigious “Winery of the Year Award” for 2015 by James Halliday, Australia’s most renowned wine critic. Upon reading this and realizing that their wines weren’t represented in the U.S., I immediately contacted the winery to see if they were interested in a Direct Import partnership. Unfortunately, at that time they were not in a position to enter a new market due to high demand for their wines at home, and nothing came of it.

Fast forward to February 10, 2016: while attending an Australian wine trade tasting in San Francisco I noticed a familiar label on one of the exhibitor’s tables: Hentley Farm. I rushed to taste them and was immediately assured that the hype, awards and big scores were wholly justified. Wow, what a line up! A few weeks later and we are now working direct with the winery to bring you these Barossa beauties!

Hentley Farm is a 150-acre mixed crop farm in the ultra premium Seppeltsfield sub-region of Barossa Valley. In the 1990s Keith and Alison Henschke used historic soil maps of the region to identify the very best soils for vines and settled on this farm. For ten years they didn’t make any of their own wine from the fruit. Instead, they chose to sell it off to other wineries and wait until they fully understood their special piece of land. In 2002 Hentley Farm (the label) was born.

2014 Hentley Farm “Skinbone” Grenache Rosé (Dry) Barossa Valley (\$14.99) A delicious, bone dry, mouthwatering Grenache-based rosé. Select parcels are picked early for bright acidity, given limited skin

contact and then pressed off to old, neutral oak for slow wild yeasts ferment and a period of sur lie aging to lend texture and length. Fantastic rosé! 94 points JH.

2014 Hentley Farm “Stray Mongrel” Red Blend Barossa Valley (\$24.99) Almost a classic Rhône-inspired Grenache–Shiraz blend, but this Mongrel is worldlier than that, with a dash of estate-grown Zinfandel in the mix! Very exotic aromatics and flavors of sweet berry fruits, boysenberry, raspberry compote, Asian spices and scorched earth. The wine is soft and lush in texture, mouthcoating but not heavy or sweet. Finishes so pure and fresh. 94 points JH.

2014 Hentley Farm Shiraz Barossa Valley (\$24.99) Classic ripe, concentrated Barossa Shiraz. Black fruit, with some red fruit and spice nuances, scorched earth and charred meat tones, lashings of mid-palate fruit and ripe, polished tannins. Full-bodied, rich and round with great length and power on the back end. 95 points JH.

2012 Hentley Farm “The Beast” Shiraz Barossa Valley (\$79.99) An exceptional bottle of Shiraz from a hillside parcel singled out for extraordinary quality. The wine is aged in 70% new French oak for 22 months. Black fruited, with deep soil tones, smoked meat, bramble and exotic spice. Palate-coating texture with perfectly groomed, fine but persistent tannins. Lovely balance of raw power and refined elegance. World-class wine—worth every penny of the asking price. 96 points JH, 95 points RP, 95 points JS, 94 points WS.



A.A. Badenhorst Family Wines



Adi Badenhorst, tasting in the cellar.

The most exciting wines in South Africa right now are coming from the Swartland. Ask anyone for a list of key winemakers in this region and I doubt they will get through more than two or three without naming Adi Badenhorst. A.A. Badenhorst Family wines are grown, made and matured on Kalmoesfontein farm in the Swartland. The 28-hectare estate consists of mostly old Chenin Blanc, Cinsault and Grenache bush vines planted in the 1950s and 1960s.

Adi's grandfather spent much of this life working at Groot Constantia, South Africa's oldest wine-producing estate (founded in 1685), so you could say that wine is in his blood. Adi made his first wine at age 13, and later worked in the cellars of properties including Château Angéus (Saint-Émilion) and Alain Graillot (Hermitage), and for nine years was head winemaker at the famed Rustenberg Estate in Stellenbosch. Adi was a founding member of the Swartland Independent Wine Growers and Swartland Revolution.

The Badenhorst wines are traditionally crafted and very much made in the vineyard. Processing in the winery is minimally invasive. All reds are whole cluster, and no additions other than sulphur are made to the wines. Cement tanks, large foudre and wild yeasts are utilized for ferments; lots of multi-varietal, co-fermentation is employed and new oak for maturation is avoided.

We have a great range of Adi's wines, from the very inexpensive Curator series at \$8.99 through to his signature wines at \$34.99. All offer a ton of character and are immensely fun to drink; they faithfully reflect the exuberant yet humble personality that is Adi Badenhorst.

