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to Marlborough

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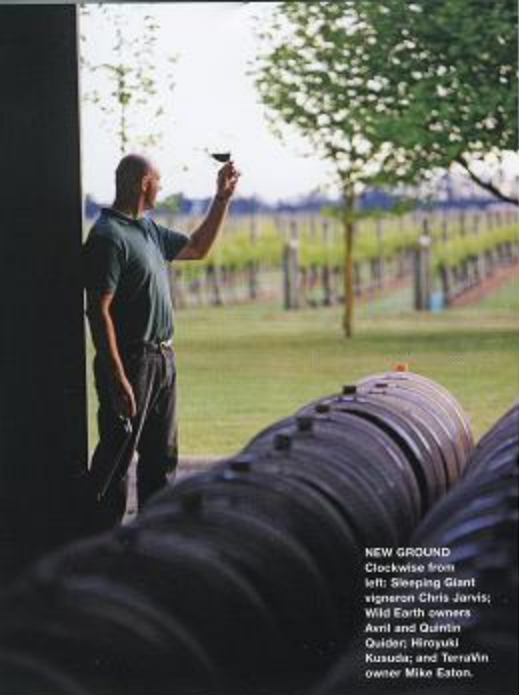


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LONDON'S HOTTEST WINE SPOTS



NEW GROUND
Clockwise from left: Sleeping Giant vigneron Chris Jarvis; Wild Earth owners Arri and Quintin Oulder; Hiroyuki Kusuda; and TerraVin owner Mike Easton.



TEXT BOB CAMPBELL MW

UNsung HEROES

If you thought you knew all the best names in New Zealand wine, think again. NZ editor Bob Campbell MW unearths the quiet achievers who are being tipped as the new guard of winemakers we'll be talking about in 2009.

Anyone who has a few bottles of 1982 *Le Mata Coleraine*, 1991 *Seasurf Chardonnay* or 1997 *Felton Road Pinot Noir* will feel pretty smug that they spotted a winner before those wineries developed cult status. They'll also deserve to feel smug about having paid a less-than-heroic price for their treasured bottles.

I do most of my tasting blind so when I unroll a top-scoring bottle and don't recognise the label I take a special interest in the producer. An increasing number of new winemakers are getting off to a strong start because they are well financed, have done the hard yards when prospecting for good vineyard sites and have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and how they're going to get there.

I've chosen several fine producers that are too small or too new to be well known. Some, such as Dada, have been selected on a lurch and are therefore highly speculative. *Others, such as Lowburn Ferris Mabi and Kingsmill are a safer bet. They've made great wines from favoured sites over several years. They're called winners to happen.*

My list includes larger producers. Inland, Elphinst Hill and Greystone Wines have got off to a flying start. Production volume brings faster turnover if high-quality standards are maintained throughout. You may have heard of these relatively bigger producers, but you may not be aware that they are very good and getting better.

Producers are grouped by region, starting in the south and heading north.

Central Otago

WILD EARTH

When a 2006 Wild Earth Pinot Noir won four trophies, including top pinot noir, at London's International Wine Challenge in 2008 (I was chairman), I began to take an interest in a wine producer that was relatively unknown to me. My record of tasting notes showed a solid performance until the 2006 and 2007 vintages when the wine really found form. Riesling and pinot gris from the 2007 vintage also earned high ratings.

American owner Quentin Quider made a fortune driving for absolute. He lives in Queensland and bought two vineyards in Central Otago as a retirement fund. Quider wisely took advice and bought land in top locations: Bannockburn and the Pisa Range area near Cromwell. Talented winemaker Michelle Richardson made his wines from 2003 to 2007, with Grant Taylor (formerly of Gibbston Valley, now with his own label Vili Estate) taking over last year.

Wild Earth clearly has a great future, and with 35 hectares of vineyards there'll be enough wine to make a decent splash.

