

WINE News

New Wave Producers in New Zealand, Australia, and South Africa



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Spotlight on the People Who Make the Magic Happen

By Thomas Smith, Australian, New Zealand, and South African Buyer



When we talk about far-off wine regions, we can sometimes lose perspective on the people behind the wines. We spill a lot of ink at K&L talking about place and terroir, but perhaps less about the incredibly dedicated artisans and producers who pour their lives into making profound wines that transport us to these distant places. Every bottle captures the story of the people who make it—their efforts through vintages great and poor, struggling with disaster and celebrating triumphs. This newsletter is a celebration of the communities that are built on a shared passion for wine.

We'll be exploring these communities and producers from the farthest corners of the wine world. In our annual Marlborough Vintage Report,

we'll see how a group of small, boutique winemakers reacted to a bumpy vintage with plenty of curveballs. We'll look at a Central Otago producer whose dedication to organic viticulture has resulted in exceptional, must-try wines. In Swartland, South Africa, a group of rebellious winemakers are making waves by joining together to make a name for themselves in an untested region. Likewise, a group of audacious winemakers in South Australia is changing the wine landscape by doubling down on a classic wine style. We review a recent tasting led by the astute and dedicated Helen Masters of Ata Rangi, and a report on the devastating aftermath of Cyclone Gabriel in the Hawke's Bay region.

I hope you'll take the time to read about some of the incredible people and communities behind the wines in this issue. As you do, let's raise a toast to the tireless efforts of the people who make them.



2018 Ata Rangi Pinot Noir
Martinborough \$59.99 97SK
96BC 96JS Ata Rangi is without a doubt New Zealand's best producer, known for crafting a perfect exemplar of the beauty of Martinborough Pinot Noir. Dark and complex with notes of black cherry, cedar, and forest

floor—this wine is delicious now, but with a little age it will turn into something absolutely spectacular. A must-try for anyone who loves Pinot Noir.



2018 Leeuwin "Art Series"
Cabernet Sauvignon Margaret River Western Australia
(Elsewhere \$63) \$39.99 97JH
95DC 95JS Margaret River is producing some of the best Cabernet Sauvignon out there right now, and Leeuwin is the absolute benchmark. A brilliant

vintage for this wine, with blackcurrant, mint, and graphite aromas above a powerful and poised structure—I dare you to find another Cabernet Sauvignon this good at its price.



2020 Valli "Gibbston" Pinot Noir Central Otago \$49.99 97SK
 I absolutely adore the wines from Grant Taylor's Valli. Made with a light touch, this flagship wine opens with a seductive bouquet of dried cranberry and Bing cherry with herbal undertones and a light bricking in color. On the

palate, it displays a gorgeous expression of savory character, red fruits, and an essence of Pinot Noir that will keep you returning to the glass, sip after sip.

Rising to the Challenge: Marlborough Vintage Report 2022

In order to really understand the 2022 vintage in Marlborough, you need to start in the previous year. In 2021, Marlborough had an unprecedented tiny vintage that left some larger brands scrambling to find fruit sources and, in some cases, blending down their Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc with Chilean Sauvignon Blanc just to stretch out their stocks and ride out the shortage. This year, wineries were eager to bottle and release early to meet demand. However, labor shortages and heavy summer rainfall created challenges. The growing season began with a warm spring, but downpours in December led to a wide botrytis infection in many sites across the Wairau. February's above-average rainfall and cooler temperatures exacerbated the issue, leaving growers with a tough decision.

In Marlborough, the vast majority of Sauvignon Blanc is machine harvested—there isn't enough labor to handpick. And, while machine harvesting can be very fast and cost-effective, it doesn't sort between healthy and botrytized fruit. Growers in 2022 had to machine pick early and quickly to save the grapes from rot. Winemakers had to get creative in the cellar to clean up the juice, with some wines showing unwanted botrytized characteristics. This led to a vintage of Sauvignon Blanc that generally lacks the exuberance and vibrancy of previous years, with more green flavors and high acidity.

