

Sparkling Wine

2006 Hunter's, Miru Miru,
Marlborough, 12.5°

Bottle £13.50 Case £153.90 Code HUN106

The latest vintage of Jane Hunter's wholly Champenois fizz from 55% Chardonnay, 41% Pinot Noir and 8% Pinot Meunier, deliciously creamy and stylish.

Lovely nose of cream and dough. Rich, and very much a vintage style biscuity and yeasty notes yet so elegant and refined. Do try this - it balances New World exuberant ripeness with Old World vintage Champagne complexity. Now-2011

Other Whites

2008 Mudhouse, Chardonnay,
Hawkes Bay, 13°

Bottle £9.50 Case £108.30 Code MUD308

Mudhouse have switched the sourcing of their excellent unwooded Chardonnay to warmer Hawkes Bay. A few months on the lees gives real weight and character.

Mid yellow. Open, appealing, drink-me nose, lemony but also mildly nutty. Mid-weight. Ripe melony juice, correctly fresh, and with some nice leesy substance. Now-2010

2008 Hunter's, Gewürztraminer,
Marlborough, 14°

Bottle £11.95 Case £136.23 Code HUN508

All too often Alsace varieties in New Zealand are dilute and characterless. This, by contrast is just delightful, fragrant and powerful.

Such a textbook scent of rose petals. A sweet heart (and about 8 grams of residual sugar) but seems correctly dry and balanced, with a crisply mineral edge. Clean, fresh finish. Now-2011

2007 Felton Road, Block 2 Chardonnay,
Central Otago, 14°

Bottle £21.95 Case £250.23 Code FET307

From the Elms Bannockburn vineyard, and such a classy New World Chardonnay.

Creamy, refined scents, lightly yeasty but pure. Layers of melon and lime, which build well on the palate. Long, zesty finish. Now-2012

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Opening times:

Weekdays: 09.00-18.00 Saturdays: 09.30-16.00

Other Reds

2005 Redmetal, Mount Erin Merlot/Cabernet
Franc, Hawkes Bay, 13°

Bottle £9.75 Case £111.15 Code RED205

Redmetal, in Hawkes Bay near the city of Hastings, is tiny by New World standards, a mere seven hectares in total, situated on part of an ancient river bed with free draining gravels, known locally as Redmetal. Though Hawkes Bay is situated at a latitude of thirty nine degrees south, it's actually cooler than the Médoc or Coonawarra.

Such a charming scent of roses and cherries. Red cherries follow through on the palate, bright and vigorous. Silky and really very enjoyable indeed. Now-2010 Limited stock

2004 Redmetal, Basket Press Merlot/
Cabernet-Franc, 13° [bottled under cork]

Bottle £14.75 Case £168.15 Code RED304

96% Merlot. Deep brick red colour. This has excellent curranty fruit and touches of liquorice, cloves, lavender and plum backed by some sweet, toasty oak. This will keep very well too. Now-2011 Limited stock

2006 Aurora, Bendigo Syrah,
Central Otago 14°

Bottle £15.95 Case £181.83 Code AUR106

Aurora is a boutique vineyard and winery in Bendigo, Central Otago. Whilst most of the vineyard is given over to Pinot, Syrah was also planted in the warmest terrace slopes in this corner of the Cromwell basin. Whilst one does not (yet) associate New Zealand with Syrah, the quality of this cool-climate example is pretty astonishing.

Deep-hued and opaque. Scent of black cherries with mocha. Densely textured, blackcurranty in style, this is really well-crafted Syrah with good keeping potential. Rounded, well-textured and harmonious.

*"It's a bit shy at first, but with time in the glass, it fleshes out to reveal sweet, smoky plum and berry, and pepper and spice characters on the finish." Simon Woods, First Taste in **Wine & Spirit**, February 2008*

*"This wine...has a character that seems to combine the best qualities of Hermitage in the Rhone and subtler examples of Shiraz from Australia. It's very (white) peppery and juicily berryish, with attractive vanilla oak", Robert Joseph, **Daily Telegraph**, July 2008 Now-2011*

Note: arriving late April

2005 Esk Valley, Reserve Merlot/Malbec/
Cabernet Sauvignon, Hawkes Bay, 14°

Bottle £16.95 Case £193.23 Code ESK305

The Kiwis began lauding the virtues of the Gimlett Gravels a few years ago, making allusions (if not comparisons) to the more famed gravels in that rather important corner of France near Bordeaux. Here is a Gimlett Gravels wine, from the Cornerstone & Ngakirikiri Vineyards, and from the splendid 2005 vintage in Hawkes Bay. It's already rather grand, but it will age gracefully too.

