

# Wine Spectator

Home > Magazine Archives > June 15, 2013 Issue > Tasting Reports

## New Zealand's Bright Horizon

**Quality and value remain the country's strong points, as imports continue to increase**

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Issue: June 15, 2013

Demand for New Zealand's crisp Sauvignon Blancs, elegant Pinot Noirs and delicious Chardonnays is booming—and for good reason. Not only do the wines offer high quality, but the vast majority cost \$30 or less a bottle.

Last year, shipments of New Zealand wines to the United States rose by 22 percent to 4.4 million cases, marking the fourth straight year of double-digit growth. (The U.S. is the country's third largest export market, behind Australia and the United Kingdom.) New Zealand is now the world's 10th largest exporter by value.

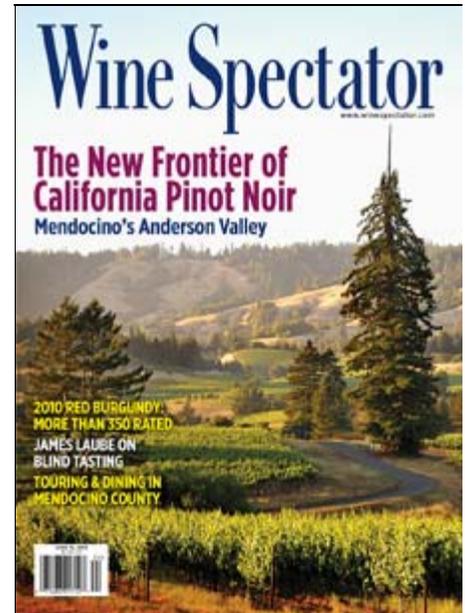
What's even more impressive is how quickly New Zealand has made its mark. New Zealand wines were barely a blip on wine lovers' radar screens until the late 1980s, when Marlborough Sauvignon Blancs first started appearing on wineshop shelves. Since then, highly regarded Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays have joined the list of the nation's top wines, and other varietals are gaining ground, including Pinot Gris, Riesling, Syrah and Merlot.

Since our last report ("New Zealand's Cutting Edge," June 15, 2012), I've reviewed more than 325 wines in blind tastings in our Napa office. Though nearly half of those were Sauvignon Blancs, the majority of the wines that received outstanding ratings of 90 points or higher on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale were Pinot Noirs. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available.)

Sauvignon Blanc still ranks as New Zealand's leading wine, representing 70 percent of the country's wine production, as well as eight out of every 10 bottles exported. There is still a benchmark style of Kiwi Sauvignon Blanc: aromatic and food-friendly, with a very crisp, sometimes racy, acidity. Yet the wine can't be as narrowly defined as it once was. There are more refined and restrained examples, with the best showing complexity and textural nuances. Winemaking has evolved from straightforward stainless-steel fermentation to experiments with native yeasts and the use of oak.

Greywacke winemaker Kevin Judd, who made two top-scoring Sauvignon Blancs—the Marlborough Wild Sauvignon 2011 (92 points, \$29) and Marlborough 2012 (91, \$20)—allows a portion of each wine to barrel—ferment with wild yeasts. At Dog Point, winemaker James Healy ages the Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough Section 94 2011 (90, \$36) for 18 months in older French oak barrels. These wines—and a number of the other top Sauvignon Blancs—exhibit an enticing range of aromatics and offer supple textures.

There's still a good reason to associate New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs with the region of Marlborough on the South Island. It remains far and away the country's largest wine region, and there are still plenty of value-oriented examples that are widely distributed, including the Oyster Bay Marlborough 2012 (87, \$15), Saint Clair Marlborough Vicar's Choice 2012 (87, \$18), Starborough Marlborough 2012 (87, \$15), Clifford Bay Marlborough 2012 (86, \$11) and Matua Marlborough 2012 (86, \$13).



[View the entire table of contents for the June 15, 2013 issue](#)

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[Reality Check](#)

[Loire Valley Alphabetical Listing](#)

[New Zealand Alphabetical Listing](#)

Consistency and value have always been New Zealand's strengths—and this year is no different. Three out of every four wines reviewed cost \$30 or less, including fine Pinot Noirs from Marlborough like the Nobilo Icon 2011 (91, \$22), Clifford Bay 2010 (89, \$15) and Stoneburn 2010 (88, \$13).

New Zealand Pinots have also been getting plenty of attention as world-class wines. It's difficult to generalize the range of styles of Kiwi Pinot, but overall quality is very high, with the best bottles showing a lively tannic structure and a jolt of acidity to keep the flavors fresh. Even though exports of Pinot Noir are second only to those of Sauvignon Blanc, many of the top bottlings are made in small quantities and imported sparingly. Your best bet is restaurant wine lists.