Luckily, there are two bright spots in this otherwise difficult vintage. Small, dedicated boutique producers keep a small staff that was able to hand pick and sort through botrytis, leaving clean, gorgeously tropical wines with excellent fruit-acid balance. Additionally, producers in drier, cooler sites (like the Awatere Valley) had much lower levels of botrytis and could mitigate its impact on the wines, resulting in clean, fresh wines that are consistent with previous vintages.

At this point in the year I've tasted dozens of 2022 Sauvignon Blancs from Marlborough, and in this tough vintage I always return to smaller, quality-driven producers as well as tried and true favorites. This is a vintage where it's important to know your producers. Here are five picks that I think represent the best of the vintage.



Back in 2020, Allan Scott received one of the highest *Wine Spectator* scores ever for a Marlborough Sauvignon and managed to do it at an under \$15 price. The next year they did it again and, in addition, were awarded

Wine Spectator's #1 Value Wine of the Year. This year? Yep. They did it again. The **2022 Allan Scott Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough (Previously \$17) \$13.99 93WS**

continues to set a benchmark for Marlborough wines. This New Zealand classic features delicious tropical notes, citrus, grapefruit, and green apple flavors, presenting a well-executed and beautifully composed taste. This is a phenomenal wine that is perfect for those who love Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc and are looking for acclaimed values.



Seasoned winemaker David Clouston launched Clouston & Co in 2017, building upon his family's long history in New Zealand. This unique wine stands out from the rest of the pack with its fermentation in concrete eggs and clay amphorae, providing a creamier texture and more substantial weight. Bursting with passion fruit, stone fruit, and citrus, the **2022 Clouston & Co Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough \$16.99 95SK** outshines many of its far more expensive counterparts while exhibiting Meursault-like characteristics akin to Greywacke's "Wild" and Cloudy Bay's "Te Koko" Sauvignon Blanc. This captivating wine exemplifies the potential of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc in the hands of a passionate and talented maker.



TWR, a boutique producer known for creating the best hand-crafted Sauvignon Blanc in New Zealand, is run by the husband-and-wife team of Jason and Anna Flowerday.



Located in Marlborough,

TWR champions organic viticulture and has been crafting exquisite, nuanced wines for over two decades. The **2022 TWR (Te Whare Ra) Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough \$19.99 94BC 94SK 93DC 93JS** is one of their most aromatic and elegant wines to date, with lemongrass, jasmine, and citrus bursting out of the bottle. TWR's signature style of aromatic focus, driving acidity, and a textured and weighted palate is on full display. Whether you're a long-time fan or new to TWR, the exceptional 2022 vintage is a must-try for Sauv Blanc enthusiasts.



One of our perennial favorites is the **2022 Greywacke Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough \$21.99 95BC 94DC**. Winemaker Kevin Judd, founding winemaker at Cloudy Bay, established Greywacke in 2009 to fully engage in detail-focused, high-quality winemaking from uncompromising vineyard sources. Greywacke's 2022 Sauvignon Blanc is taught and citrusy, complemented

by notes of ripe mango and pineapple with a slight hint of flinty reduction. There's not a trace of greenness anywhere to be found on this wine. A truly exceptional Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc that is beautifully composed with everything in its place.



The **2022 Smith Sheth "Cru" Sauvignon Blanc \$26.99** is an exceptional offering that showcases the perfect fusion of traditional and modern winemaking techniques. Fruit from the absolute best possible sites in Marlborough is fermented in stainless steel with small portions in oak foudres, then aged for six months on its lees, resulting in a remarkable depth of flavor.

On the nose, you'll find vivid aromas of blackcurrant leaf, lime, and meadow flowers. The complex, energetic palate features a delightful blend of citrus, white peach, and elderflower, exhibiting a rich and balanced weight. The finale is a distinctive briny mineral character that leaves a lasting impression. *Vegan*

Organic in Central Otago: The Wines of Carrick

Carrick was established in 1993 in the heart of Central Otago's Bannockburn region. Named for the nearby Gold Rush mining town, this gorgeous estate spans 24 hectares of vineyards planted on the picturesque Cairnmuir Peninsula and shares a property line with one of New Zealand's most celebrated vineyards, Felton Road's Cornish Point. In the early days, Pinot Noir was the flagship variety for the winery before they expanded their range to include Riesling, Chardonnay, and Sauvignon Blanc. Today, they are widely respected across New Zealand for the quality of their wines.

