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PinotFile

The First Wine Newsletter Devoted to Pinotaficionados

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New Zealand

Middle Earth is Quickly Taming the Finicky Grape

Currently there is as much Pinot Noir planted in New Zealand as in California. This is an astonishing fact considering New Zealand, which is about the size of Oregon, entered the modern age of Pinot Noir production about 10 years ago. At the end of 2005, there were 516 wineries, both boutique and large-scale, and nearly 50,000 acres of grapes. Last year, 11.5 million cases of New Zealand wine were sold worldwide (Linda Murphy, *SF Chronicle*). The United Kingdom is New Zealand's biggest market but within five years it is expected that the United States will be the top importer of New Zealand wines. Behind Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay, Pinot Noir remains a small player comprising less than 5% of exports. However, New Zealand Pinot Noirs have attracted considerable interest and the thirst for them in this country is growing.

Rolfe and Lois Mills of Rippon Vineyard by Lake Wanaka in Central Otago were the first to plant experimental vitis vinifera in New Zealand in the 1970s. There were many experts who felt that wine grapes could not be grown successfully this far South (at the time this was the most Southern vineyard in the world). After years of research, in 1982 they planted Rippon's vineyard and Central Otago's first commercial block of vines. Other New Zealand wine pioneers included Tim and Judy Finn (Neudorf Vineyards in Nelson, South Island, planted in 1978), Neil McCallum (Dry River in Martinborough, North Island, planted in 1979), Clive Paton (Ati Rangi in Martinborough, North Island, planted in 1980), and Alan Brady (Gibbston Valley, Central Otago, South Island, planted in 1981).

Geographically, New Zealand has both a North Island and South Island (see map on next page). The islands are acclaimed for their beauty and there are many contrasting environs including forests, snow-capped mountains, valleys, lakes, and coastline. Remember *Lord of the Rings*? In all, there are ten wine regions. On the North Island are Northland, Auckland/Waiheke Island, Waikato/Bay of Plenty, Gisborne, Hawkes Bay, and Martinborough. Only Martinborough, which is located at the southern tip of the South Island, is suitably cool for Pinot Noir. On the South Island are Marlborough, Nelson, Waipara/Canterbury, and Central Otago, all of which have climates ideal for Pinot Noir. The names of the regions reflect both English and the native Maori languages. The Polynesian navigator, Kupe, is historically reputed to be the first man to sight New Zealand in approximately 950 AD. He returned home to tell of his findings. In about 1350 AD, seven migratory canoes sailed from Hawaiki to New Zealand and stayed. The native Maoris found an abundance of natural resources and flourished here.

Martinborough Some of New Zealand's oldest plantings are located here. Most of the wineries are boutique scale growers. Many critics believe that the Pinot Noirs from here have a more Burgundian character. Notable wineries include: Ata Rangi, Alana Estate, Craggy Range, Dry River, Escarpment, Hidden Valley, Te Kairanga, Martinborough Vineyard, Palliser Estate, and Voss Estate.



Marlborough At one time this was sleepy sheep-growing country, but is now the largest winegrowing region in New Zealand. It is known for the Sauvignon Blanc that thrives in the sunny climate here, but half of the Pinot Noir in New Zealand is grown here. The original vineyards here were clustered in the Wairau Valley, but new growth is expanding into the hillsides of many neighboring valleys like Waihopai, Omaka, Brancott, and Awatere. Cloudy Bay is the most famous winery name here but there are many other notable Pinot Noir producers: Brancott, Churton, Dog Point, Fairhill Downs, Foxes Island Wines, Kim Crawford, Highfield, Huia, Hunters, Nautilus, Nobilo, Terravin, The Crossings, Villa Maria, and Wither Hills.

Nelson Nelson is a province and town of the same name, located at the northern tip of the South Island two hours from Marlborough. Most of the wineries here are family-owned. Pinot Noir producers include Rimu Grove and Neudorf.

Waipora/Canterbury Waipora is one area in New Zealand that has chalky loam soil with limestone. It is located one hour north of Christchurch. Sheltered from the sea by low lying hills, the combination of soils and microclimate have created a region of great potential for Pinot Noir. Prominent Pinot Noir producers include: Alan McCorkisdale, Bell Hill, Canterbury House, Fiddler's Green, Kaituna Valley, Pegasus Bay, Pyramid Valley Vineyards, and Schuster.

