

Grape Vine

A monthly Internet newsletter about wine, wine buying, wine tasting, and wine collecting – V.Pina, Publisher – Vol. 2 Issue 1

This month in the Grape Vine we introduce you to the wines of New Zealand. During the 1990s, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc took the world by storm by producing great tasting, fruit-driven, dry, wines at affordable prices. For a small country, there are a lot of quality wines coming out of New Zealand. While we are talking about the southern hemisphere, we may as well jump over to Australia and discuss two wine regions there that I recently visited. Lastly, we'll look at the sometimes-confusing world of pronouncing wine terms.

Wine 101 – Where grapes are grown and wines are made

New Zealand

Did you know that some of the southernmost wine regions in the world are in New Zealand? Did you also know that New Zealand is producing some of the most exciting and affordable wines in the world? For example, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc already ranks up there with the best Sauvignon Blancs produced in France. High-quality Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Merlot are also made here.

In order to understand the wines of New Zealand you have to know a little bit about the country itself. You probably know it's a country made up of two major islands, the North Island and the South Island. The climate on the two islands is different. The North Island is generally warmer than the South Island and red wine grapes are more likely to ripen better here. The cooler South Island tends to produce more wines made from white grapes. Certain red wine grapes, like Cabernet Sauvignon, are a challenge to grow on either island because the climate simply does not get hot enough for long enough. What Cabernet Sauvignon is grown in New Zealand is normally blended with Merlot.

New Zealand is a country with many river valleys, mountains, and low-lying plains. As a result, different wine regions excel at growing different grapes. The wine regions are listed on the labels of New Zealand wines, in addition to the grape variety. Let's take a look at New Zealand's wine regions.

New Zealand's main grape wine growing regions:

- **Northland & Matakana** – The northernmost wine region of New Zealand. It is challenging to make wines in this region due to the heat and rain. As a result, the amount of wine produced is small. White wines made here are from the **Sauvignon Blanc**, **Chardonnay**, or **Gewürztraminer** grapes. The red wines made in this region are usually a blend of the **Cabernet Sauvignon** and **Merlot** grapes.

- **Auckland** – This wine region is in the northern part of the North Island. White wines made here are from the **Chardonnay** or **Sauvignon Blanc** grapes. Red wines are made from the **Cabernet Sauvignon**, **Merlot**, or **Cabernet Franc** grapes.
- **Waikato/Bay of Plenty** – This region on the North Island is known for white wines made from the **Chardonnay**, **Riesling**, or **Sauvignon Blanc** grapes. Red wines are usually made from the **Merlot** grape.
- **Waiheke Island** – The principal red grapes grown in this North Island region are the **Cabernet Sauvignon** and **Merlot** grapes. White wines made in this region are usually made from the **Chardonnay** grape.
- **Hawke's Bay** – This region on the North Island produces white wines made from the **Chardonnay** or **Sauvignon Blanc** grapes and red wines made from **Cabernet Sauvignon** or **Merlot** grapes.
- **Gisborne** – Known for white wines made from the **Chardonnay**, **Müller Thurgau**, **Muscat**, **Sauvignon Blanc**, or **Semillon** grapes. Not much red wine is made in this rainy region on the North Island. What red wine is produced here is made from the **Merlot** or **Pinot Noir** grapes.
- **Wairarapa/Martinborough** – This North Island region produces red wines made from **Pinot Noir**, and to a lesser extent, the **Cabernet Sauvignon** or **Merlot** grapes. White wines are made from the **Sauvignon Blanc**, **Riesling**, or **Chardonnay** grapes.
- **Marlborough** – Arguably the most famous wine region in New Zealand, this South Island appellation produces some of the best white wines anywhere made from the **Sauvignon Blanc** grape in particular. Other white wines are made from the **Chardonnay** or **Riesling** grapes. Quality red wines are made from the **Pinot Noir** or **Cabernet Sauvignon** grapes. Excellent sparkling wines are also made in this South Island region.
- **Nelson** – This South Island region produces white wines made from the **Sauvignon Blanc**, **Chardonnay**, or **Riesling** grapes. A limited number of red wines are made here. Most of them from the **Pinot Noir** grape.
- **Canterbury** – This cool South Island region is known for red wines made from the **Pinot Noir** grape. White wines are made from **Chardonnay**, **Riesling**, or **Sauvignon Blanc** grapes.
- **(Central) Otago** – White wines in this South Island region are made from the **Chardonnay**, **Riesling**, or **Gewürztraminer** grapes. **Pinot Noir** is main red wine grape grown in this most southerly of New Zealand's wine regions.