KINGSMILL

Kingsmill has only made four wines: two vintages of pinot noir and riesling. I've tasted three of them. I gave both vintages (2006 and 2007) of pinot noir a resounding gold-medal rating, and a high silver-medal score to the 2007 Kingsmill Riesling. That's a good start.

It's easy to understand the secret behind the success when you visit the small vineyard

of owners Philip Horn and Donna Abrams. It's in the stubbing heart of Bannockburn, Central Otago's most successful wine district. The wine is made by Matt Kingsmill at neighbouring winery Ovens.

Only a few hundred cases of pinot noir are made each year, but you can buy it through the winery's website www.kingsmill-wines.co.nz; a six-bottle carton of the terrific 2007 vintage retails for a relatively reasonable NZ\$179 plus freight.

LOWBURN FERRY

A modest three-hectare vineyard in Lowburn has produced a string of cracking pinot noirs since the first vintage in 2003. That inaugural vintage won trophies for top wine and top pinot noir. I tasted a barrel sample of the 2005 and immediately ordered a case. After release, I scored it gold. Similarly, for the



MATT KINGSMILL OF FUN
KINGSMILL WINES
www.kingsmill-wines.co.nz



ALL TOGETHER NOW
Brian and Nicola
Richard (third and
second from right
with the Marlboro team.

2007 vintage, although in the interesting year it only rated high silver.

Owners Roger and Jess Gibson have lived in the Lower Valley for 15 years. They began selling wine through their online store <http://www.gibsonwines.com> before becoming winemakers. They are assisted by Carol Burn, who is a contract winemaker with Vinquo. You can buy the 2006 and 2007 vintages via www.lambtonfarm.co.nz for NZ\$38.95.

Waipara GREYSTONE WINES

Accountants have a reputation for cutting costs to the bone – a practice that doesn't tend to make the best wine. Greystone founder, former chartered accountant Bruce Thomas, is not your average accountant. In fact, he looks more like a spy or pilot than a number-cruncher. Thomas purchased a hillside farm in Waipara and, after carefully mapping its soils, aspects and altitudes, planted sauvignon blanc, riesling, pinot gris, chardonnay, pinot noir and syrah on areas of the vineyard that best suited each variety. I remain sceptical about the syrah, which I've not yet tasted, because it demands more heat than I believe Waipara delivers, but the rest of Greystone's wines are excellent.

By a stroke of genius, Thomas employed former Penfolds viticulturalist Nick Gill who managed most of the vineyards supplying Orange, Elvi winemaker Dominic Maxwell is equally inspiring. Forty hectares of vineyards, with more to come, means Greystone Wines should be relatively easy to find.

Nelson REDOUT HILL

Daniel Jackson left the security of the IT industry to try his hand at winemaking in Nelson's Mouteka Valley, an outstipped area. Redout Hill is New Zealand's only riesling planted in granite. To be more precise it is called Separation Point granite and is the country's oldest rock structure. Thankfully for Jackson, the granite weathers evenly,

allowing the vines to be planted with a slope rather than downslope.

Redout Hill's first three wines, all from the 2006 vintage, are sauvignon blanc, pinot gris and riesling. They are striking and distinctive despite with gruffs from famous (showing impressive purity and depth. Only five to six hectares of vines are planted so bottles will be relatively hard to find. This is a speculative choice.

BLACKENBROOK

Blackenbrook is small (five hectares of vines) and new (first wine from 2006), so it's hardly surprising it's little known outside Nelson. Swiss owners Daniel and Ursula Schwarzenbach have the meticulous approach to winemaking for which their countrymen are famous, while Daniel has some serious winemaking experience under his belt. He has worked for top producers in Austria, Germany, Switzerland and France, and has judged wine at competitions in Switzerland, France, Germany and China.

Blackenbrook makes a diverse pinot noir and an even better chardonnay. Its greatest strengths are pinot gris, riesling, sauvignon blanc, gewürztraminer and chardonnay – not necessarily in that order. Quality has crept up in recent years to an impressive peak. In 2007 and 2008, if it continues, Blackenbrook has a very bright future.

