

GOURMET TRAVELLER

BOB CAMPBELL'S TOP NEW RELEASES

WINE

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for your collection

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Qantas/WINE
Winemaker of
the Year 2005

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A man with dark hair, wearing a blue long-sleeved button-down shirt and khaki cargo pants, stands with his hands on his hips against a wall of horizontal wooden planks. The wall has a rustic, weathered appearance. On one of the planks behind him, the words "Rising/Chenin" are written in a light-colored, possibly chalk or paint, font. The lighting is warm and directional, coming from the side, creating soft shadows.

Rising/Chenin

RISING SON

Hiroyuki Kusada, New Zealand's first Japanese winemaker, has gone from apprentice to master with his stunning debut syrah.

Bay, is one of the brightest and most creative winemakers I've met. Ivan Sutherland was one of Marlborough's earliest vineyard owners and was Cloudy Bay's chief viticulturist for many years, supplying it with much of the production from his extensive vineyard holdings. After just a couple of vintages, Healy and Sutherland have already shown they can make world-class sauvignon blanc, chardonnay and pinot noir.

Grape expectations: *Anyone who buys these wines now (especially the pinot noir) is onto a winner.*

FROMM WINERY

Hätsch Kalberer, winemaker at Fromm, gets a pretty free rein to make the wines he wants. The result is a wide range of indulgent wine styles that are snapped up by those who are in the know. Fromm is a living example of the axiom "good wine needs no bush" – wine lovers find Fromm, and not the reverse. Try the winery's sleek chardonnay, super-elegant pinot noir or uncannily Germanic-style riesling and you'll instantly share my enthusiasm for Kalberer's wines.

Grape expectations: *A low-key achiever that is set to avoid the hype surrounding many well-recognised cult-wine producers.*

GRAVITAS

Gravitas is a relatively new label founded by expat Kiwi Martyn Nicholls, one of the few people in the world to earn an MBA in wine from Bordeaux university. I am as impressed by Nicholls' view of the big picture as I am by his first couple of vintages of sauvignon blanc and chardonnay. Nicholls has also bought a vineyard in the Spanish Pyrenees, where he has planted riesling – clear evidence of his savvy lateral thinking.

Grape expectations: *I predict great things from this label.*

TERRAVIN

Mike Eaton is nutty about slopes. Instead of doing the sensible thing and planting his vineyard on Marlborough's plains like everyone else, he headed for the hills. It's much more expensive to grow grapes on sloping land, but Eaton figured that he should be able to make better wine and get a higher price.



RISING SON
Hiroyuki Kusuda, New Zealand's first Japanese winemaker, has gone from apprentice to master with his stunning debut syrah.

Eaton developed the now highly respected Clayvin vineyard before selling it and purchasing even steeper land. He's a red wine specialist making mostly pinot noir and "J", a blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and malbec that puts a smirk on the face of his fellow Marlborough winemakers – until they taste it and realise its potential.

I recently reviewed Eaton's entire range from the first vintage in 2001 to the barrel samples of 2004. A couple of early vintages are marred by winemaking faults, but the wines show enormous concentration and promise. Terravin's latest secret weapon is winemaker Mike Weersing (see Pyramid Valley Vineyards, below).

Grape expectations: *Terravin is a cult winery waiting to happen.*

Martinborough

ESCARPMENT VINEYARD

Larry McKenna has, as they say, got form. He was the driving force behind the rapid development of New Zealand pinot noir during the '90s. In 2003, McKenna was able to let his obsession loose and make the first wine from his own vineyard. I expected the best and that's exactly what he delivered with the 2003 Escarpment Kupe Pinot Noir.

Grape expectations: *Well-funded, with a great vineyard site ... not to mention McKenna. This is a safe investment.*

KUSUDA WINES

Hiroyuki Kusuda is the country's first Japanese winemaker. He made some stunning wines at Schubert, a small Martinborough winery, where he worked with owners/winemakers Kai Schubert and Marion Deinling. Now he's released the first wines under his own label, including an impressive syrah that sells in Japan for about NZ\$100.

Grape expectations: *Kusuda is an absolute perfectionist; he won't settle for second-best. Looks like a cult winery in the making.*

Waipara

BELL HILL

Bell Hill is the dream wine project of Marcel Giesen and Sherwyn Veldhuizen. The vineyard, situated about 15 minutes' drive west of Waipara, looks like something from a film set. Imagine a steep, north-facing slope that's adorned with low-trained, densely planted vines in a vineyard coated with bright limestone chip, and a romantic alpine chalet alongside. The vineyard, on the site of an ancient limestone quarry, is planted with pinot noir and a small amount of chardonnay. Although the first few vintages have been very good, they haven't met Giesen and Veldhuizen's high standards and were marketed under their Old Weka Pass Road label, but their best is surely yet to come.

Grape expectations: *When Bell Hill Pinot Noir finally appears, buy it.*

PYRAMID VALLEY VINEYARDS

"No risk", "a dead cert" and "top of the list" were the responses I got from a couple of winemakers when I told them I planned to include Mike Weersing's Pyramid Valley Vineyards in my list of wineries with cult potential. I share their enthusiasm, despite the fact that Pyramid Valley Vineyards has yet to make and release a wine. Conviction is based on two things: its exciting limestone-rich (and yet-to-be-proved) vineyard site, and the passion, skill and intelligence of Weersing – which together are unsurpassed.

Grape expectations: *It's my guess that Pyramid Valley Vineyards pinot noir will be near the top of the charts within a year or two of release. Put your order in now.*