

WINE News

*The Savvy is not always grassier
on the other side of the globe.*



AUGUST 19, 2019 FEATURES

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Southern Disruption: The New Wine of Oz, NZ and SA

By Thomas Smith

The wines of New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa continue to defy expectations. In the past, these categories have been dominated by two major wines: Australian Shiraz and Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. Brands like Yellow Tail came on the market and shaped the way we thought about wines from these countries. Australia? They make sugary, sappy Shiraz, right? New Zealand? It's all about the grassy Sauvignon Blanc, isn't it? But what I love about K&L is our ability to find wines that flip the script on these narratives. We've been able to find producers, both large and small, across these countries that are passionately crafting

a wide array of delicious wines. In New Zealand, amid an ocean of bulk wine production in Marlborough, there are a handful of families making profound, world-class wines. In Australia, a new generation of winemakers are building a rich landscape of Riesling, Grenache, and Cabernet-based wines that are lighter and more elegant expressions of their terroir. It's a thrilling time to explore the wines of the Southern Hemisphere, and I'm glad to say that the wines have never been better.

Based in our Redwood City store, Thomas Smith is K&L's new buyer for wines of New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa.

2016 Craggy Range "Te Kahu" Bordeaux Blend Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay (\$19.99)

A braided riverbed that produces New Zealand's best full-bodied reds, Gimblett Gravels is a great terroir. The Te Kahu reads more Bordeaux than New World, with black fruits, cassis, and spice overlaying deeper elements of iron and sage. This savory, dense, and concentrated wine will age into the next decade. But, with a quick decant it opens beautifully. **97 DC, 93 JS**



2016 Yering Station Estate Chardonnay Yarra Valley (\$24.99)

The Yarra Valley is Australia's Burgundy, known for cool-climate Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Yering Station was the first vineyard and winery there, and was originally planted in the 1850s. This Chardonnay is acid-driven, with bright citrus elements and flinty minerality. Weighted and rich, creamy, yet racy, this is a gorgeous Chardonnay that dramatically performs above its price. **94 JS**



2018 Mount Edward Pinot Noir Rosé Central Otago (\$14.99)

Hands down, this is my favorite rosé wine of the 2019 rosé season. 100% direct-pressed Pinot Noir from one of the best vineyards in Central Otago, this is bone dry, pale in color, and incredibly sophisticated. With its soft strawberry tones on the palate and beautiful floral aromas, this is light and delicate. It's elegant rosé at its best. This is a must-try wine for anyone who loves rosé.



Cover: Cows grazing in winter at Te Whare Ra in New Zealand.

This Is Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc, Redefined

By Thomas Smith

It's impossible to talk about New Zealand wine without mentioning **Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc**. Accounting for 75% of the country's total wine production, Sauv Blanc has become big business in Marlborough, dominated by a handful of huge producers churning out wine on a mind-numbing scale. Just to give you an idea, 25% of all New Zealand wine sold in the United States comes from just one producer. Yet outside of these massive vineyards and production facilities, we've managed to find a handful of small, family-run producers whose passion for winemaking translates into beautiful, handcrafted wines that are redefining what it means to make, and enjoy, Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc.

2018 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$19.99) Jason and Anna Flowerday purchased their 11-hectare vineyard outside of Renwick in 2003, and quickly became known as one of the breakout stars of the region. Their philosophy is simple: grow healthy, organic grapes on a small scale, pick at perfection, and intervene very little in the winery. The result is staggering. Soft, elegant and exquisitely balanced, this competes with nearly any Sauvignon Blanc made anywhere. **95 BC, 91 RP**



If anyone understands the distinct regions of Marlborough, it's Astrolabe winemaker Simon Waghorn, who has spent his career focusing on distinctive sub-climates. From nine vineyards, each presenting a unique expression of Sauvignon Blanc, his **2017 Astrolabe Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$19.99)** interweaves parcels from the Wairau, Awatere, and Kekerengu Coast seamlessly, creating a wine of balance and power. **90 WS**

It's difficult to think of a winemaker more synonymous with Sauvignon Blanc than Greywacke's Kevin Judd. In 1984, Kevin helped found Cloudy Bay, where he spent the next 23 years building New Zealand's most successful, global wine brand. After leaving in 2009, he started a new project focusing on small-scale production and uncompromising quality. The **2016 Greywacke "Wild Sauvignon" Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (\$26.99)** is named for the wild yeasts that cold-ferment his Sauvignon Blanc over six months. The wine is left on lees for another six months, which adds additional texture and weight, creating a distinctive and compelling Sauvignon Blanc. **94 JS, 93 WS**



Impossible to Ignore: South African Chenin Blanc

By Elsa Baez

During a staff tasting of South African wines a few months ago, I scratched across the top of my tasting sheet, "Why am I not drinking these wines more often?" It's unbelievable that Chenin Blanc is so underrated. With bright, ripe fruit, wonderfully full and textured body, and nuanced aromatics, it is one of those wines that can be easy to overlook on the shelf, but impossible to ignore in your glass.