Wine 102: Vin de Vin's Road Trip to Australia

This month I was fortunate enough to visit Melbourne, Australia. Melbourne is the capitol of the state of Victoria, which is home to several wine regions, two of which I visited: the Yarra Valley and the Mornington Peninsula.

YARRA VALLEY

The Yarra Valley is one of Australia's oldest and most-respected wine regions. Just an hour northeast of Melbourne, this region is known for its cool climate and scenic hillside vineyards. Recently, the area has suffered from extremely dry conditions, although traditionally it can be humid. In many cases, very dry conditions can result in greater grapevine vigor and grape ripeness. The cooler conditions are conducive to certain red grape varieties like Pinot Noir, and white grape varieties like Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc.

The first winery I visited was Domaine Chandon. It is owned by the French Champagne house Moët & Chandon. There are other Chandon facilities in the Napa Valley in California, Spain, Argentina, and Brazil. Exported wines are under the label Green Point. This particular facility was established in 1985 and has been producing some of the best sparkling wines in Australia. The winery is on a beautiful tract of land featuring an impressive café that, for a fee, serves light food and a sample of their "still" (non-sparkling) and sparkling wines. The café overlooks a patio and rows of hillside vineyards. The wine shop or tasting room ("cellar door" as it's called in Australia) is small but all of the wine produced at the facility can be purchased here. It also sells various chutneys and condiments in addition to the standard gift shop items.

The best sparkling wine I tasted here was the Domaine Chandon Cuvee Riche. It has a beautiful medium-gold color and an attractive, fruity aroma. The taste is slightly off-dry with robust effervescence. This is a great wine to kick off an evening meal with or to have with hot or spicy dishes. Domaine Chandon also offers several other sparkling wines, including one made from Shiraz, which you don't see very often. The winery also produces other still wines like Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

The other winery I visited was Coldstream Hills. This winery was established by and is home to Australia's foremost wine writer, James Halliday. His imprint on the quality of the wines produced here is quite evident. Among the still wines, my favorite was the New Zealand-like Sauvignon Blanc. It had a tropical fruit nose with citrus and green apple notes. The best overall wine we tasted was the Botrytis Pinot Gris. Pinot Gris is grown most famously in the Alsace region of France, and in northern Italy (where it is known as Pinot Grigio). In this case, the Pinot Gris grapes are allowed to hang on the vine until they become affected by the noble rot, botrytis. Not at all thick or cloying, this wine is light and fruity with a mild level of sweetness. This wine can be enjoyed as an aperitif or after dinner.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA

This wine region is an hour southeast of Melbourne and is known as the weekend beach retreat for many Melbournians. The Mornington Peninsula is bordered by Port Philip Bay to the west and the Bass Strait to the east. This strip of land benefits from the refreshing breezes that come from all directions. This wine region is heavily influenced by its maritime climate. Undulating hills eventually flatten as you approach the ocean. Just a couple of miles inland, the temperature can heat up considerably. In years when it is warm, the wines produced here can be full and concentrated. In cooler years, the wines are lighter but elegant and distinctive. Chardonnay is the most widely planted grape, followed by Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Pinot Gris.

The first winery I visited was Red Hill Estate. Arguably the most scenic winery in Australia, it features a very good restaurant with an impressive view overlooking the vineyards, outdoor patio, and large wine shop. Lunch was lightly fried calamari and a Greek salad. The non-reserve Sauvignon Blanc was

impressive. It featured a tropical fruit nose followed by lemon, grapefruit, and grassy notes. This is another wine that could be mistaken for New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. The wine shop was quite large and offered a wide range of sparkling, still, and dessert wines.