Central Otago This is the planet's most southerly wine region. It is the fastest growing wine region in New Zealand. In 1995, there were 114 acres of vines here and by 2006, 2,845 acres were planted. 70% of the plantings are Pinot Noir. The climate is continental in Central Otago for it is further from the ocean than any other winegrowing region in New Zealand. Mountains are a prominent feature with snow in the winter but plenty of sun in the summer and autumn. Pinot Noir thrives here. The growing season is not long, but the absence of a wet maritime influence allows tannins to ripen and acidity is retained without sugars becoming excessive. About half of the Pinot Noir here is made by the wineries or made by co-ops, the other half is put into Central Otago blends. A long list of Pinot Noir producers are scattered over five subregions of Central Otago (Gibbston, Cromwell, Bannockburn, Wanaka, Alexandra) includes: Akurua Bannockburn, Amisfield, Bannock Brae Estate, Carrick Wines, Chard Farm, Drystone, Felton Road, Gibbston Valley, Gypsy Dancer Estates, Kawarau Estate, Mt Difficulty, Mt Rosa, Mount Michel, Olssens of Bannockburn, Pisa Range Estate, Quartz Reef, Richardson, Rippon, Rockburn, Shaky Bridge, Two Paddocks, Valli, and Waitiri Creek. Felton Road was the first major vineyard and winery in Central Otago (1991). Central Otago makes New Zealand's most expensive wines.

In the 1980s, Pinot Noir vines were primarily Pommard (UCD 5) and AM 10/5 and AM 2/10. Dijon clones were released by the New Zealand government in the 1990s and these have been widely planted. There are, of course, suitcase clones in the ground as well. Phylloxera has surfaced in New Zealand but is not a significant problem. Spread is very slow, and there is constant replanting and new planting of Pinot Noir vines.

The style of New Zealand Pinot Noir is still evolving for it is a young wine industry. It is difficult to generalize about the style now because there are so many different ones. You can find extremes from elegant, feminine, and classic Pinot Noirs, to more earthy Burgundian styles, to heavily-oaked, fruit bombs. Recurring criticism has been that the wines are over-extracted, unbalanced, and lack complexity. Michael Steinberger says, "For the moment they suggest the New World more than Burgundy; they are, in other words, fruit-driven and high in alcohol, extract, and oak." Rod Smith said, "It isn't Burgundy but it isn't Oregon. New Zealand is carving out a niche for itself." Sommelier Rene Chazottes notes, "The Pinot Noirs do not have opulent fruit, that is, they possess plenty of fruit but not sheer power. The wines are layered and sinewy. They are fruit-driven more than oak-driven in general and exhibit a strong acid backbone." Many critics, including Chazottes, feel that Central Otago is the chosen spot for New Zealand Pinot Noir. John Olssen (Olssen's) is enthusiastic about Central Otago: "crisp and clean, full of strong fruit. The clean and elegant minerality - sometimes austerity - of Central Otago wines is probably the most distinctive single attribute for me." Henry Hariyono writes,

“The style of Pinot made in Central Otago is much in demand among younger wine drinkers in the United States today: with their rich, dark fruit aromas and flavors, intriguing floral and mineral nuances, and ripe, harmonious acidity - not to mention their often considerable heft (typically 14% alcohol) - they pose a threat to the more established Pinots of Martinborough, which while often more complex, earthy and Burgundian, can come off as drier and leaner in comparison with the fruit bombs from Central Otago. Former sommelier Andy Tan prefers Martinborough Pinot Noir. He writes, “Martinborough is clearly our cup of tea. Always distinctly more dark cherry-soaked-liqueur-like, more earthy, and structured. Central Otago wines, on the other hand, often lack complexity and are monotonously similar from one winery to another.”