With an unwavering commitment to organic viticulture, Carrick has been a pioneer in sustainable wine production. They began conversion to organic in 2013, obtaining full organic certification for their vineyard in 2018—no small task. Without using synthetic pesticides and herbicides, organic producers must give dramatically more attention to the health of their vineyards. A slight uptick in humidity or a few hungry insects can get out of control quickly, and, without chemical interventions, there is rarely a recourse once the problem arises. So producers like Carrick watch and inspect their vineyards closely and constantly for even the slightest potential issues. Maintaining a balance between the vines, the soil, and the environment is no easy task, but it's a rewarding one, yielding wines that have a greater sense of place and expression of site.

With all this effort in the vineyard, it makes sense that Carrick produces their wines with minimal intervention in the cellar, capturing the vintage as transparently as possible. All grapes are harvested by hand; all fermenters are hand punched and all yeasts are native to their vineyard. The end result is a fabulous lineup of wines that showcase purity of fruit and sense of place. When I think about all of the work that goes into these hand-made wines, their dedication to organics, and their absolute pristine vineyard in one of the world's greatest places for Pinot Noir, I continue to be astounded by how reasonably these wines are priced for the quality they deliver.



The beautifully balanced **2020 Carrick Riesling Bannockburn Central Otago (Biodynamic) \$16.99** is ripe and features 19g of residual sugar, providing just the right amount of sweetness to harmonize with its full-throttled acidity. This incredibly affordable Riesling boasts aromatic notes of orange blossom, lemon sorbet, and peach, while the palate shows gentle sweetness, crisp acidity, and a tightly structured, finely poised finish. An excellent choice for customers seeking quality and value.

If you haven't tasted New Zealand Chardonnay, you should. The **2021 Carrick Chardonnay Bannockburn Central Otago (Biodynamic) \$19.99 94SK** starts with a captivating mix of white peach preserves, flinty reduction, and lemon zest. Toasted oak and sweet ground almonds add depth and character. On the palate, the complex flavors are supported by excellent concentration, pitched acidity, and a full-bodied, creamy structure showing signs of sur lie aging. Carrick Chardonnay impresses with its long, creamy vanilla



Picture by Tourism Central Otago, Will Nelson Lores.

finish and well-balanced natural acidity. A totally under-the-radar Chardonnay that absolutely outperforms its price.



The **2020 Carrick Sauvignon Blanc Bannockburn Central Otago (Biodynamic) \$16.99 94RC** is a complex and engaging Sauvignon Blanc that stands out due to its barrel fermentation, which contributes richer, more complex and savory flavors compared to stainless-steel counterparts. This wine offers intense aromatics including warm spice, light cream, and ripe yellow-fruit aromas.

On the palate, flavors of pineapple and Meyer lemon combine with green herb and spice notes, while subtle almond and butter pastry add nuance and depth. This medium-full bodied Sauvignon Blanc is refined and textural, with substance and seriousness in spades. The 2021 Carrick Sauvignon Blanc is a unique, sophisticated twist on traditional New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc offerings.

The **2021 Carrick "Billet Doux" Pinot Noir Bannockburn Central Otago (Natural Wine) \$21.99 93RC** fits neatly into the "natural wine" category. Made with absolutely no additions of any kind—no yeast, acid, or sulfites. This is a true minimalist wine made to show



off the pure character of where the grapes are grown. The Billet Doux displays a soft and refined nose, unveiling earthy undertones of dark fruit and baking spices. This medium-bodied, savory wine harmoniously melds blackberry, cherry, and thyme, while the silky mouthfeel features dusty fine tannins that emphasize its earthy and savory character, culminating in an elegant, peppery finish. A beautifully evolving wine with panache.