Deep hue: vigorous purple. Aromas of cassis and vanilla. Such generous fruit, a gush of mulberries, blackcurrants and damsons. Ripe but firm tannins - great for keeping. Oak, fruit and tannin all so well-integrated. Excellent prospect. Now-2014



New Zealand

New Zealand now offers not just quality but quantity as well, following years of energetic planting and a huge crop to boot in the 2008 vintage. This has had the benefit of keeping prices pretty flat for years, helped by currency stability (i.e. their dollar is almost as weak as the British peso).

For the first time we can now recommend wines from the two most successful grapes in New Zealand, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, as offering at least as good value as wines from the same grape varieties in France. The Mirror Lake Marlborough Sauvignon is probably more intense and fruity than anything from Touraine at the same price, and our two top-rated Kiwi Sauvignons, whilst very different, would stand up impressively next to a similarly valued Sancerre.

Likewise Pinot Noir: the row of Pinots we tasted blind in our office (of already pre-selected samples) was perhaps the most pleasurable single flight we have seen in years. We could have (though haven't) bought every wine! Most wines are from the 2007 vintage, and right now they look much better value at current exchange rates than the 2007 red Burgundies, with the better wines now offering a comparable ability to age gracefully too.

We have accordingly strengthened our list across the board this year, but especially at the top end, where we have added: the two Mudhouse Swan wines, a polished Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc and a deliciously approachable Central Otago Pinot Noir; three wines from Felton Road, Nigel Greening's impeccable property in Central Otago, certainly the source of the country's finest Pinots; and the vibrant Bordeauxish Reserve blend from Esk Valley in Hawkes Bay.

Simon Taylor

March 2009

Note: all wines in this list are bottled under screw-cap, except the Red Metal Basket Press, Merlot/Cabernet-Franc

Mixed Cases

All include two bottles of each of the six wines listed, at a discount of at least 5%

Kiwi Sauvignons

£118.00 Code NZ109

2008 Mirror Lake, Marlborough
2008 Waipara Springs, Waipara
2008 Yealands, Marlborough
2008 Mudhouse, Marlborough
2007 Isabel, Marlborough
2008 Mudhouse, Swan, Marlborough

Island Terroirs

Three whites and three reds

£132.00 Code NZ209

2008 Yealands, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough
2008 Mudhouse, Chardonnay, Hawkes Bay
2008 Hunter's, Gewürztraminer, Marlborough
2007 Delta, Pinot Noir, Marlborough
2007 Mudhouse, Swan Pinot Noir, Central Otago
2005 Redmetal, Mount Erin Merlot/Cabernet Franc, Hawkes Bay

Top Kiwi Fruit

One sparkling, two whites and three reds

£192.00 Code NZ309

2006 Hunters Miru Miru, Marlborough
2008 Mudhouse, Swan Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough
2007 Felton Road, Block 2 Chardonnay, Central Otago
2007 Delta, Pinot Noir, Marlborough
2007 Felton Road, Pinot Noir, Central Otago
2005 Esk Valley, Reserve Merlot/Malbec/Cabernet Sauvignon, Hawkes Bay

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Sauvignon Blanc

Despite concerns about the size of the 2008 Sauvignon Blanc harvest - and there are some dilute wines out there, be warned - our blind tasting of Kiwi Sauvignon Blancs was fascinatingly diverse, enabling us to craft a selection for all tastes. You can't just say, "I really like New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc" and leave it at that any more: what do you mean? We all know the classic Marlborough style, with bright gooseberry and grapefruit leaping out of the glass, but now there are more austere and steely wines from the sub-regions of Awatere or Wairau, brightly tropical wines from up-and-coming Waipara in the South Island, and (though not appearing here) soft and sherberty examples from warmer Hawkes Bay. The range of styles and flavours in New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is probably broader than, say, in Sauvignon Blanc from the Loire.

Marlborough, with its free draining stony soils, still dominates the Kiwi scene: about 90% of all the Sauvignon in the country is grown there. Long hours of sunshine, dryish summers, high luminosity, and warm days refreshed by cold nights, give high quality grapes with great ripeness but also fine aromatics.