The next winery was T'Gallant. Even more rolling hillside vineyards can be found here along with traditional vegetable plantings. Established in 1994, this winery is housed alongside the indoor/outdoor Le Baracca restaurant. The tasting room offers an eclectic mix of traditional wines as well as Italian varieties like Moscato and Sangiovese. The Sangiovese had a deep-red color with medium cherry tannins. This wine was perfect for my seafood risotto dinner later in the day at a BYO Italian restaurant in the beachside village of Dromana. The Moscato had a typical citrus and pineapple nose followed by explosive fruit and just a bit of fizz. Not only can wine be purchased at the tasting room but one can also buy various vegetables and plants that have been grown successfully on the property.

If you find yourself in Australia's second-largest city, I would strongly recommend you drive an hour and see two of the most scenic and bucolic wine regions in the world.

Wine 103: Pronouncing Wine Terms

One aspect of wine that can be intimidating and complicated is the pronunciation of certain wine terms. Think about a wine label. Most of us are looking for simple words (in English). What makes it even harder are the words used to describe wine that we don't normally use and are less likely to know how to pronounce. Most of these involve grapes and European wine regions. Let's look at some examples:

Grape and Wine Names:

Cabernet Sauvignon	Cab-er-nay Saw-vee-nyon
Merlot	Mer-loh
Pinot Noir	Pee-noh Nwahr
Syrah	Seer-ah
Shiraz	Sheer-ahz
Cabernet Franc	Cab-er-nay Frahnc
Petit Verdot	Peh-teet Ver-dow
Malbec	Mahl-beck
Grenache	Gren-ahsh
Tempranillo	Tem-prah-kneel-yo
Chardonnay	Shar-dohn-nay
Sauvignon Blanc	Saw-veen-yawn Blahnk
Riesling	Reese-ling
Chenin Blanc	Shenin Blahnk
Gewürztraminer	Geh-VAIRTZ-trah-mee-ner
Pinot Grigio	Pee-noh GREE-joe
Semillon	Sem-ee-yown
Mourvèdre	Moo-veh-dre
Sangiovese	San-geo-vay-se
Nebbiolo	Neb-be-o-low

Viognier	Vee-oh-nyay
<i>Wine Region Names:</i>	
Bordeaux – <i>France</i>	Bore-doh
Burgundy	Burr-gun-dee
Alsace	Al-sahs
Loire (Valley)	Low-ahr (Valley)
Beaujolais	Boh-jhoe-lay
Côte d’Or	Coat day Ore
Côte de Nuits	Coat day Nu-wee
Côte de Beaune	Coat day Bone
Côte Rotie	Coat Roe-tee
Sancerre	Sahn-sehr
Vouvray	Voov-ray
Sauternes	Saw-turn
Quartes de Chaume	Cart de Shohm
Pessac-Léognan	Pay-sack Leo-yan
Languedoc Rousillon	Lan-gadoc Roo-see-yown
Pouilly-Fuissé	Pwee Fwee-say
Pouilly-Fumé	Pwee Few-may
Châteauneuf du Pape	Shah-toe-nuf Doo-pahp
Chablis	Shah-blee
Meursault	Muhr-so
Mâcon	Mah-cawn
Rioja – <i>Spain</i>	Ree-oh-hah
Priorat	Pre-o raht
Ribera del Duero	Ree-bear-ah del Daweh-ro
Mosel-Saar-Ruwer – <i>Germany</i>	Moh-zel Zar Roo-ver
Rheingau	Rine-gow

January’s Vine Cuttings
(recommended wines)

White Wine

**2001 Selbach-Oster Zeltinger Sonnenuhr
(vineyard) Riesling (grape) Spatlese (ripeness level)**

Beautiful golden-yellow color and citrus aroma, this wine is a classy Riesling from the fantastic 2001 vintage. This wine is bursting with pure Riesling fruit, lime, minerals, and effervescence. Try this chilled with Chinese food. Worth every bit (and more) of \$20.

Red Wine

**2000 Château D’Agassac Haut-Medoc
(appellation) Bordeaux (region)**

If you haven’t heard about the 2000 vintage in Bordeaux, you have now. It is being billed as the best vintage in at least 10 years. What does that mean? Most of the time it means high-quality wines at expensive prices. At \$22, this fruity Bordeaux red wine is affordable. It is full of earth, cherry, and tobacco notes. Goes well with steak.

Next month: The Wines of Portugal!