Surprisingly, 85% of New Zealand wineries are foreign-owned. Central Otago’s Gypsy Dancer Cellars is owned by Gary Andrus, formerly of Archery Summit in Oregon. He farms 40 acres in Gibbston Valley and released his first Pinot Noir from the 2003 vintage. Amisfield, also in Central Otago, is owned by San Franciscan Tom Torsher, former CEO of Levi Strauss & Co. Grant Taylor is owner/winemaker of Valli Vineyards and winemaker for Gibbston Valley Wines. In 1980, Taylor helped build Pine Ridge where he was assistant winemaker until 1986, when he left for Domaine Napa. He then returned to New Zealand in 1993. In Nelson, Patrick Stow, another Napan, crafts Pinot Noirs at his Rimu Grove Winery. The list goes on and on. Many notable American Pinot Noir winemakers work in New Zealand as well. Because it is located in the Southern Hemisphere, the growing season begins when North America’s season ends. In addition, many American winemakers stay in New Zealand. For example, American Doug Wiser, a protégé of Ted Lemon (Littorai) was the winemaker at Craggy Range until his tragic death in October of 2004. Craggy Range has since started a program to bring an American winemaker to their winery every year.

The last six vintages for New Zealand Pinot Noir have been very good. 2000 was outstanding especially in Martinborough, 2001 was very good in Otago, 2002 was outstanding, 2003 showed good potential overall, 2004 was a record crop, and 2005 was an excellent year with lower yields.

New Zealand vineyards have long been farmed with organic and sustainable methods. The viticulture scheme here has always encouraged non-irrigated vines and the absence of insecticides as part of the program. The New Zealanders have pioneered the use of screwcaps for their wines and many wineries use screwcaps now exclusively. Many of the wines shipped to the United States, however, still employ cork to avoid the cheap image that screwcaps carry among wine enthusiasts here.

Over the last few months I have had the opportunity to sample many New Zealand Pinot Noirs. I tried to feature wines with a little bottle age on them. Unfortunately, a number of the best wines from New Zealand cannot be found in America. Some of the small, special wineries sell their entire production in New Zealand or countries where their demand is established. For smaller wineries, it is difficult to establish distribution in enough areas here to justify the expenses of export. The wines I have reviewed in this issue are all available in the American marketplace. I have listed below a number of retail sources which regularly stock a decent selection of Pinot Noirs from New Zealand. You can also contact the distributors included in the reviews to find a source.

The Jug Shop, San Francisco, California, www.jugshop.com

Hi Time Wine Cellars, Costa Mesa, California, www.hitimewine.net

Wine Exchange, Orange, California, www.winex.com

Peter Marr Wine Trader, Australia, www.pmwt.com.au

Southern Hemisphere Wine Cellar, Huntington Beach, California, www.southernwines.com

Piccadilly Beverage Shops, Champaign, Illinois, www.pbspicks.com

Central Otago Wine Cellar, www.otagowine.com

Martinborough

1995 Te Kairanga Pinot Noir 13.0% alc., \$17. Founded in 1984, this was one of the first New Zealand Pinot Noirs to show up on the shores of California. The Maori name means “Land where the soil is rich and the food plentiful.” 250 acres under vine. The wine spent 15 months in French oak. Perfectly cellared by me since purchase. The wine has an orange tinge to the rim. The nose reveals orange peel, forest floor and a little sherry. Very light fruit flavors with sandalwood and oak. The fruit has faded, but there still are tannins in the finish. Very drinkable.

2002 Bannock Brae Estate Barrel Select Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$28. A newer winery with the a picturesque vineyard on the shores of Lake Dunstan. The first vintage was 2001. The nose is very perfumed with lilac and wild strawberries. The red fruit and plum flavors are very delicate. A soft wine that finishes short. The aromatics are much better than the flavors. Imported by L&R Imports, Denver, CO.

2002 Ata Rangi Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$29. The aromatics feature strawberries, currents and herbs. Earthy flavors lead to a short and slightly stemmy spice-tinged finish. Imported by Epic Wines, Aptos, CA.