2008 Mirror Lake, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, 12.5°

Bottle £7.50 Case £85.50 Code MIR108

The return to our list of a £7.50 New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc - and it's really good too, having passed our blind tasting with flying colours. This is a wine cleverly sourced and blended from the excess of excellent juice in the 2008 harvest.

Bright and clear. Scent of grapefruit with a more tropical, passion-flower hint. Zippily attractive tangerine and lemon mid palate, which builds well and has a charming silky texture. Good acid thread, and nicely dry. Now-2010

2008 Waipara Springs, Sauvignon Blanc, Waipara, 13°

Bottle £9.50 Case £108.30 Code WAI108

The vines at Waipara Springs were among the first to be planted in the 1980s in the Waipara district near Canterbury on the South Island. Here they make a deliciously open Sauvignon, vibrant with ripe grapefruit, from calcareous soils.

"This is cracking Sauvignon with some Loire-like minerality as well as focused grassy, fruity, blackcurrant bud aromatics. The palate is concentrated with lovely bright grassy, herby fruit and lovely textural richness, finishing quite minerally with high acidity. Lively, intense and well-balanced. 92/100", Jamie Goode's Wine Blog, www.wineanorak.com, 4th October 2008 Now-2010

2008 Mudhouse, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, 13°

Bottle £9.95 Case £113.43 Code MUD108

Named after a mud block house which was built in the original vineyard, the Mudhouse Wine Company, founded by former Essex farmer John Joslin, produced its first wines in 1996. The estate is now part of NZ Vineyard Estates, but size isn't all bad: this is a dynamic business creating well-made wines at sensible prices. The Sauvignon is just so consistently reliable that it has become a bit of a benchmark here. In the 2008 vintage it's lifted by the blending in of some 15% of fruit from Waipara.

Open gooseberry, elderflower and peardrop scent. Gooseberry and green citrus palate, fresh and zippy.

"Fresh, lightly perfumed, some youthful pear drop aromas. Clean and minerally, taut and fresh with a long, dry finish", Julia Harding, MW on www.jancisrobinson.com, 5th January 2009 Now-2010

2008 Yealands, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, 13°

Bottle £9.95 Case £113.43 Code YEA108

Peter Yealands is a highly enterprising local farmer from Marlborough who, with two business successes already under his belt - farming mussels and deer - has planted vines, reshaping the harsh landscape in the process, in the cool Awatere Valley.

Very pale and clear. Smoky nose, with green pepper. Classic example of that dry, minerally style one associates with Wairau and Awatere, with pea-pod, nettle and asparagus balanced by kiwi-fruit and elderberry.

"Markedly herbaceous on the nose and the palate. Very traditional NZ SB with good concentration in this greener style", Julia Harding, MW on www.jancisrobinson.com, 5th January 2009 Now-2010

2007 Isabel Estate, Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, 13°

Bottle £12.50 Case £142.50 Code ISA507

Isabel was planted in the late eighties by Mike and Robyn Tillier in the Wairau Valley near the Omaka river. They were not only ahead of the game in selecting a particularly good site, but also planted vines at high density to ensure better quality fruit.

There are few Kiwi Sauvignons that match the complexity of Isabel. Intensely grapefruity, crisply mineral, and with a beguiling silky texture, this really is classy and refined - a sort of Kiwi Pouilly-Fumé. Now-2010

2008 Mudhouse, Swan Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough, 12.5°

Bottle £12.75 Case £145.35 Code MUD508

This is sourced from Mudhouse's Wool Shed Block in the upper Wairau Valley.

Intense, almost musky scent, with notes of ripe melon and basil. This is very young: initially tight, it benefits from time in the glass to show its best. Intense sherberty lemon and lime with red apple. So characterful and mouthwatering. A show-stopper. Now-2011

Pinot Noir

Alright, we admit it: we are Pinotphiles here (no, it's not yet a crime to love Pinot, it just sounds like one...), so we continue our quest for good Pinot across the globe, from Burgundy to Chile, Oregon and beyond. Having occasionally remarked that Kiwi Pinot, whilst consistently enjoyable, can be a bit one-dimensional and expensive, we have had a wholesale conversion over the last year, hence our biggest offering of New Zealand Pinots yet.

As with the Sauvignon Blancs, styles can be very diverse, so read our tasting notes carefully. Marlborough continues as a source of fresh, cool-climate Pinots, but many would argue Pinot leadership has moved to Central Otago in the South Island, where the vines enjoy a more continental climate, similar to Burgundy. Latest, and highly promising, newcomer is Waipara, near Canterbury, with some limestone soils.