Marlborough TERRAVIA

It's difficult not to be caught up in the enthusiasm of Mike Eaton, owner of this small, cheap wine producer. Eaton loves hillside vineyards. He planted Clevein vineyard, which is the source of Freedom best wine, and was Marlborough's first hillside vineyard of any size. After selling Clevein to Freedom, Eaton planted vines on his current hillside site and established the TerraVia label. He also uses greener grapes but maintains his high standards by paying on a per-hectare basis and taking full control of the vineyard.

TerraVia's signature wines are a potential hillside Reserve Pinot Noir and TerraVia 1, a cabernet merlot blend that achieves seemingly impossible levels of ripeness and concentration in Marlborough's totally unassisted climate. Hillside Reserve Pinot Noir is a great wine; TerraVia 1 is a miracle. Another miracle is TerraVia's horridly named sauvignon blanc – it's the best of its type I've ever tasted. Like others in my list, Eaton has a love affair with his vineyard and his wines that borders on an obsession. TerraVia is a precious gem waiting to be discovered.

MALBI

Malbi was developed by Brian Rickard, a talented winemaker who made wine for Eric Taylor in Chile before returning to New Zealand to become winemaker at Ironbark. In 2001, while still at Ironbark, Rickard began making wine under his own Malbi label – a reaction against the trend to blend wines from many sites. His experience inspired him to focus on producing wines of vintage rather than the fruit-heavy Marlborough style that dominates the market. His single-vineyard wines are hand-picked and whole-cluster pressed. Fermentation is achieved using indigenous yeasts. Pinot noir is hand-planted and, to date, has been bottled unfined.

Malbi producers hand-made wines with character and without compromising quality. They may not always be easy to understand, but once you do, you'll love them.

Until recently Malbi wines have been made in microscopic quantities. In 2007 Rickard purchased the Coller in Brun winery. Production has increased significantly and quality remains as high as ever.

YEALANDS

Peter Yealands has achieved the seemingly impossible with commitment and time. What he began planting vines on a grand scale, many Marlborough winemakers wished him three glasses of beer that he wouldn't last a year. He did, and now has 1150 hectares of impressive vineyards, most in the Awatere Valley. In the process, Yealands literally moved mountains. He reshaped the terrain with bulldozers, doing some of the work himself. An announcement that he was building a winery

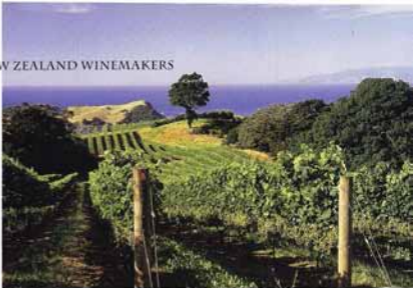


GREAT WINE
Christina from
Oliver Peter, Steven
Gregoire's Dominic
Maxwell, Kasper's Phil
Hart and Elaine Adams,
Gregoire's owner Bruce
Thomas, Blackhawk's
Doris Schwarzbach.



NEW ZEALAND WINEMAKERS

VINOUS VISTA
Man O' War has many small vineyards dotted across an idyllic and expensive estate.



met more scepticism. A massive winery opened for business in time for Yealands' inaugural 2008 vintage. It's not only big, it's green. Yealands was the first New Zealand winery to be designed to gain a six-star rating under the draft Green Star NZ Industrial building rating system.

At his winery opening, Yealands declared that he had plans to become New Zealand's largest wine producer. This time no one laughed. Yealands' wines are good. I think they're going to be great.

Martinborough

KUSUDA

Hiroyuki (Hiro) Kusuda gained a law degree in Tokyo, worked for the Consulate General of Japan in Sydney before getting the wine bug. He gained a degree in viticulture and winemaking at Geisenheim University prior to moving to Martinborough, where he helped establish Schubert winery with classmates Kai Schubert and Marion Deimling. Kusuda leased a vineyard in 2002 and made his first wine at the Schubert winery.