Finally, the Carrick's flagship wine is the **2019 Carrick Pinot Noir Bannockburn Central Otago (Biodynamic) \$29.99 93BC 93RC 92JS**. A soft and pure nose reveals sweet aromas of blackberry, cherry, and plum melding with pepper, thyme, vanilla, cinnamon, and earth. This medium-bodied wine features concentrated sweet and savory fruit complemented by clay earthiness and a gentle, long finish. The lively acidity and supple, powdery tannins create a silky texture, unfolding earthy elements on the palate. A bright, high-energy wine crafted from organic grown grapes, the 2019 Pinot offers a balanced expression of sweet and savory dark fruit, spice, and herb layers with a pleasantly dry and lingering finish.



The Revolution in South Africa's Swartland

In October of last year, I grabbed a cup of coffee, climbed a set of stairs, and stood on the corrugated tin roof of my room and watched the sun rise over Swartland, South Africa. I was staying at a remote compound in the Swartland countryside that houses celebrated winemaker Adi Badenhorst's home and winery. I had spent the previous night drinking wine with Adi until the early hours of the morning, but seeing the morning break over the landscape of Swartland was worth far more than the lack of sleep.

This was the first of many eye-opening moments I experienced on my buy trip to South Africa last year. Swartland itself is the breadbasket of South Africa. Driving down the highway, I was surprised at first with the complete absence of any kind of vineyards—it wasn't until heading up a dirt road into the foothills that I could see knee-high, trained vineyard rows hidden behind cover crops of wheat and barley.

While Swartland's wine production can be traced back to the 17th century, its real birth as a wine region came in the early 2000s. A number of influential winemakers flocked to Swartland for its old-vine plantings of Cinsault, Grenache, Syrah, and Chenin Blanc. Rather than compete with one another, Badenhorst, the Mullineuxs, Eben Sadie, and others joined together in what they called the "Swartland Revolution" to try and raise awareness this incredible region and the exceptional wines they produce. Over the years their group has grown to include over twenty winemakers that represent the best producers in the region.

The Swartland region is renowned for its old bush vines, particularly those of Chenin Blanc, which form a significant part of the area's viticultural landscape. In addition, Swartland is home to a variety of red grape cultivars, with Syrah and Cinsault being standouts. Swartland Syrah wines are celebrated for their full-bodied character with fine tannin and excellent drive, whereas Cinsault tends to be vibrant and juicy. Throughout my trip, I was astounded by the quality, typicity, and texture of Swartland wines. Here are some of the very best—any of these would be a great place to start your dive into the wonders of Swartland:



The **2020 David & Nadia Grenache Paardeberg Swartland South Africa** \$39.99 has aromas of bright

red fruits, white pepper, and delicate floral notes, brimming with elegance and freshness. Complete with a vibrant array of flavors, including ripe red cherries, strawberry, and hints of earthy spice, counterpointed by a bright crack of acidity that hits in the midpalate. Soft and pretty, this is a modern-style Grenache that shows what Swartland is capable of.

The **2021 Mullineux "Old Vine" White Blend Swartland South Africa** \$34.99 93JS 93VN is crafted from a blend of old-vine Chenin Blanc, Grenache Blanc, and Viognier. On the nose, it offers a fragrant bouquet of white flowers, ripe stone fruits, and subtle hints of honey, while the palate follows with juicy apricot, peach, and delicate citrus notes. Beautifully balanced and all balanced by a refreshing acidity and a touch of minerality.



Another of my favorites from Mullineux is the **2017 Mullineux Syrah Swartland South Africa** \$34.99 Sourced from vineyards planted to quartz and shale, the texture of this wine is its hallmark. Prickly fine-grained tannins and a soft finish complement ripe black fruit flavors of blackberry and cherry with notes of leather.