While New Zealand's cool, sunny climate made it an obvious choice to grow Sauvignon Blanc, until recently many Pinot Noirs suffered from being thin and overtly herbal. It didn't take long for better vineyard sites to be identified—typically above the valley floors and warmer foothill regions. Pinot Noir vines have also been maturing, resulting in more complex and balanced wines.

There are now three key regions for Pinot Noir: Central Otago, Marlborough and Martinborough. Central Otago, on the South Island, has the most distinctive wines, with robust dark fruit flavors and fleshy tannins. The region is represented this year by top-scoring versions from Burn Cottage, Cashburn, Felton Road and Rippon.

Marlborough Pinots tend to have red fruit flavors and supple, silky tannins—this year's standouts include Astrolabe, Greywacke, Lake Chalice, Saint Clair, Seresin and Ten Sisters—while versions from Martinborough, such as those made by Ata Rangī and Craggy Range, stand out for their savory and gamy qualities.

There are still plenty of excellent 2010 Pinot Noirs on the market—a vintage that many consider the best ever for this varietal. The mix of 2010's ideal growing conditions and low yields resulted in deep and structured wines. Examples include the Astrolabe Marlborough Province (92, \$28), Wairau River Marlborough Reserve (90, \$35) and Rippon Central Otago Tinker's Field Mature Vine Lake Wanaka (90, \$99). Rippon winemaker Nick Mills believes his 2010 Pinots have plenty of phenolics, which will help the wines age. "2010 requires patience," he says. "It will become a great vintage."

The 2011s, which are making their way here now, are also impressive so far, including a group of five outstanding wines from Felton Road. 2011 was a warmer, more humid year, so the wines are likely to be a bit more showy than the 2010s, a touch less concentrated, but still displaying what the region is capable of.

Chardonnay is the country's third-most planted variety, and the best bottlings find a way to balance crisp acidity with fresh fruit flavors and elegant profiles. Look for bottlings by Dog Point, Greywacke and Mountford. There are also some fine aromatic white wine bottlings such as Pinot Gris, Riesling and Gewürztraminer, which are steadily climbing in terms of production and imports. Many of these wines are surprisingly full-bodied and marked by a soft acidity.

Success has had its challenges. Increased production and a series of bumper crops beginning with the 2008 harvest have threatened to create a glut of New Zealand wines, but quick thinking by the country's growers led to a concerted effort to curb yields with aggressive pruning. The 2012 harvest was a natural self-correction, down 18 percent from the previous year. In fact, 2012 was one of the coolest growing seasons in New Zealand's recent history. For the whites hitting the market now, this means more restrained wines with a lack of tropical fruit flavors, some showing a touch of coarseness on the finish. The reds remain to be seen, but the hope is that the smaller crop will result in concentrated, powerful flavors.

The New Zealand wine industry is also a leader in technology and eco-friendly practices, recently becoming the first country to require every grower and producer to set targets for the use of energy, water, chemicals and packaging as part of the Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand initiative. Along with that has come a surge in the number of wineries and vineyards exploring organic and biodynamic practices. And to top it off, New Zealand leads in using twist-off closures. More than 90 percent of the wines in this report were sealed that way.

Not that long ago, it would have been hard to imagine that New Zealand would have such an impact—let alone offer so many outstanding, complex and affordable wines. With a steady supply making its way to wine lovers in the U.S., the future looks bright.

*Senior editor MaryAnn Worobiec is Wine Spectator's lead taster on the wines of New Zealand.*

- [MaryAnn Worobiec's Recommended Wines From New Zealand \(in PDF Format\)](#)
- [Map of New Zealand \(in PDF Format\)](#)

## MaryAnn Worobiec's Recommended Wines From New Zealand

More than 325 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at [www.winespectator.com/061513](http://www.winespectator.com/061513). WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

### TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>FELTON ROAD Pinot Noir Central Otago Block 3 2011</b> Supple and refined, with a core of focused, juicy flavors of cherry and strawberry, showing tremendous power and focus. Delivers wave after wave of spice, floral, mineral and herb details.	93	\$80
<b>GREYWACKE Pinot Noir Marlborough 2011</b> Elegant, with supple, fresh and lively flavors of raspberry and cherry, meshing harmoniously with details of clove, forest floor, tobacco leaf, pepper and dried lavender, echoing on the long finish.	93	\$39
<b>SERESIN Pinot Noir Marlborough Leah 2009</b> A graceful red, with pretty dried lavender, Earl Grey tea and vibrant white pepper aromatics that give way to plush plum and raspberry flavors and white truffle highlights. Detailed and focused.	93	\$32
<b>ASTROLABE Pinot Noir Marlborough Province 2010</b> Intoxicating aromatics of orange zest, dried lavender and peppery earth lead to a succulent core of raspberry and strawberry.	92	\$28
<b>BURN COTTAGE Pinot Noir Central Otago 2011</b> Full of personality, with fleshy black cherry, plum, mineral and pomegranate flavors making a grand entrance. Shows good balance.	92	\$55
<b>FELTON ROAD Pinot Noir Central Otago Cornish Point 2011</b> Expressive and delicate, showing dried lavender, wild strawberry and cranberry flavors, with a fresh loamy earth character.	92	\$70
<b>GREYWACKE Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough Wild Sauvignon 2011</b> Creamy and luscious, showing lemon meringue pie, lemon curd and vanilla pudding flavors up front. A fresh acidity weaves in and out.	92	\$29
<b>MOUNTFORD Pinot Noir Waipara Valley Liaison 2009</b> Baking spice aromatics, with cedar notes and touches of caramel and toast, lead to ripe, rich cherry and raspberry flavors.	92	\$26
<b>SEIFRIED Riesling Nelson Sweet Agnes Winemakers Collection 2011</b> Like nectar from yellow raisins, this offers notes of buttered brioche and honeycomb, with a spiciness and plenty of intensity and focus.	92	\$25 375ml
<b>SERESIN Pinot Noir Marlborough Raupo Creek Single Vineyard 2009</b> Restrained, but highly detailed and elegant, with wild raspberry, fresh cherry and pomegranate notes at the core.	92	\$70
<b>CAMBRIDGE ROAD Pinot Noir Martinborough Animus 2011</b> Offers cracked black pepper, cherry, strawberry and pomegranate flavors, with lively acidity and detailed aromatics.	91	\$43
<b>CASHBURN Pinot Noir Central Otago 2011</b> This distinctive red shows white pepper, talc and dried lavender notes, with wild berry and plum flavors on an elegant frame.	91	\$30
<b>CRAGGY RANGE Le Sol Gimblett Gravels Hawkes Bay 2010</b> The juicy, lively red currant and raspberry flavors are pure, focused and vibrant, with spice and dried violet details. Syrah.	91	\$100
<b>FELTON ROAD Pinot Noir Central Otago Block 5 2011</b> Crushed raspberry and wild strawberry flavors are pure, bright and focused in this refreshing and polished red.	91	\$80
<b>GREYWACKE Chardonnay Marlborough 2010</b> Lemon meringue, peach, coconut water and tangerine notes are pure, refreshing and very focused, with a lithe texture.	91	\$39

### TOP WINES (continued)

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>GREYWACKE Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Extremely aromatic, with honeysuckle, lemongrass and lemon zest notes, followed by lemon, tangerine and nectarine flavors.	91	\$20
<b>MOUNTFORD Pinot Noir Waipara Valley Estate 2009</b> Crisp berry and cherry notes show white pepper and dried lavender details, with toast and caramel nuances, in this supple red.	91	\$50
<b>NOBILO Pinot Noir Marlborough Icon 2011</b> Shows great focus, offering raspberry and cherry notes at the core, with details of caramel, loam, cigar box and clove.	91	\$22
<b>SERESIN Pinot Noir Marlborough Home Single Vineyard 2009</b> This effusive red exhibits black and white pepper aromatics up front, with juicy black cherry and raspberry flavors at the core.	91	\$180

### TOP VALUES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
<b>BRANCOTT Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> The spicy quince and Asian pear flavors rest on a crisp, juicy body, with plenty of lime zest and grapefruit notes.	89	\$14
<b>CLIFFORD BAY Pinot Noir Marlborough 2010</b> Robust, offering fresh black cherry and plum flavors that are extremely juicy and intense, with cigar box and spice details.	89	\$15
<b>FRENZY Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Smooth and intense, with plenty of lemon, kumquat, lime zest and ruby grapefruit flavors, offering a juicy finish.	88	\$11
<b>TOHU Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough Single Vineyard 2012</b> Appealing, with a tangy mix of peach, melon, citrus and apple flavors, offering plenty of fresh thyme notes.	88	\$15
<b>OYSTER BAY Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Light-bodied, with fresh-cut grass, herb and jalapeño notes that mingle well with notes of lemon, lime and grapefruit.	87	\$15
<b>STARBOROUGH Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Features succulent melon, kiwifruit, peach and grapefruit flavors, with good intensity and juiciness.	87	\$15
<b>BABICH Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Juicy, with bright acidity and lemon, lime and green apple flavors.	86	\$14
<b>CLIFFORD BAY Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> This succulent white shows passion fruit, lime and green melon notes.	86	\$11
<b>FIRE ROAD Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Exhibits juicy peach, citrus and apple flavors on a smooth body.	86	\$13
<b>KATO Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Tangy and refreshing, with flavors of lime, passion fruit and citrus.	86	\$12
<b>KONO Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Aromatic, with smooth but crisp lemon-lime and green apple flavors.	86	\$12
<b>MATUA Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Key lime pie and citrus zest notes are sleek and crisp. Lively finish.	86	\$13
<b>MOHUA Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Tangy lemon, lime and green apple flavors have a crunchy acidity.	86	\$13
<b>SAUVIGNON REPUBLIC Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2012</b> Offers tangy notes of ripe, juicy peach, nectarine and citrus.	86	\$8