2014 A.A. Badenhorst "The Curator" White Blend Coastal Region (\$8.99) Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Sémillon. A stunning little white blend, a summer quaffer. A mix of yellow stone fruit and ripe citrus flavors, with toasted grain nuances from the Chenin. Soft, round mouthfeel and an invitingly fresh and mouthwatering finish. A seriously good bottle at this price.

2012 A.A. Badenhorst "The Curator" Red Blend Coastal Region (\$8.99) Dusty red fruits, plum, red currant, smoked meat, some briary, brambly edges. Easy to love, a nice balance and completeness

on the palate. A very authentic vinous quality, nothing artificial or manufactured about this budget bottle. Great for when you fire up the "Braai" aka the grill! Top value.

2015 A.A. Badenhorst "Secateurs" Chenin Blanc Swartland (\$12.99) Fantastic rich texture and body. Amazing how much textural power this wine delivers at such a value price point (without relying on oak). Flavors of yellow plum, apricot, golden pear, toasted honeyed grains; a nice lees note brings some savory flavor back in. Phenomenally easy to drink.

2015 A.A. Badenhorst "Secateurs" Rosé Coastal Region (\$13.99) Juicy, tart berry fruits, Herbes de Provence, a soft, creamy texture and dry finish. A fantastically pure and "slurpable" rosé!

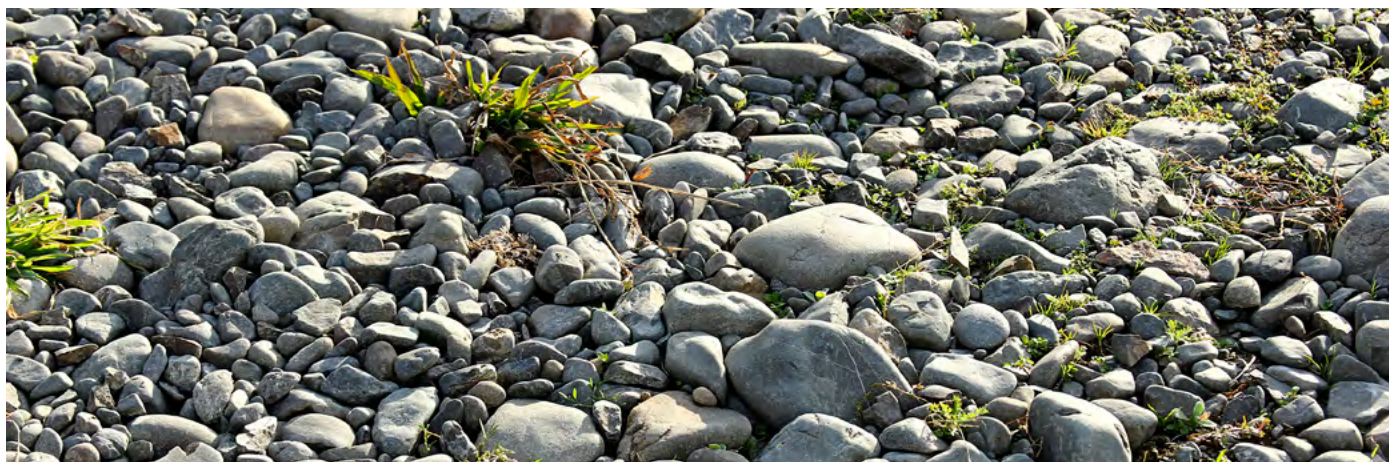
2012 A.A. Badenhorst "Secateurs" Red Rhône Blend Swartland (\$14.99) A perennial favorite at K&L, this Rhône-inspired red blend hits the mark again. Lots of dark berry-cherry flavors but also lots of savory, meaty, smoky notes and toasted spices. Beautiful balance and a nice lift from the whole cluster fermentation. 90 points RP and VN.

2011 A.A. Badenhorst "White" Swartland (\$34.99) Made from Chenin Blanc, Roussanne, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc, Viognier, Verdelho, Chardonnay, Grenache Gris, Clairette Blanche and Palomino (though some may not appear on the back label—they forget) picked from old, inter-planted vines on the estate. 1,200-liter foudre used for fermentation and the first 13 months, with additional maturation in cement tank on full lees. 93 points RP: "It's a flippin' gorgeous white blend... If you want to know why Adi Badenhorst is a great winemaker, sign up here."