The **2018 A.A. Badenhorst "Ramnagras" Old Vine Cinsault Swartland South Africa** \$59.99 95DC presents a captivating nose of red cherries, cranberries, and earthy undertones, complemented by hints of spice and floral notes. On the palate, this medium-bodied wine delivers a perfect harmony of red fruit flavors, including raspberry and red currant alongside subtle nuances of herbal notes and well-integrated tannins. Easily one of the best Cinsaults I have ever tasted.

One of the most eye-opening wines of the entire trip was the **2019 Porseleinberg Syrah Swartland South Africa** \$94.99 96JS 96VN 95RP 95WS Planted on a rare slope of blueschist, this is world-class Syrah with a nose of dark berries, black pepper, and alluring hints of violets and smoked meat. The palate continues with ripe blackberry, plum, and savory spice, complemented by elegant, silky tannins. A staggeringly good wine—quite possibly my favorite being made in all of Swartland.



Shiraz Redefined by South Australia's New Wave Producers

Shiraz has long been synonymous with Australian wine. As the most planted variety in the country, it consistently garners a significant share of international awards and accolades. Classic Aussie Shiraz, which reflects Australia's warm climate, is characterized by its intense concentration, deep color, and robust fruit profile. This truly unique wine style has earned its place in the international canon of distinguished wines. But here in the United States, Shiraz has had something of an image problem. Many wine enthusiasts assume Australian Shiraz is poor quality, excessively sweet, and dull—essentially describing Yellowtail. But I'm here to tell you that there is a whole world of Australian Shiraz characterized by extraordinary quality, ageability, and deliciousness, all while staying true to the wine's classic style.

This is particularly evident in South Australia, where over the past decade, a new generation of talented and ambitious winemakers has emerged who are crafting distinctive and ambitious Shiraz, while maintaining its classic profile. Though diverse, they all share a common thread: miniscule production size. Producers like Callum Powell and Doug Standish are pushing the boundaries of Australian Shiraz by focusing on small, old-vine vineyard sources and obsessively paying attention to detail at every stage of the winemaking process. Their limited production size reflects their pursuit of quality; if they made any more they would be sacrificing their obsessive attention to detail.

As a result, the new "classic" Australian Shiraz emphasizes finesse, detail, and structure that focuses on terroir-driven expressions with refined complexity. This includes greater acidity and structure and a more judicious use of oak that allows the nuances of fruit, spice, and earthy undertones to take center stage. Critics and enthusiasts alike have recognized the exceptional quality of this new wave, lauding their sophistication, finesse, and remarkable versatility. Here are three producers who are redefining the quality of Shiraz in South Australia:



David and Callum Powell.

Winemaker Callum Powell is Australian winemaking royalty. His father, David Powell, launched Torbreck in 1996 to instant international acclaim and has worked side-by-side with Callum at Powell and Son for over a decade. Callum's new venture is Agricola.

The **2021 Agricola Vintners "Ebenezer" Shiraz Barossa Valley \$79.99 94RP** is crafted from a vineyard planted in 1951 in the Ebenezer subregion of North Barossa. This classic, full-bodied Shiraz is plush and round with a supple elegant mouthfeel and plenty of finesse. It's elegantly imbued with flavors and aromas of cassis, blackberry pie, salted licorice, and cocoa powder.

North of Barossa, Adelina is crafting some of the best wines in the heart of the Clare Valley, situated right next door to AP Birks Wendouree (quite possibly the



most difficult to acquire wine in the world) **2021 Adelina Shiraz Clare Valley South Australia \$49.99 94JS 93RP** is an absolute standout.

This Shiraz contrasts deep, rich fruit with spicy, floral aromatics that gather an intricate bouquet of purple fruits, asphalt, tar, lavender, and violets. On the palate, it shows a richness of blackberry and plum that is beautifully balanced by notes of cracked pepper, licorice, and earthy undertones.



Colin McBryde of Adelina.



Dan Standish.