The **2018 A.A. Badenhorst "Secateurs" Chenin Blanc Swartland (\$14.99)** is just such an example of a clean, crisp, and refreshing Chenin Blanc that delivers big on fruit without overpowering the palate. The aromas suggest tropical fruits, along with subtle hints of citrus zest, while the palate is upfront with acidity, a hint of lime on the mid-palate, and the finish is wonderfully crisp. This wine demonstrates the concept of balance: each of its elements complement each other. It brings together fruit, acid, weight, and aromatics into a perfect glass of wine. **94 WS**



Despite the fact that the **2018 Tania & Vincent Carême "Terre Brulée" Chenin Blanc Swartland (\$12.99)** is produced in Swartland, it is rooted in the ancestral home of Chenin Blanc, the Loire

Valley—and it shows. Tania and Vincent Carême, star winemakers based in Vouvray, are internationally recognized for their work with this variety. This wine shows off with flowery aromatics, but the acid here is especially bright and focused. It provides a lift to the ripeness of the fruit. Yet, this is far from lean—it has a texture that gives it weight and gravitas, a remarkable feat for wine at this price.

Andrea Mullineux's **2018 Kloof Street Old Vine Chenin Blanc Swartland (\$19.99)** is a stunning example of exceptional South African Chenin, produced by one of South Africa's best winemakers. Named *Wine Enthusiast's* "Winemaker of the Year" in 2017, this American expat living in Swartland has been crafting stunning wines since 2007. The Old Vine Chenin is bursting with lemon zest intertwined with honeysuckle and ripe stone fruit. On the palate, it displays rich texture and powerful acidity, while still keeping a sense of elegance and complexity. This is in large part due to the fact it's produced from older vines ranging from 35 to 40-plus years old, which naturally produce grapes at lower yields but with a higher concentration of flavors.



Shiraz, Love It, But There's More from Australia

By Chris DePaoli

No doubt about it, Aussie Shiraz is phenomenal.

The dark juice shines in a variety of roles and deserves its place at the head of the Australian wine pantheon. It's a peculiar thing then, as I spent the 2018 harvest working in the Barossa Valley, to learn that most of the winemakers of the area, while still excited about Shiraz in their country, were more and more enthused with the alternative offerings coming from regions far and wide. Befitting a country the size of a continent, Australian winemaking is growing up, and using their broad geography to make more wines, in more styles, than ever before. Australian wine is more than colorful-ended roo's and ink-black fruit bombs. There's elegance and finesse throughout the country, and the prices won't stay this low forever. Pinot Noir, Grenache, and Riesling have found sweet spots to flourish in, and we've got fine examples of each on our racks.

The Adelaide Hills, to the east of the city, is everything you don't think Australia is: cool, moist, and green. With its fresh fruit and light,



truffle and herb nose, the **2016 Sidewood Estate Pinot Noir Adelaide Hills South Australia (\$14.99)** is a great example of the incredibly crushable wines coming from the region.

Unlike Aussie Pinot, Aussie Grenache has been a known quantity for some time, but recently has become undeservedly underappreciated. Rediscovering this refreshing, red fruit-flavored, yet earthy variety is easy with options like **2015 Thistledown "Thorny Devil" Old Vine Grenache Barossa Valley South Australia (\$19.99)**, which is as good a barbecue wine as the world knows. **93 JH**

Over on the white side, Australian Chardonnay and Sémillon get their plaudits, but Riesling has also been hitting its stride recently, with the Clare Valley leading the charge. Jim Barry's **2017 Jim Barry "Lodge Hill" Dry Riesling Clare Valley South Australia (\$16.99)** is ridiculously good, showcasing the herbal and citrus notes the region is known for. **95 DC, 94 W&S**



New Zealand Chardonnay, Undiscovered Gem?

By Thomas Smith

Chardonnay and Pinot Noir have an intertwined history that dates back centuries. As shown everywhere from Burgundy to the Sonoma Coast, these two varieties virtually always thrive together in the same climates and soil conditions. With all the incredible Pinot Noir coming out of New Zealand these days, it has left me wondering as to why Chardonnay has not received the same attention. New Zealand is producing exceptional Chardonnays grown in every major wine region across the country. From Auckland to Central Otago, these wines express the unique places in which they are grown, and are every bit as good as the top Chardonnays across the world.