**** 2003 Craggy Range Te Muna Road Vineyard Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc., \$37. This winery is a partnership between American businessman Terry Peabody and Master of Wine Steve Smith. Formed in 1998 with the purchase of winegrowing land in Hawkes Bay’s Gimblett Road sub-region, Craggy Range has since acquired several Pinot Noir vineyards in other regions, including Martin’s Road, Otago Station, and Te Muna in the Wairarapa region of Martinborough. The Te Muna Road Vineyard was planted in 1999 (extensive details of this vineyard are posted on the wineries website, www.craggyrange.com). The winery now owns 700 acres of vineyards at a cost of reportedly \$36 million! This is a particularly charming wine. The attractive nose features wild crushed strawberries and cherries. Luscious black cherry fruit and sandalwood burst on the mid palate and the creamy texture adds pleasure. The tannins are velvety and the finish is brisk and clean. Imported by Kobrand Corp, NY

***** 2003 Kupe by Escarpment Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$60. Escarpment is a partnership of the Kirby (Yabby Lake, Mornington Peninsula, Australia) and McKenna families formed in 1999. Larry McKenna is a talented Pinot Noir winemaker who earned his accolades while at Martinborough Vineyard for many years. He has been described as “The Prince of Pinot” by top international wine writer James Halliday. The Maori navigator Kupe is said to have discovered New Zealand, and his image on the label and his pioneering



journeys inspire the winemaking here. The Kupe bottling (there is also a regular Escarpment label which is equally excellent), represents the first wine released from close-planted vines on the estate’s Te Muna Road, Martinborough vineyard planted in 1999. Word is that some of the plantings here are suitcase clones from France planted on their own roots. This wine has clearly the most power of any New Zealand Pinot Noir I tasted for this review. It is a Pinot of great promise that I wouldn’t think of drinking for at least five years. The potent nose intoxicates with plums and black cherries. The flavors are deep and dark with pepper, earth, and toasty oak notes. There are substantial tannins in the background. This is one big, rich pussycat. Released in 2005, now sold out. This single-vineyard Pinot Noir will only be produced in exceptional vintages. Imported by Paterno Imports.

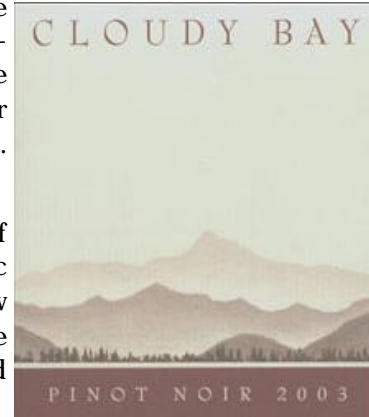
*** 2003 Schubert Wairarapa Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc.. \$43. A gorgeous nose of fresh Bing cherries leads to unctuous flavors of more cherries and spice. An elegant and soft Pinot that that finishes a bit shallow and woody. Still a very decent drink.

Marlborough

* **2002 Villa Maria Estate Reserve Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$27. Screwcap, New Zealand's third largest wine producer (behind Montana and Nobile) has converted all production to screwcaps. For a very large winery, their whole lineup is consistently dependable. This wine is a blend of the best clones from several vineyards in the Marlborough region. Aged 9 months in 40% new French oak. Villa Maria also bottles single vineyard Pinot Noirs. The aromatics feature strawberry, cinnamon, oak and a touch of alcohol. The Pinot fruits are nicely presented on a smooth platform. The tannins are fine and the finish is of decent length and tangy. Imported by Vineyard Brands, Birmingham, AL.

2002 Wither Hills Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$30. Purchased in 2002 by the brewing giant, Lion Nathan. Prior to be sold, there were some award-winning Pinot Noirs produced. The vineyards are in Marlborough, while the winery is in Auckland. The nose offers notes of raspberry, sour cherry and earth. The fruit is shallow. A soft, decent wine of little interest. Imported by Paterno Wines.

2003 Cloudy Bay Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$30. I have had a number of vintages of this wine, but they don't offer the thrill of the Sauvignon Blanc which almost single-handedly brought worldwide recognition to New Zealand wines. The nose is very shy. Soft and light cherry flavors are accented with herbs and oak. A simple and decent Pinot Noir. Imported by owners, Cliquot.