The **2021 Standish "The Schubert Theorem" Barossa Valley South Australia \$139.99 99RP** is a tribute to the esteemed Marananga sub-region of Barossa Valley. Sourced from low-yielding, dry-grown vines primarily planted in the early 20th century, this wine boasts dark fruit, spice, and hints of chocolate on the nose. As a full-bodied Shiraz, it presents beautifully integrated tannins and

vibrant acidity, alongside lush flavors of blackberry, plum, and baking spices on the palate. The Schubert Theorem effortlessly balances fruit radiance and plush tannic texture, brimming with energy and abundance.

An Epic Vertical Tasting of New Zealand's Pinot Master Ata Rangi



Earlier in this month I had an incredibly tense moment. In 30 minutes, 12 guests were arriving at K&L's Redwood City tasting bar for a one-of-a-kind event where I would be pouring a 12-year vertical tasting of New Zealand's

greatest Pinot Noir producer: Ata Rangi. A few months prior, a long-term collector offered to let me purchase one bottle of each vintage in order to stage this unique, seminar-style tasting. Knowing the collector, I felt pretty confident that the wines would be in good condition—but you can never really know for sure. In addition, although Ata Rangi has a reputation for spectacular, age-worthy Pinot Noir, I had never actually tasted an older bottle myself. Finally, I had arranged for Ata Rangi's winemaker, Helen Masters to join us over Zoom to lead the tasting vintage by vintage. The stakes were rather high.

So it was to my incredible relief that the moment I twisted off the top of the first wine, a beautiful aroma of aged Pinot Noir poured forth from the bottle. The same thing happened with the next, and the next, until all 10 wines were open and absolutely singing. A few minutes later, our guests started meandering into the room. I got Helen on the screen, and we were on our way to one of the most exciting and serious tastings we've ever staged.

Helen is absolutely amazing—an incredibly gifted winemaker who brought a huge amount of insight and perspective to the tasting. With a consistent aim to always produce wines that show their vintage, she discussed how Ata Rangi usually falls into one of two styles: bigger, more powerful vintages that are all about fruit and drive; and more elegant, higher-acid vintages that are beautifully aromatic and full of tension.

Her perspective on crafting ageable wines was absolutely intriguing. At Ata Rangi, what makes a wine have the components for a long life are determined by vine age—not maceration, tannin, or pH. At



Helen Masters leads the charge at Ata Rangi, where exceptional, ageable Pinot Noir represents the best of New Zealand.

20 years, vines fall into balance in producing fruit that naturally achieves phenolic ripeness, while still keeping its acidity and structure intact. For me, it was a totally new take on ageability and production that I had never heard before.

By the end of the tasting, it was clear that not only every single wine aged well, they were all beautiful and unique. Here is a short summary of the wines tasted and my thoughts.

2003: The first wine of the lineup and a more forward style for Ata Rangi. Black cherry and truffles above Ata Rangi's unmistakable savory foundation. Delicious. A top wine of the tasting.

2004: One of the leaner, more tense years. Touches of forest floor, more firmly structured than the 2003, a multitude of dry herbs and a beautiful line of acid that pushed through the palate from attack to finish.

2005: This was my favorite wine of the tasting. Another big vintage with an array of dried cranberry, cherry compote and wild strawberry, accented by leather and mushroom. Absolutely stunning.

2006: WOTN (Wine of the Night) by group consensus. Savory and brambly, of all the older wines this was the most "Ata Rangi" style we tasted. Earthy and savory with slight hints of dried red fruit—an amazing bottle.

2009: A beautiful, clear red fruit note running back to front with herbal notes and savory undertones. Perhaps a little on the simple side, but delicious nonetheless.

2010: A close second for WOTN. This was all about acid drive just leaning on the fruit profile. There was still plenty of life. A good backbone of tannin, but honestly, if you had a bottle of this in your cellar, I'd still tell you to drink it right now, it was just so darn good.

2011: The most mineral wine in the lineup: wet cobblestones and forest floor with little hints of black fruit popping in and out with each taste. Tannins are still firm—this has plenty of time to go.

2013: One of New Zealand's best vintages in recent memory. Almost a bruiser of a wine, one of the most structured and tannic of the evening, with blackberry, brambles, and incredibly polished, rigid tannins. Still a baby.