In Auckland, the Brajkovich family has run Kumeu River for three generations. Focusing on single-vineyard expressions of Chardonnay, they have developed a reputation as one of the world's best producers of the variety. The **2016 Kumeu River "Estate" Chardonnay Kumeu (\$29.99)** leans toward the Burgundian side of the spectrum, showing intense focus and purity. At a recent tasting with the current proprietor, Paul Brajkovich, I had the opportunity to taste a ten-year vertical of each of their Chardonnays, and I can confirm they age beautifully, but are equally energetic and delicious upon release. Vinous's Neal Martin states it best when looking at Chardonnay prices elsewhere, "You are left scratching your head as to why Kumeu River is not uttered in the same breath as Leflaive, Ramonet or Marcassin." **92 W&S, 91 RP**



On the South Island, in the heart of Central Otago, single-vineyard focused Mount Edward is known as one of New Zealand's best producers of Pinot Noir. However, their 2017 Bannockburn Chardonnay is an absolute hidden gem. Sourced entirely from Morrison Vineyard, located in the Lowburn subregion, the **2017 Mount Edward Chardonnay Bannockburn Central Otago (\$13.99)** has nectarine and almond on the nose, and a palate that is light-bodied, with an invigorating texture. The tension, focus, and linear character of this wine perfectly displays Central Otago's terroir. Only five barrels made. **93 JS**

Warren Gibson and Lorraine Leheny have developed this small label, Bilancia, as a side gig to Warren's day job as winemaker at Trinity Hill in Hawke's Bay. The **2015 Bilancia Chardonnay Hawke's Bay (\$29.99)** is sourced from vines planted at La Colline, Bilancia's own vineyard that is terraced across the slopes of Roy's Hill, above Gimblett Gravels. This Chardonnay does not undergo malolactic fermentation, and is racy, bright, and focused. With a mix of citrus and stone fruits, and lifted, airy texture, this wine is full of minerality and tension. This is an incredible display of New Zealand Chardonnay. **95 BC, 93 RP**





Winter comes to a close in the Margaret River area.

Xanadu: What They Have Made is Real in Margaret River

By Thomas Smith

Xanadu has had roots in Western Australia's Margaret River region since it was founded in 1977. For decades, the winery quietly produced Cabernet Sauvignon from its estate properties right outside the village of Margaret River. Then in 2005, the winery was purchased by entrepreneur Doug Rathbone, who recognized the immense potential of the property and set Xanadu on track to becoming a globally recognized producer. Glenn Goodall was hired on as head winemaker in 2006. He spent the following years conducting trials to improve the health and quality of the vineyard along with improving practices in the winery.

The results of this push toward quality have been overwhelming. Their estate Chardonnay has scored 95 points or above in the last five vintages. The estate Cabernet has scored 95 points or above eight times in the last ten years. Most noteworthy, Xanadu's 2016 estate Cabernet was awarded the Jimmy Watson Memorial Trophy, the most prestigious Australian wine award, for which it beat out over 1,500 other wines in two different tasting trials. Xanadu has clearly landed as a Margaret River classic, producing a stunning lineup of wines that deliver hugely on both quality and value.

This has been a tremendous year for Xanadu. It's no longer an up-and-comer, and the hard work the Xanadu team has put in to produce wines of exceptional quality clearly merit them a seat at the table of classic Margaret River producers. I can't wait to see what's next in store for this incredible winery.



The 2016 Xanadu "Estate" Cabernet Sauvignon Margaret River (\$24.99) ranks among the best Cabernets I have ever had from Margaret River. Dark, focused, with a backbone of graphite and teeming with lush, forward fruit, plus a touch of fresh mint, this an outright masterpiece. It has an acidic drive, a brightness, and lift that you often find with Margaret River Cabernet. Anyone who loves old-school Napa Cabernet should be right at home here.

The 2015 Xanadu "Estate" Chardonnay Margaret River (\$17.99) is a beautiful take on bigger, richer-styled Chardonnay. With 30% new French oak, the wine takes on added weight and texture while still maintaining impeccable balance. White peach, citrus, and grapefruit all play out on the palate wonderfully, with a razor sharp bite. **95 JH, 91 RP**

With a blend consisting of 63% Sauvignon Blanc, 35% Semillon, and 2% Muscadelle, you might expect the 2018 Xanadu "DJL" Sauvignon Blanc-Sémillon Margaret River (\$19.99) to have more of an Old World sensibility. But that notion is turned entirely on its head by its sheer vibrancy and brilliance. Clean, bright and focused, this white Bordeaux blend showcases passionfruit, flint, and lime, with stunning length of finish.

Finally, it's tough to beat the 2017 Xanadu "Exmoor Drive" Chardonnay Margaret River (\$14.99). Named for the road that borders the vineyard and leads to the village of Margaret River, the Exmoor Drive sees less new oak than the estate Chardonnay (only 5%) yet still has a creamy texture and tons of pear, citrus, and melon, and a bright, crisp finish. **92 JH, 91 W&S**



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