Nelson

2003 Neudorf Moutere Pinot Noir 14.5% alc.. Screwcap. Owned by Tim and Judy Finn, Neudorf Wines is in a tiny hamlet that was established in 1842 by German settlers. They planted their first vines in 1978 and now have their own winery. The elegant nose of dark berries and exotic woods is refreshing. The dark cherry and blackberry fruits are delicately presented. The wine finishes with plenty of tannins. www.neudorf.co.nz.

Central Otago

2002 Bannock Brae Estate Barrel Select Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$28. A newer winery with the first vintage in 2001. A picturesque vineyard on the shores of Lake Dunstan. The nose is very perfumed with lilac and wild strawberries. The red fruit and plum flavors are very delicate.. A soft wine that finishes short. The aromatics are much better than the flavors. Imported by L&R Imports, Denver, CO.

* **2002 Akarua The Gullies Bannockburn Pinot Noir** 14.5% alc., \$32. Screwcap. This wine is the entry-level label in the lineup. Luscious dark cherries, strawberries, and wild flowers dominate the nose. A lot of plump, sweet fruit that, well, taste great. The fruit literally explodes in the middle. This bigger styled wine is well composed. The finish has noticeable alcohol and tannins. www.akarua.com.

2001 Peregrine Pinot Noir 14.0% alc.. The peregrine is New Zealand's native falcon. The winery here, built in 2003 on a former fine-wool sheep station along the Kawarau River, is architecturally spectacular. A concrete bunker houses Peregrine's tasting and production rooms, and it is covered with a translucent corrugated-fiberglass wing that protects from summer heat and winter snow. The graceful form is meant to evoke Peregrine's namesake bird. The wine has a slight orange tinge.

the nose is beautifully perfumed with red fruits such as cranberry and cherry. The flavors don't follow in step, with the finish a little stemmy and woody and lacking fruit punch. The 2004 Pinot Noir won a Gold Medal in the New Zealand Wine Competition. Imported by Empson Inc., Alexandria, VA.

****Valli Bannockburn Vineyard Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$40. This is the private label of well-known New Zealand winemaker, Grant Taylor, who also crafts the wines at Gibbston Valley. The name is derived from a distant relative who emigrated to New Zealand in the 19th century. I really like this classically-styled Pinot Noir. The nose is earthy with a touch of red fruit and oak. The flavors are understated and cloying. This is a balanced wine of great finesse and elegance. Smooth and feminine.

****Rippon Vineyard & Winery.** The history of Rippon goes back to the 1970s when Rolfe and Lois Mills began to experiment with vitis vinifera plantings here in Central Otago. By the early 1990s, Rippon Pinot Noir was winning worldwide recognition and in 1992 was awarded the trophy for New Zealand's best red wine. Rolfe became the founding President of the Central Otago Winegrower's Association. Rolfe passed away in the year 2000, but his family carries on the tradition here. Lois continues at the administrative helm, son Nicholas became the winemaker, brother David is the property's mechanic, sister Charlie just completed her viticulture degree and another sister Sarah is a caterer who assists with special events at the winery. Also, Nicholas is getting married shortly to Jo Montagu who will be managing export and key accounts. I had the pleasure of dining with them recently and they are very warm people who have success written all over them. Nicholas spent four years living in France to study viticulture and winemaking in Burgundy and Alsace. He worked for and was mentored by Alain et Sophie Meunier from Domaine Jean-Jacques Confuron, Nicolas Potel of Maison Nicolas Potel, Pascal Marchand of Domaine de la Vougeraie, Aubert de Villaine of Domaine de la Romanee-Conti and others. Upon returning to the family vineyard in 2002, Nicholas instituted biodynamic farming with no herbicides. The vineyard is not irrigated and is virtually all on its own roots. The clones are Pommard, 2/10, 10/5 and Lincoln planted from 1985-1991. The vineyard along the shores of Lake Wanaka is probably the most photographed one in the world and appears often on the cover of New Zealand wine promotional literature. Imported by Penny and Andy Loving of Station Imports, Colorado Springs, CO, 719-651-9898.



RIPPON VINEYARD AND RUBY ISLAND

GILBERT VAN REENEN

WWW.CLEANGREEN.CO.NZ

* **2001 Rippon Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$33. Light in color, the delicate nose offers soft red fruits and a hint of orange rind. The red fruits are enhanced with spice and herbs and the whole package finishes fresh and clean. An elegant wine with great charm.