2012 A.A. Badenhorst "Red Blend" Swartland (\$34.99) Blended from Shiraz, Cinsault, Tinta Barocca, Grenache and Mourvèdre. Whole cluster, foot-stomped, spontaneous ferment in cement tank, maturation in three 4,000-liter oak casks for 16 months. Highly aromatic with mountain herbs, red flowers, exotic berry fruit, leather, sandalwood, sweet ground spice. Medium bodied and quite focused, a lithe and energetic wine, evocative of something aged in large format cask—that subtle power, coiled nature. Really special wine.

2014 A.A. Badenhorst "Ramnasgras" Cinsault Swartland (\$34.99) Stunning wine. A very lifted, elegant style with a complex combination of savory, earthy aromas and flavors, with cran-cherry and rose petal notes. Hard ground spice, fynbos, and granite. Amazingly powerful for a light-to-medium bodied wine of only 12.5% alcohol. The quality and pedigree of these old vines is shining through beyond all else. Fantastic.





Not for nothing do they call it the Gimblett Gravels.

William Murdoch: A Little Piece of Bordeaux in New Zealand

On my annual trip to NZ last year I was super excited to visit a tiny little winery called William Murdoch in Hawke's Bay. This small family-owned estate sits right at the heart of the Gimblett Gravels, a sub-region that I believe has the potential to consistently produce world-class, structured red wines on a par with the great properties of Bordeaux and Napa. The region is defined by its dramatic soil, or lack thereof. The vines grow into 30-foot-deep river gravels with only 10% organic matter. The bare, stony topsoil radiates heat back into the vines like the best vineyards of Pessac-Léognan or the famed "galets" of Châteauneuf-du-pape. This means wines that are concentrated, firmly structured and have a distinctive, gravelly, mineral quality.

William Murdoch is only a few hectares in size, but it has a prime position sitting alongside illustrious neighbors such as Craggy Range, Trinity Hill and Te Awa. The vineyard is BioGro certified organic and owner Brett Murdoch is very proud to farm this way. The consulting winemaker is Jenny Dobson. Though you may not know her name, if you have been a Bordeaux customer at K&L over the years you undoubtedly will have drunk some wines she made. Jenny was winemaker at Château Sénéjac in Haut-Médoc for 12 years. She also made wine at Domaine Dujac in Burgundy and other notable properties around the world. Jenny now has over 30 years of winemaking under her belt and is a truly intuitive, old school winemaker.

Combining this fascinating terroir with winemaking pedigree like Jenny's, it's easy to see how these wines taste more like traditional Bordeaux than what most people would expect from a New Zealand red. These are earthy wines, packed with tobacco notes, cedar, cigar box, stony minerals, plum and dusty berry fruits mingling with the savory flavors. These wines are current releases at six years old. The wines are deliberately held back to allow them to develop character and for the tannins to soften.

A very pleasant surprise for me during the tasting was the 2012 Syrah. This was a challenging vintage in Hawke's Bay: it rained...a lot. However, as other wines have proven, when you have careful, hands-on viticulture and relentless quality-orientated focus in the winemaking, you can make *great* wines from tough seasons. This is one such wine. I hope you enjoy these William Murdoch wines as

much as I do—throw away conceptions of fruity, New World reds, this is a little piece of old school Bordeaux in New Zealand!

2010 William Murdoch Cabernet Sauvignon-Cabernet Franc Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay (\$16.99) The essence of cool climate, gravelly, mineral-structured Cabernet with a dash of lift and spice from the Cab Franc. This is all about the cigar box, leather, tobacco leaf expression of Cab. Some blackcurrant and plum fruits, too, and a stony, earthy, soil-driven character. 93 points RC, 90 points BC.

2010 William Murdoch Merlot-Malbec Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay (\$16.99) A little softer and more generous than the Cabernet-Cab Franc bottling. Slightly more plush fruit but still very much in the cedar, pipe tobacco, spice box spectrum. Reminds me of old school Saint-Émilion. 92-93 points RC, 92 points BC.

2012 William Murdoch Syrah Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay (\$16.99) Fantastic aromatics that would make a great Côte-Rôtie blush. A mélange of brambly red and black fruits, smoked meat, sandalwood, rubbing spices, crushed violets and clove. Supple, elegant and vibrant on the palate, with great energy and freshness from the cooler vintage. Really special Syrah.

