

different strokes

New Zealand has earned international acclaim for its sauvignon blancs but what of its aromatic riesling and pinot gris, world-class pinot noir and earthy shiraz? We lift the lid on the five most versatile kiwi producers.

STORY WINSOR DOBBIN



CLOUDY BAY

Established in 1985, Cloudy Bay has been one of the flag bearers for New Zealand sauvignon blanc with both its benchmark standard release and the oaked Te Koko. The winery and vineyards are in the Wairau Valley in Marlborough, at the north of the South Island, where the maritime climate is ideal for producing quality wines from a range of grape varieties. The iconic winery takes its name from the bay at the east of the Wairau Valley, named Cloudy Bay by Captain Cook on his voyage to New Zealand in 1770.

Cloudy Bay 2007 Chardonnay (\$45)

This is an intense, full-flavoured chardonnay that combines power with elegance and focus. Varietal fruit flavours, with citrus and peach to the fore, are enhanced by smoky oak characters which add complexity and backbone without overpowering the fruit. This is a complex, textural wine that is drinking well now and can confidently be cellared for five years.

Drink with whitebait fritters and garlic aioli.

Cloudy Bay 2007 Pinot Noir (\$52)

Marlborough pinots are not always successful, with some weedy examples made from grapes grown in inappropriate sites. This, however, is a lovely wine made from fruit from an elevated vineyard. It has some appealing dark cherry and red fruit flavours, hints of savoury mushrooms, spice, prominent oak and some nice silky tannins.

Drink with roast duck pancakes.



PEGASUS BAY

Leading neurologist Ivan Donaldson founded this winery in the Waipara Valley, 45 minutes north of Christchurch, in 1986. The first vintage was in 1991. Donaldson made the first wines in his Christchurch garage but today Pegasus Bay is the flagship winery for the region with a beautiful cellar door and restaurant. This family owned and operated company is particularly known for its world-class rieslings, made in several styles, and high-quality pinot noir. It also releases wines under the Main Divide label.

Pegasus Bay 2008 Riesling (\$38)

Made in a Mosel style, this is a superb off-dry New Zealand riesling with zestiness, botrytis character adding a hint of sweetness (25g of residual sugar) and some spice on the finish. A warm year meant it is uncharacteristically high in alcohol at 13 per cent but has a richer, more viscous finish than previous years. It remains fragrant and intense with nice acid and balance.

Drink with Vietnamese spring rolls.

Pegasus Bay 2007 Encore Noble Riesling (\$58 for 375ml)

This wine, one of four rieslings made by Pegasus Bay, is made from fruit left to hang on the vines until winter. Botrytis, known as noble rot, developed on the berries adding concentration and intensity. The end result is a honeyed wine with tropical fruit salad flavours. It is mouthfilling and lusciously sweet but with zingy acid on the finish.

Drink with tarte tatin.



ATA RANGI

The leading light in the Martinborough wine region, a one-hour drive north of Wellington, Ata Rangi has established itself as one of the leading pinot noir producers in the 'new world'. Starting with a barren five-acre paddock in 1980 when the district had no wine pedigree at all, founder, owner and manager Clive Paton turned Ata Rangi into a producer of over 12,000 cases of premium wine a year – much of which is exported around the world.

Ata Rangi 2007 Craighall Chardonnay (\$59)

This superb chardonnay is a product of the Ata Rangi home block vineyard, where the vines are now over 25 years old. Double sorting of fruit and minimal intervention from winemaker Helen Masters have led to a wine with lovely complexity and intensity. With 25 per cent of the juice seeing new oak there is just a hint of charred character, but the wine is largely fruit driven with a delightful crisp acidity on the finish.

Drink with roast chicken and mushroom risotto.

Ata Rangi 2007 Pinot Noir (\$82)

Ata Rangi's pinots are a benchmark in New Zealand, described by leading Kiwi wine writer Michael Cooper as "one of the greatest of all New Zealand wines." The warm 2007 vintage in Martinborough means this is a more muscular and brooding style than normal. You'll find dark cherry on the nose and palate, and typically gamey and savoury flavours along with supple tannins and oodles of complexity. Tight and powerful, this is a wine that screams out to be cellared.

Drink with pan-fried quail.



VILLA MARIA

One of New Zealand's largest wineries, Villa Maria, was founded in 1961 by current owner George Fistonich, the son of Croatian immigrants. Today, Villa Maria has extensive vineyard holdings in Hawke's Bay, Gisborne and Marlborough and is regularly the country's most successful show exhibitor, particularly with its bargain-basement. Since 2004, all Villa Maria wines have been sealed under screw caps and Villa Maria claims to be the first major wine company in the world to declare itself a 'cork-free zone'.

Villa Maria 2006 Private Bin Syrah (\$32)

Hawke's Bay syrah, particular wines made in the Gimblett Gravels region, is building a formidable reputation and the wines are the perfect antidote to the big, high-alcohol Australian shirazes from the Barossa and McLaren Vale. Like this wine, most Hawke's Bay syrahs are lower in alcohol, high in pepper and spice components and far closer in style to the red wines of France's Rhone Valley. Sappy, soft and very appealing.

Drink with lamb cutlets.

Villa Maria 2008 Private Bin Pinot Gris (\$22)

New Zealand pinot gris tends to be made in an unashamedly Alsace style; intensely aromatic with pear characters to the fore. In the wrong hands this variety can be dull and lacking in flavour, but this is a fresh and lively white wine that underlines exactly why pinot gris is rapidly becoming a very fashionable variety. Easy drinking – enjoy rather than analyse.

Drink with grilled garfish.



MUDBRICK

Waiheke Island, in the Hauraki Gulf and just a 30-minute ferry ride from downtown Auckland, has built a considerable reputation for the quality of its Bordeaux-style reds from wineries including Stonyridge, Goldwater Estate, Te Motu, Passage Rock and Cable Bay. This family-owned winery, which is also home to an acclaimed restaurant, has been a big improver in recent years, making a range of wines that includes chardonnay and syrah as well as a range of wines made from Bordeaux varieties cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and merlot.

Mudbrick 2008 Reserve Chardonnay (\$45)

This is a very fine style of chardonnay with fresh fruit characters melding seamlessly with nutty, toasty oak. This wine was 100 per cent barrel fermented with 30 per cent in new French barriques. The nose displays hints of citrus, peach, toasty oak and nutty characters while the palate is beautifully balanced with mouth-filling flavours, length and suppleness.

Drink with spiced pork belly.

Mudbrick 2005 Reserve Merlot Cabernets (\$60)

This blend of merlot, cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon – three classic Bordeaux varieties – was made from hand-picked fruit from the estate vineyards. It is rich and medium-to-full bodied with forest fruit characters and smoky oak hints added by 14 months in French oak barriques. An opulent, smooth red from a very good vintage.

Drink with venison steaks.

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