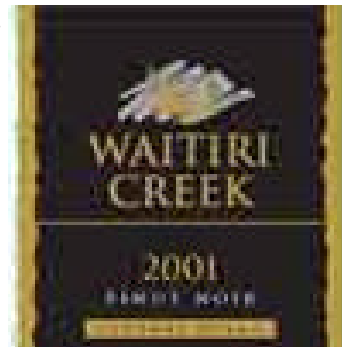
** **2003 Rippon Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$35. Fermented with resident yeast and aged 18 months in 25% new French oak barrels. This is the first wine made at Rippon by Nicholas Mills and his team. The wine is still slightly closed and would benefit from decanting. The style is similar to 2001, but there is more of everything - more delicate red fruits, more spice including cinnamon, more layers of flavor. The mouth feel is silky and sexy. A balanced wine of great potential.

* **1995 Rippon Pinot Noir** 13.0% alc.. This Pinot displays an aged mahogany color. A slightly funky nose brims with ripe cherries and toast. There is a touch of mocha and barnyard among the copious red fruits. The tannins have totally integrated into a silken texture. Probably a little Brett here, but it only adds to the appeal. A real treat.

The following six wines, like Rippon, are imported by Station Imports (www.stationimports.com) These wines are a product of contract winemaking at Central Otago Wine Company (COWCO), the largest contract winery in Central Otago. All of these producers are quite small and they contract with COWCO and its master winemaker, Dean Shaw, to produce their wine according to their specifications.

* **2001 Waitiri Creek Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$32. An estate vineyard of 12.5 acres was planted in 1996 and two additional vineyards in Bannockburn and Gibbston, total another 12 acres. Slight orange tinge to the rim. Lovely nose of cherries and sandalwood. Nice mature fruit. Finishes with a healthy fine tannic backbone. Lean and balanced.

2002 Nevis Bluff Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$26. From a single vineyard of 11 year old vines in Gibbston Valley. A bigger styled Pinot Noir with funky nose and flavors. The wine features earthy, darker fruits, some vegetal highlights, and plenty of oak tannins.



* **2003 Mount Michael Pinot Noir** 14.0% alc., \$30 All wines are estate grown from a 10 acre estate site. A terrific nose of cherries, strawberries and rhubarb. The flavors duplicate the nose. Silky and balanced with a lengthy finish.

2003 Shaky Bridge Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$30. Screwcap. The historic Shaky Bridge, built in 1878 overlooks the town of Alexandra, Central Otago. The mature vineyards, William Hill and Shaky Bridge, were planted in 1973. A delicate nose with a touch of strawberry and alcohol. More oak than fruit on the woody finish.

* **2003 Kawarau Estate Reserve Pinot Noir** 13.5% alc., \$32 Strict organic farming here with low yields. The label depicts a well-known identities from Central Otago gold mining era. The aromatics and flavors feature wild strawberries. Very tangy wine with a lengthy finish. Terrific wine for food, especially summer barbecue.

2004 Sleeping Dogs Pinot Noir 13.5% alc., \$25. Screwcap. The owner, Roger Donaldson, is a movie producer (*Dante's Peak*) and friend of Sam Neil. The name, "Sleeping Dogs," comes from Sam Neil's first movie, *Sleeping Dogs*. Grapes are sourced from Bannockburn, Lowburn, and a family vineyard on Old Gibbston Road. Smells like fresh strawberries, flowers, and herbs with dried red fruit undertones. The fruit flavors are very light. There is a good kick of acid on the tannic finish.

2002 Rockburn Pinot Noir 14.5% alc., \$29. The name is derived from the rugged, rock-strewn, burn-scarred landscape of Central Otago. The wine is sourced from three vineyards in Lowburn, Gibbston Valley, and Lake Hays. The nose starts out very funky but recovers with air. Nice Bing cherry flavors with baking spices and a little vegetal note. Maybe some prune from very ripe fruit. A wine with good finesse that integrates the alcohol well. The finish has plenty of acid to the point of sourness.