2010 William Murdoch "The Guardsman" Cabernet Sauvignon Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay (\$44.99)

This wine blew my mind. I drank it slowly over three days and it got better and better as time passed. A best block and barrel selection of the finest Cabernet Sauvignon (78%) on the estate (the balance Cab Franc, Merlot, Malbec), aged in the finest Bordeaux cooperage money can buy and built for multi-decade aging. Intensely concentrated black and blue fruit, cassis, plum, blackcurrant, beautiful cigar box notes and Paulliac-esque pencil shaving characters. Lots of long chain, fine tannins that will assure a long life and demand extended decanting if drinking young. This deserves a spot in anyone's cellar. 95-97 points RC, 93 points BC.



New Zealand Savvy: Keeping it Fresh!

I recently spent a few weeks traveling around New Zealand, where the sheer diversity of wines I encountered was mind-boggling. New Zealand produces a vast array of wines, from bright, aromatic whites like Pinot Gris and Riesling to full-bodied, powerful Cabernet-based blends and Syrah. For such a small island nation, its dramatic landscapes, plethora of diverse macroclimates and varied geology have given winemakers a very broad palette from which to create their vinous art. Our New Zealand selections continue to grow at K&L, and sales figures show both our customers and staff are excited about NZ wines. We have over a dozen different grape varieties reflected in the 200-plus Kiwi wines on our shelves! However, the one thing that really made an impact on me during this latest trip was the continued relevance of NZ's most famed grape: Sauvignon Blanc.

In the 1980s, NZ's distinctive style of Savvy became an overnight sensation. Its intoxicating aromas, bold flavors and zippy acidity seduced wine drinkers in their millions. Winemakers delivered time and time again with unmistakable flavor. Within a few years, "New Zealand Sauv Blanc" was known to just about anyone who drank wine anywhere in the world. The synthesis of a varietal and a place had occurred, much like "Napa Cabernet" or "Barossa Shiraz." When people hear these expressions they know what to expect: a dependable, familiar flavor profile, a sense of place captured in wine.

However, as the proverb says: familiarity breeds contempt. The danger is that because this monumental success is based on such a consistent wine, some consumers might become bored with the uniformity of flavor. Despite this fear, market trends continue to show growth and New Zealand's wine exports go from strength to strength. Today, despite the incredible vinous diversity I touched upon earlier, Sauv Blanc still accounts for 85% of New Zealand's booming wine exports. So how has NZ staved off this ominous threat of stagnation?

Well, part of my visit to NZ was to attend the 2016 International Sauvignon Blanc Celebration hosted in Marlborough, where some 300 trade participants assembled to celebrate the varietal and also to investigate this ongoing phenomenon. After a few days (and a few hundred wines) what became very clear to me is that NZ Sauv Blanc producers have been very successful in broadening the scope and variety of expressions without alienating their devoted audience. Grape growers and winemakers have been continually experimenting and innovating with Sauv Blanc, creating a wondrous array of expressions without straying too far from what makes NZ Savvy so unique. Leaf plucking, dry farming, varying yields, uses of wild yeast, oak barrels, lees and skin contact and splashes of Sémillon are just some examples of how producers have kept Sauv Blanc fresh and appealing.

After tasting these wines extensively over the past decade, I would argue that one generic, homogenous "NZ Sauv Blanc" doesn't really exist. Regional and sub-regional characters and varied winemaking techniques have ensured diversification. However, importantly, there is still a powerful underlying commonality in almost all of the wines. The sense of place is so powerful it is able to support many subtle and enthralling variations on a theme without losing its inherent natural

form. The current crop of talented winemakers understand this fine balance of maintaining continuity without stagnating, and I don't think there has ever been a more exciting time to be a fan of NZ Sauv Blanc. Here are a few to check out:

2013 Giesen "The Brothers Reserve" Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$14.99) Sourced from the estate's top parcels across both the Wairau and Awatere valleys. Absolutely quintessential "Marlborough Sauv Blanc," packed full of juicy gooseberry, citrus, tomato leaf and stony minerals. Tons of flavor, great mouthwatering acidity and a clean mineral finish. This bottle really shows the high quality of the vintage.



2014 Carrick Estate Sauvignon Blanc Bannockburn Central Otago (\$16.99) Young winemaker Francis Hutt is crushing it right now, making some of the region's most exciting and sophisticated wines. Classic NZ Savvy but with lots of lees-derived texture and drive from the Central Otago's schist soils.



2014 Elephant Hill "Reserve" Sauvignon Blanc Hawke's Bay (\$19.99) Grown just yards from the ocean, hand-picked, whole cluster pressed and wild yeast fermented 50% in stainless tank and 50% in old French oak barrels, this is serious, weighty, rich, textural Sauvignon Blanc with a hint of salinity from the crashing surf. 93 points BC, 92-93 points RC, 93 points SK.