As well as being well travelled and educated, Kusuda is meticulous, determined and focused. His wines reflect those qualities. Most of Kusuda's production is sold in Japan where it fetches high prices, however, it is available at the Village Winery in Auckland and Ultimo Wine Centre in Sydney.

He makes intense, long-lived syrah and pinot noir; both highly recommended.

Hawkes Bay

DADA

When I first clapped eyes on a bottle of Dada (2007 Dada 1), I assumed it was yet another over-priced designer wine that would under-deliver on quality. That assumption was partly driven by the wine's accompanying letter which advised: "Dada 1 is presented with a bare minimum of information – the absence showing the omnipresence. Dada 1 was conceived as an experimental, even 'avant garde' wine, and its title references the famous movement in art and literature based on freedom of expression, surprise and the unexpected. The name reflects the winemakers approach to the wine itself..."

To me the "surprise and the unexpected" was a price tag of NZ\$50 without any indication of grape variety.

The wine is impressive. Flavours suggest sauvignon blanc, classy oak and yeast autolysis. Even more noteworthy is its great mouthfeel and silken texture.

Winemaking partners (in life and business) David Ramonete and Kate Galloway buy grapes from many sources, do experimental winemaking, reject most of the results and bottle the best – one wine so far. They purchased the Alluviale label from Blake family Vineyard (producer of the Bordeaux-beating Redd Gravel) and will continue to make this blended red using small parcels of fruit from the original vineyard. Call it a hunch, but I think Ramonete and Galloway have a bright future as quality wine producers.

ELEPHANT HILL

Roger Weiss is a wealthy German businessman. He's also a petrol-head. According to popular rumour, he arranged to buy several old Jaguar cars after they had been completely refurbished by a Hawkes Bay car company for hundreds of thousands of dollars each. During his regular visits with partner Reydan they fell in love with the region and bought land at Te Awanga.

A state-of-the-art winery was soon constructed with a stylish restaurant above a luminous lake and with views across the sea to Cape Kidnappers.

Elephant Hill is a mid-sized winery with a capacity of 400 tonnes. From the first vintage in 2007, it made good sauvignon blanc and chardonnay plus a terrific vignier. It's a great vineyard site and Weiss has so far shown an uncompromising approach to quality. Talented winemaker Steve Skinner does an outstanding job. Elephant Hill is destined to become a serious force in quality Hawkes Bay wine production.

SLEEPING GIANT

I've been impressed by two out of the four Sleeping Giant wines tasted and completely bowled over by the other two: 2004 Sleeping Giant Grace and 2006 Sleeping Giant Hill Block Chardonnay. Its vineyards are tucked into a basin on Te Mata hill, which provides protection from cooling winds.

Vignerons Chris Jarvis – who is reluctant to be called a winemaker – outlines his philosophy on winemaking on the winery website www.sleepinggiant.co.nz. He opts for a hands-on, traditional approach in search of balance. If you see a bottle bearing the name Sleeping Giant, buy it.

Auckland

MAN O'WAR

Waheke Island's largest wine producer has been making wine for several years with mixed success. The Spencer family hired and fired a few consultants, planted a few vineyards in good spots and bad, built a winery and kept a fairly low profile while they figured how to do things right. A few years ago I made a brief visit and wrote off the operation as a rich man's plaything with limited prospects of success.

A recent visit changed that view. Man O' War is now making some good wines from a large number of small vineyards dotted across the expansive estate. Each vineyard site has been chosen with an eye to quality and little attention to economics. Some are so steep that it seems a miracle anyone is able to tend the vines and harvest the grapes.

The wines show impressive concentration and ripeness under the watchful eye of winemaker Rachel Lay. They have character and, in some cases, real class. Syrah and chardonnay were my favourites, although a muscular cab sav also deserves a mention. ♣

To source wines, see page 155.