***** Felton Road** I saved the best for last. Established in 1991 with the first wines released in 1997, Felton Road is situated on north-facing slopes in Bannockburn, Central Otago. The wines are produced exclusively from the estate's 32-hectare vineyards over three sites. The vineyards are managed by organic practices and many biodynamic techniques to ensure quality grapes. Chardonnay and Riesling are produced in addition to Pinot Noir for a total of 10,000 cases per year. The Felton Road wines have quickly attracted international attention and are now exported to over twenty countries worldwide by Wilson Daniels. Critical acclaim has included Robert Parker who said :Felton Road's Pinot Noirs are breakthrough efforts in New Zealand and compete with the finest wines being made in California, Oregon and Burgundy's Cote D'Or." James Halliday exclaimed, "Felton Road, with Blair Walter as winemaker, has consistently produced Pinots with exemplary finesse and length for more than five years. If there is to be a top producer, it has to be Felton Road." I would second these comments and say, without a doubt, Felton Road Pinot Noirs, priced here in the states at less than \$50, are the greatest undiscovered bargain here in Pinot Noir, bar none. The website is www.Felton Road.com.



2003 Felton Road Estate Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$35. Screwcap. Pure Pinot Noir - brisk, bright modest Pinot fruits with great acid. A really enjoyable wine with a kiss of oak and herbaceous ness. The nose and flavors offer some earthiness and forest floor so typical of Burgundy. A nice little cherry kiss at the end. Epitome of balance. You can't ask for much more in a Pinot.

2003 Felton Road Block 3 Pinot Noir 14.0% alc., \$50. Screwcap. Saucy cherries and baking spice in the nose. Perfectly composed Pinot fruits on a magic soft carpet woven with spice and herbs. An utter joy and privilege to drink. Laughable quality at \$50. A benchmark for Middle Earth Pinot Noir. Oh, by the way, there also is a Block 5 which some critics think is the best of all of the Felton Road wines. It is no coincidence that Felton Road is imported by the same company, Wilson Daniels, that imports Domaine Romanee Conti wines to the United States.





PrinceofPinot.com

Greg Crone, of NZ Brancott Vnyds, likened wine drinkers' developing appreciation of Pinot to a man's maturing taste in women. "It was", he said, "like graduating from Pamela Anderson to Grace Kelly."

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Jeff Carlson, sommelier at Rat's Restaurant in Hamilton, New Jersey, is very successful at staging the restaurant's wine events. Regarding the 'it' grape, Carlson explains: "I talk about the four major producing areas (for Pinot Noir). On the one side of the spectrum is Burgundy, the home of Pinot Noir, yielding wines that are complex and earthier. On the other side is California, with riper flavors and bigger fruit. In the middle, you have New Zealand, which leans more toward California. And then you have Oregon, which leans more toward Burgundy." Well said.

Pinot Noir Euphemisms

New Zealand gained recognition on the world wine stage with their distinctive Sauvignon Blancs. One New Zealand producer, Cooper's Creek Winery, has released a Sauvignon Blanc euphemistically labeled "Cat's Pee on a Gooseberry Bush." In the United States, the government interceded and the label reads "Phee" instead of "Pee."

I thought that there was a lot of potential in this idea for Pinot Noir. It has been said that great Burgundy "smells like shit" What Clémenceau said about politics applies to Burgundy as well: "It's like *andouillette* (a French specialty made from pig's intestines) - it needs a smell of shit, but not too much." I suggest the following euphemisms for Pinot Noir: "Doggy Do-Do on a Mushroom Patch," "Cow Dung on Loamy Earth," "Horse Muck on a Rose Bush," Emu Poo on a Herb Garden (Australian)."

And now, the final word on the subject: It has been scientifically proven that if we drink 1 liter of water each day, at the end of the year we would have absorbed more than 1 kilo of *Escheria coli* bacteria also found in feces, in other words, we are consuming 1 kilo of Doo Doo. However, we do not run that risk when drinking wine because alcohol has to go through the process of fermentation and treatment with sulfur dioxide. WATER = Doo Doo. WINE = HEALTH. Free yourself of Doo Doo, drink WINE! It is better to drink wine and talk Doo Doo, than to drink water and be full of shit.