2014: Lots in common with 2013, but with the tannic volume turned down. Much more ready to drink than the previous vintage. Perfumed full of succulent fruit.

2015: One of the crunchier wines in the lineup. Another cooler year with good acid, but only faint traces of aged character. This is just at the start of its journey.

Ultimately, it was a phenomenal tasting that showed the strength of Ata Rangi's wines, the way in which they gracefully age.

If you don't have a bottle of the current release, **2018 Ata Rangi Pinot Noir Martinborough \$59.99 97SK 96BC 96JS**, in your cellar, I highly recommend picking up a few and laying them down. The results will be stunning.

Weathering the Storm in New Zealand's Hawke's Bay

Right now, the Hawke's Bay wine region of New Zealand is in the midst of grappling with a recent disaster. In February of this year, the region was absolutely pummeled by Cyclone Gabrielle, the most powerful storm to hit the area in over 50 years. It unleashed fierce winds and torrential rain, causing the stopbanks of the Esk and Ngaruroro Rivers to break and trigger flash floods that poured down from the mountains. Roads were washed out, power gone, and vineyards literally buried under mountains of mud and debris.

Heartbreak doesn't even begin to describe it. The country's best site for full-bodied reds, places like the Gimblett Gravels, Te Awanga, and the Esk Valley have been slowly gaining international recognition for Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Syrah. Some of the country's most historic producers are now working to get their vineyards and wineries repaired and back on track.

The silver lining is the resilience and response of New Zealand's tight-knit wine community. Vineyard owners, winemakers, and residents have rallied together, providing support, assistance, and resources to help the affected vineyards recover. The New Zealand Winegrowers Association has pledged to aid both immediate relief efforts and long-term recovery plans, aiming to ensure that the region can continue producing exceptional wines for the world to enjoy. I wanted to take a little time to shine a light on some of the producers in this affected region and shore up support for the amazing wines they produce.



Esk Valley was one of the producers worst hit by the effects of the cyclone. Currently we have their **2019 Esk Valley Bordeaux Blend Gimblett Gravels \$17.99 93BC 93DC**, which is absolutely outstanding. Its vibrantly aromatic style combines the scents of violets and cassis with herbal, earthy notes. On the palate, the wine offers an impressive concentration of juicy fruit, blending plums and berries

with some spice and cedar undertones. Medium-bodied, dry, and tense, it boasts fine-grained tannins, and is an excellent value.

The **2020 Craggy Range "Te Kahu" Bordeaux Blend Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay \$19.99 94JS** has long been a



customer favorite from Hawke's Bay: Merlot-driven aromas of plums, black cherries, and graphite. The palate has structured tannins and forward acidity, providing definition and balance. A gorgeous, Right Bank-inspired wine that consistently delivers in spades.

Te Mata is one of New Zealand's most historic wineries. Established in 1896, it is one of New Zealand's most treasured wineries and named a national heritage landmark. **2019 Te Mata "Estate" Syrah Hawke's Bay \$25.99 96DC 95WE** displays red plum, blackberry, lavender, and cinnamon, balancing fruit with spicy oak elements and a savory edge.



Trinity Hill was the first producer to plant vines in the Gimblett Gravels and has been one of its top producers ever since. The **2019 Trinity Hill Syrah Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay \$29.99 96JS 95SK 94VN** perfectly captures the cracked black pepper the variety is known for. But unlike its counterparts in the Northern Rhône, you'll find it more generously fruited with a softer texture and velvety finish. The interplay between spicy, fruit, and meatiness are at the core of what makes this wine a spectacular example of Hawke's Bay Syrah and one of my absolute favorites.



The **2019 Bilancia "La Collina" Syrah Hawke's Bay New Zealand \$79.99 99JS 98BC** is nothing short of spectacular. Perched on the steep slopes of Roy's Hill, an old shooting range, the La Collina is a breathtakingly modern spin on Hawke's Bay Syrah. Elegant and aromatic, brimming with black pepper, this a Burgundy lover's Syrah. Weighing in at 13% abv, this is a stylish, incredibly complex Syrah that will excite anyone who loves the variety.