Winemaking techniques for Pinot in New Zealand are very much Burgundian: usually a cold soak, fermentation in open fermenters, pigéage (punching down the cap), and maturation in French barrels.

2008 Mudhouse, Pinot Noir, Marlborough, 13.5°

Bottle £9.95 Case £113.43 Code MUD608

The Mudhouse Pinot has become a really popular wine here, and the latest vintage is perhaps even better than the 2007; fresher and more balanced.

Soft raspberry tone. Scents of ripe, mildly jammy fruit and toast. So bright and pretty, with a lifted, wild strawberry quality. Very winning - perfect for everything from simple roast chicken to a charcuterie-based picnic. Now-2011

2007 Delta, Pinot Noir, Marlborough, 13°

Bottle £12.50 Case £142.50 Code DEL607

Delta, named after the triangular shape of some of the vineyards, is largely a Pinot Noir project. Here the Pinot is so Burgundian in style - comparable (but cheaper) to a St. Aubin Premier Cru from a warm vintage.

Mid raspberry, slightly smudgy look. Enticing aromas of fresh oak overlaying creamy red fruit. Bright, juicy attack, all raspberries and redcurrants (and even a hint of rhubarb). Not sweet, but very fresh, pure and lively. Could even be served quite cool. Now-2011

2007 Waipara Springs, Premo Pinot Noir, Waipara, 14°

Bottle £13.75 Case £156.75 Code WAI607

We have not yet tasted enough Pinots from Waipara to get a feel for a Waipara style, though it seems to have an individuality of its own. This is the second vintage we have offered of the Premo Pinot. The vines here are relatively old by New Zealand standards, and the result is a well-extracted, meaty Pinot which can age well.

Deep ruby tone. Rich aromas of mocha, perfumed red fruit with a Turkish delight hint, and clove. Dense, black-fruited and mildly spiced palate, with a structure of some tannin and acid. Not an obvious Kiwi charmer, this is youthful, firm and promising. Now-2012

Note: arriving late April

2007 Mudhouse, Swan Pinot Noir, Central Otago, 14°

Bottle £15.50 Case £176.70 Code MUD807

A single vineyard wine from Mudhouse's Bendigo vineyard, this goes into French oak barrels, 25% new.

Deep, youthful ruby. Brambly, spicy perfume. A wine very much in the first flush of youth, showing rich and moreish ripe red cherries, with more than a touch of Kirsch. Stylish, very supple and long. This would convert anyone to the joys of Kiwi Pinot. Now-2011

2006 Peregrine, Pinot Noir, Central Otago, 13.5°

Bottle £18.25 Case £208.05 Code PEE106

Like most Otago wineries, Peregrine is new, founded 1998, with vines in the Cromwell basin and Gibbston. We like the concentration and ripe tannic structure of their Pinot, which was tight in youth but is now drinking very well.

Deep hue. Aromas of black fruit, wrapped in clean, cedary oak (all French, 35% new). Weighty and mouthfilling. Not over-ripe, rather ambitiously blackfruited and well-constructed. Just a touch of that attractive savoury note which Pinot delivers early in New World examples. Now-2011

2007 Felton Road, Pinot Noir, Central Otago, 14°

Bottle £23.50 Case £267.90 Code FET607

When we saw Nigel Greening to buy his wines he was celebrating just receiving his formal papers to emigrate to New Zealand. He is now living there amongst the vines of this terrific, bio-dynamically farmed estate, now generally accepted to be the top producer of Pinot in the country. Both Jancis Robinson, MW and Neil Martin for the Robert Parker organisation (which has given the estate its top five star ranking) praise the wines to the skies. We are really pleased to get hold of a small allocation.

Mid purple. So ripe, svelte and complete, and so approachable already but with the substance and class to keep well too. Coulis of raspberries. Very long. Now-2013

2007 Felton Road, Calvert Pinot Noir, Central Otago, 14°

Bottle £27.75 Case £316.35 Code FET807

In a thoroughly Burgundian spirit Nigel Greening likes to make wines to express the personality of all the different blocks in his vineyards, so it's a fascinating exercise to pick one's favourite. In this vintage we loved the wine from the Calvert vineyard: though the vines here are young, planted 1999 and 2001, this seems a superb site for Pinot.

Much more complex aromas on this, with hints of earthiness and spice. That richness and complexity is so evident on the palate too, with a smooth velouté of black cherries enlivened by pepper and mocha. So velvety. Now-2014