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FOODWINE ^{tn}

WITH TONY HARPER



CULTURED KIWIS ... pinot noir professionals Paul Brajkovich, Ivan Donaldson, Judy Finn, Steve Smith, Phyll Pattie, Richard Riddiford, Clive Weston, Ross Lawson, Annie Millton, Blair Walter, Pol Lenzinger and George Fistonich

Desirable dozen

A group of New Zealand vineyards comes together to talk up top-flight pinot noir

It's always an interesting weekend when members of New Zealand's self-formed vinous elite – the Family of Twelve – make their annual visit to Brisbane. But this year had extra allure with Blair Walter presenting a tasting of 12 New Zealand pinot noirs; one from each participating winery. Blair has been the winemaker at Felton Road (arguably New Zealand's most famous pinot noir estate) since 1996, guiding it from its early days (vines were planted in 1992) through to the superstar status it enjoys today, so his insight at this style of tasting was always going to be valuable. What made it even better was the small nature of the tasting group – 16 in total.

The tasting started in the north (Auckland) and finished with Central Otago, so there were pronounced regional differences. And, of course, there was no lack of stylistic idiosyncrasies due to whims and wants of the various winemakers. But there was an underlying thread connecting all of the wines – a Kiwi-ness for want of a better word.

Kumeu River 2006 began the tasting and, while it certainly garners its fair share of criticism every time I see it shown, it remains (vintage after vintage) one of my favourite Kiwi pinot noirs and it was probably in my top three at this tasting. The fact that it is grown so far north means that it is outside the comfort zone for pinot noir, but Michael Brajkovich (he makes the stuff, while brother Paul is the marketing director) is a deep thinker and an exceedingly accomplished winemaker, and he gets more earthy, funky complexity in his pinot than most of his countrymen.

The Martinborough region was represented by Ata Rangi 2006, Palliser 2006 and Craggy Range Te Muna Road 2006. There is an inherent depth and power to Martinborough pinots that makes them alluring and quite serious (in both price and nature). The Palliser

was probably the least of the three in absolute terms, but it sells for about \$40, which is half the price of the Ata Rangi and perhaps two-thirds of the Craggy Range. Thinking bang for buck, it is a pretty serious wine.

Ata Rangi pinot noir generally demands four or five years in bottle before it really starts to sing, and I reckon the '06, while a crackingly good wine, was looking pretty tough, tight and angular. That said, there was power, fruit and framework to burn, and I have no doubt that it will be a pretty amazing wine once some cellar time has worked its magic.

As for the Craggy Range, it was typical of the stable – carefully crafted, blemish-free, fragrant, pretty, polished and exceedingly expressive.

Marlborough was represented by four wines: Lawson's Dry Hills 2005, Villa Maria Taylors Pass 2006, Nautilus 2007 and Fromm Clayvin Vineyard 2005. They were all pretty strong (especially the Nautilus in terms of value), but as far as I'm concerned the Fromm is in a class of its own: firmly structured, a little wild, brooding, complex and needing time.

From Nelson, there was Neudorf Moutere 2006 (brilliant) and from Waipara came the Pegasus Bay 2006, another wine I treasure vintage after vintage.

But in the end, the 2007 Felton Road showed why it is regarded as the pinnacle of Kiwi pinot. It has the rich, explosive fruit that is characteristic of Otago pinot noirs, but it is reigned in and backed by a ripe, tannic framework and there is depth and complexity to burn.

As for the commonality that ran through all the wines, it has left me a little perplexed. Perhaps most producers are aiming for a similar stylistic goal; one that prizes fruit clarity and a fairly solid structure. And there was a fairly dominant, stalky note that ran through most wines. It's made me curious enough to explore the subject further.

QUICKBITE



KATIE LOTON 21
// CAKE DESIGNER
AND DECORATOR,
OXFORD STREET
BAKERY, BULIMBA

BEST BREKKY?
Bean Scene, St Lucia.

Its almond croissants are beautiful.

MOST MEMORABLE MEAL?

When I was four my parents set up a mushroom stool restaurant in our dining room for my sister and me. We got all dressed up in mum's high-heeled shoes and had a miniature candle-lit

dinner. Dad waited on us and Mum was the chef.

CUPCAKE TIPS?

Make your cupcake batter from scratch using fresh ingredients. Try out different icings, be creative and practise.

AND FOR THE HOME BAKER?

I started young with Mum's family recipes, so bake with your children, friends or family. And don't be discouraged if you have a flop.

FAVOURITE RESTAURANT?

The Himalayan Cafe in New Farm – it has great service, wonderful food and is well priced.

FAVOURITE COFFEE?

I love Di Bella coffee.

WHAT DO YOU COOK AT HOME?

Fresh apple-and-berry pie is a favourite. I also love roast sweet potato salad.

KEY TO A PERFECT MEAL?

Sharing your creation with friends and family, with great conversation and big laughs.

MUST-HAVE UTENSIL?

A palette knife.

A WINE-FOOD MATCH YOU LIKE?

A quality sauvignon blanc with almost any meal suits me.

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