2014 Jules Taylor "OTQ" Barrel Fermented Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$19.99) A great example of innovation in the vineyard and cellar. This single vineyard wine is made from fruit selectively hand-picked from the "sunny side" of the vine rows. This sun-exposed fruit gives riper stone fruit and passion fruit flavors. In the cellar, it is fermented on its lees in neutral oak barrels. 95 points BC.



2012 Pegasus Bay Sauvignon Blanc-Sémillon Waipara (\$24.99) 70% Sauvignon Blanc and 30% Sémillon. Fermentation was natural using indigenous yeasts, followed by six months ageing on lees, the Sémillon portion being in old oak. A rich and complex style that ages like fine white Bordeaux. I recently had a 10-year-old bottle that was phenomenal! 92-93 points RC, 92 points BC.





The dramatic Gibbston Valley, home to Valli.

40 Years in The Making: The Great Wines of Valli

Valli is one of the preeminent Pinot Noir producers in all of NZ.

Legendary winemaker Grant Taylor has worked with this fickle varietal all around the world for over 40 vintages—that is to say there isn't much to know about this seductive beauty that Grant hasn't experienced. Should you ever meet him, however, you will find a modest, unpretentious guy dedicated to quality and authenticity. The considerable acclaim his wines have garnered over the years has not affected his unassuming and gracious persona. His is committed to illustrating the sub-regionality of Central Otago and produces a range of single vineyard wines, each representing a different terroir.

This is a very Burgundian construct, where Pinot Noir is simply the appropriate medium to communicate the essence of place. The wines are made in tiny quantities, typically less than 500 cases total for each release. They are very age-worthy and, I believe, warrant inclusion in the cellar of any Pinot lover.

2013 Valli “Waitaki” Pinot Noir North Otago (\$44.99) Somewhat the outlier of the bunch, hailing from “North Otago” and the spectacular Waitaki Valley, a region known for its very cold temperatures and limestone-rich soil. The resulting Pinot Noir is a highly fragrant, floral wine, with purple flowers, crunchy forest berries, intense limestone minerality and vibrant, electric energy/acidity. 95 points SK, 95 points BC: “Pure, vibrant, high energy Pinot Noir with mineral, red cherry, violet and subtle earthy/savoury, wild herb characters. Powerful wine...”

2013 Valli “Gibbston” Pinot Noir Central Otago (\$44.99) The “home” block for Valli. This wine typifies the wild nature of this rugged, mountainous terrain. Again, the sub-region is very cool and the wine exemplifies this with lots of brambly fruit and gamy aromas and flavors. Red-fruited with lots of spice and earthy flavors, this really shows the complex, savory spectrum of the varietal. 97 points SK, 94-95 points RC.

2013 Valli “Bannockburn” Pinot Noir Central Otago (\$44.99)

This wine shows the generosity and supple texture that Bannockburn's clay soils and sunny aspect gives. Lovely mid-palate fruit weight, bolder dark berry fruits and a polished texture. Wild thyme abounds as per usual. Accessible but also holding great potential for the future. 95 points BC, and 97 points Sam Kim: “This exceptional Pinot is richly expressed with layers of silky texture...”

2013 Valli “Bendigo” Pinot Noir Central Otago

(\$44.99) The most brooding of the Valli Pinots. This dramatic terroir of schist and quartz boulder-strewed mountainsides always packs a punch. Dark fruit, muscular structure and obvious longevity. Grant's delicate hand lends more finesse to this Bendigo offering than some, but there is still intrinsic power here. 96-97 points RC, 96 points SK: “This sweetly fragrant Pinot is filled with spiced cherry, plum, toasted almond and a touch of cocoa...deeply satisfying.”

2013 Valli “Waitaki” Riesling North Otago

(\$19.99) Beyond his mastery of Pinot Noir, Grant also makes some dynamite Riesling. This bottling from the cool, limestone-rich Waitaki Valley is in a spätlese style with a lovely balance of racy acidity and exotic sweetness. Spiced mandarin, preserved lemon, white florals and spiced pear. Mouthfilling, rich and full of energy. Notable sweetness, perfectly complemented by fresh, mouthwatering acidity. So drinkable—a summer favorite for me. 94 points RC, 95 points BC: “This could be the most Germanic style of Riesling that I have yet tasted... a tantalising mix of mineral, green apple, lime, and rose petal flavours...”