The ambitious **2018 Villa Maria "Ngakirikiri" Cabernet Sauvignon Gimblett Gravels Hawke's Bay \$99.99 97DC 96BC 95VN 95WE** has been made for less than a decade but has quickly risen in the ranks to one of New Zealand's best wines. A blend of 90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Merlot, and 2% Malbec, this is easily on par with classified growth Bordeaux that is incredibly concentrated, structured, and built for the cellar.

Overdelivering for Under \$20: New Zealand Pinot Noir Values

Let's face it. There's not a ton of great options for Pinot Noir drinkers for under \$20. There are a handful of reasons for this. First, Pinot Noir grapes thrive best in cooler climates with well-draining soils, which narrows the places where it can grow—most of these places are well-established and have expensive land costs. Additionally, Pinot Noir's thin skins make them more susceptible to diseases and pests, and therefore require much more care and attention in the vineyard. Finally, it is a variety that is naturally low yielding, so producers end up with less wine for much more effort. Together, this makes finding great Pinot Noir that doesn't break the bank a tricky proposition. The solution? New Zealand!

New Zealand's cool climate and diverse regions provide excellent growing conditions for Pinot Noir. For a country whose wine production has always been centered on Sauvignon Blanc, vineyard prices in suitable regions are considerably less expensive than elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, government programs focused on sustainable and organic viticulture have resulted in New Zealand becoming a hotbed for organic winegrowing practices and research, leading to healthier vineyards and lower instances of diseases and pests. The end results are that New Zealand has more options for Pinot Noir in the value range, and in that range the wines are considerably higher quality than in more established Pinot Noir regions like California or Burgundy.

With a wide range of styles, there's plenty to taste and explore. Here are some of my favorite New Zealand Pinot Noirs under \$20 that overdeliver:



The **2020 Koyama Pinot Noir Waipara \$19.99 93BC** brings to mind one word: vibrant. Sourced from two vineyards planted to limestone soils in North Canterbury, the Koyama Pinot explodes out of the glass with intense cherry, wild strawberry, brambles, and spices.

Ata Rangi is one of New Zealand's most acclaimed Pinot Noir producers. While their flagship employs vines that are 20+ years old, their young vines produce fruit for the **2020 Ata Rangi "Crimson" Pinot Noir Martinborough (Previously \$25) \$17.99 94SK**. This wine hits Martinborough on the head with an elegant balance of spicy, savory, and pure fruit. With its powerful and concentrated flavor



profile, boasting wild strawberry, early season Bing cherry, and savory undertones, the 2020 Ata Rangi "Crimson" Pinot Noir is an absolutely outstanding example of value-driven Pinot Noir.

Another of my favorites is the **2021 Sheild (Middle-Earth) Pinot Noir Nelson \$19.99 93SK**. Grown in Nelson, Marlborough's next-door neighbor, the Sheild Pinot Noir shows dark berries and plum with an accent of dried herbs. I love the firm tannin profile on this wine—a characteristic rarely found in Pinot Noir in this class. The palate boasts a refined mouthfeel and juicy fruit intensity, splendidly framed by fine, polished tannins that befit the wine's youthful charm and poise.



One of my favorite Marlborough Pinot Noirs is the **2018 Momo (Seresin) Pinot Noir Marlborough \$19.99** Made entirely from organically and biodynamically grown grapes, the Momo is bright, refreshing, and crunchy. With flavors of ripe raspberry, Bing cherry, and dried herbs this is an excellent example of organic Pinot Noir that will fit almost anyone's budget.

Finally, the **2019 Fromm "La Strada" Marlborough Pinot Noir (Previously \$30) \$19.99** is soft, beautiful, airy, and elegant. Light aromas of fresh cranberry, Bing cherry and floral notes lead, while the palate expresses the wine in a light frame with bright, lip-smacking acidity and an incredibly smooth finish. An excellent value from one of New Zealand's top Pinot Noir producers.



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