SoHo Wine Co. from the “Sicily of the South Pacific”

Waiheke Island is one of the most idyllic winegrowing areas you could ever visit. This small, 12-mile-long island surrounded by crystal clear waters is picture perfect. Just a short ferry ride from Auckland (New Zealand’s largest city), this is a wine tasting paradise. You can rent scooters (Vespas) and cruise around the island from one boutique vineyard to the next. The wines from this land have long been renowned for their intensity and concentration. Waiheke is one of the warmer growing areas in New Zealand thanks to its relatively northerly latitude, and yields here are typically low due to almost constant maritime winds. The wines are typified by power and purity of fruit. Well-situated vineyards on the island can produce Bordeaux varietal-based wines of structure and length, plus very serious Syrah. One problem for a small island with steep terrain and low yields is that farming and winemaking costs are very high, and the resulting wines often reflect that with their price tags. However, having tasted the wines for many years, I was determined to find a producer from Waiheke to add to our Direct Import program and bring some truly great Waiheke wines to our customers at super reasonable price points. In 2015 I spent a few days on the island visiting many of its “marquee” properties. The range of wines I tasted was outstanding, but there was one property that put it all together—quality, style, slick packaging and surprisingly affordable pricing, given how great the wines were. This producer was SoHo Wine Co.

SoHo founder Rachael Carter set out with a mission to bring people top-quality wines with a “sexy, stylish personality.” Fashion and design are clearly important to SoHo (hence the name). Just one look at the labels and promotional materials will show you they are serious about positioning themselves as a luxury brand. However, you’ll be pleased to know (I hope) that as a wine buyer at K&L, I have to look way beyond the stylish design and sleek packaging and assess the true merits of what’s in the bottle. Well I must say SoHo’s Waiheke offerings (plus a Central Otago Pinot Noir they offer) blew me away! The wines’ purity and polished textures are more than equal to their classy presentation. The Waiheke estate wines are made by the talented James Rowan, and for the Central Otago Pinot they recruited none other than Grant Taylor of Valli (whose own wines are also featured in this newsletter)!

SoHo’s Waiheke vineyard called “Jomara” is located in Onetangi at the northeastern end of the island. It’s a steep and undulating property parcelled to the different varieties they focus on. I toured the site on the back of a 4-wheeler and had to hang on tight on some of the inclines! The

soils are clay loam with layers of volcanic ash and gravel. All the vines are cropped very low at around three to four pounds of fruit per vine. The wines from this site have a very distinctive vibrancy of lifted fruit and a firm mineral core that I find very reminiscent of Mount Etna wines from Sicily. Thanks to our Direct Import program, they are very affordable, and I hope you will give them a try!

2014 SoHo “Carter” Chardonnay Waiheke Island (\$19.99) Top-class Chardonnay. Very Meursault-inspired: lots of powerful orchard fruit, yellow peach, stone fruit pit; toasty, nutty, Marcona almond, lots of yeast and lees character. Rich and weighty but dry and focused—no flabby, over-the-top, buttery malo here, just concentrated power and great savory lees-inspired persistence on the palate. The value is just unreal given the quality. I would run this up against double-the-price Premier Cru white Burgundy with confidence. 95 points BC, SK; 93 points RC.

2014 SoHo “Revolver” Bordeaux Blend Waiheke Island (\$19.99) A very vibrant, expressive wine with tons of flavor and character. It’s a Bordeaux-inspired blend with a good chunk of Cabernet Franc, which really lifts the aromatics and gives a lovely, exotic nuance to the fruit. Cassis, ripe plum, blackcurrant, sweet tobacco spice, subtle lavender. Ripe, silky tannins, fresh acidity and polished to a shine with lovely, flashy French oak licks; an incredible wine for the money. 95 points SK, 93 points RC.

2014 SoHo “McQueen” Pinot Noir Central Otago (\$24.99) Made by one of the most experienced and celebrated winemakers in all of NZ, with 40-plus years crafting Pinot Noir under his belt. The McQueen Pinot is very exotic and aromatic. Asian spice, subtle thyme whiffs, ripe berries, sandalwood, clove, star anise, clay, schist minerals and perfectly integrated oak. Quite powerful and rich but finely tuned and precisely poised. 95 points SK, 93 points RC, 92 points BC.

2014 SoHo “Valentina” Syrah Waiheke Island (\$19.99) This Syrah has lovely floral aromatics, purple fruits, lifted Asian spices, scorched earth, and a classy French oak polish. Beautiful, pure, silky wine, very easy to drink, with great presence on the palate. Equally at home with food or as the main course by itself. 95 points BC and SK.



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