

Match made in Marlborough



WARREN BARTON

WHEN it comes to wining and dining, the ultimate experience in this part of the world is dinner at Herzog, the Marlborough restaurant widely regarded as New Zealand's best, accompanied by some of the wines lovingly hand-crafted by Hans Herzog.

Well, how about this: Dinner in a boatshed converted by New Zealand cinematographer Michael Seresin into a cosy, special-occasions restaurant on his property in beautiful Waterfall Bay, a 15-minute boat ride from Picton, in the Marlborough Sounds.

The dinner is catered by Louis Schindler, the chef Hans and Therese Herzog brought from their Michelin-starred Taggenburg Luxury Restaurant in Switzerland, when they settled in New Zealand in 1991; the wines are from Herzog and four other family-owned Marlborough wineries, also passionate about the wines that they produce.

It is another class act, a dinner that celebrates the harvest and provides a stunning showcase for not only the considerable skills of chef Schindler (now at Timara Lodge) but also for wines made by a group of winemakers whose labels might not be on everyone's shopping list but are appreciated by those with a serious interest in wine.

Seresin is among them, of course. The winery was founded by Seresin (his film credits include *Midnight Express* and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*) and the wines are as distinctive as the handprint on the label. Most notable are the sauvignon blancs and pinot noirs and, on Saturday, it was the generous and savoury 2004 Leah (a bargain at \$30) which was chosen to go with the short loin of fallow deer, coco beans, black pudding with silver beet reduction.

Mike and Claire Allan whose label is named for the huia, the extinct New Zealand bird, still work out of a winery originally built from two Goldpines joined end to end.

Among their wines is a particularly palatable gewurztraminer and a bubbly that is excellent with food.

It was the latter (a 2001 Brut which sells for \$35) which was chosen for the dinner and worked perfectly with a sweetcorn broth with shrimp and feta; black tiger prawn and curry; and the tartare of tuna with salmon roe.

Clos Henri is, as the name suggests, one of several wineries in Marlborough that are

French owned, this one by Henri Bourgeois, one of the most respected producers in Sancerre, which is among the few places in the world that grow both sauvignon blanc and pinot noir. And these are the only varieties that wear the label here.

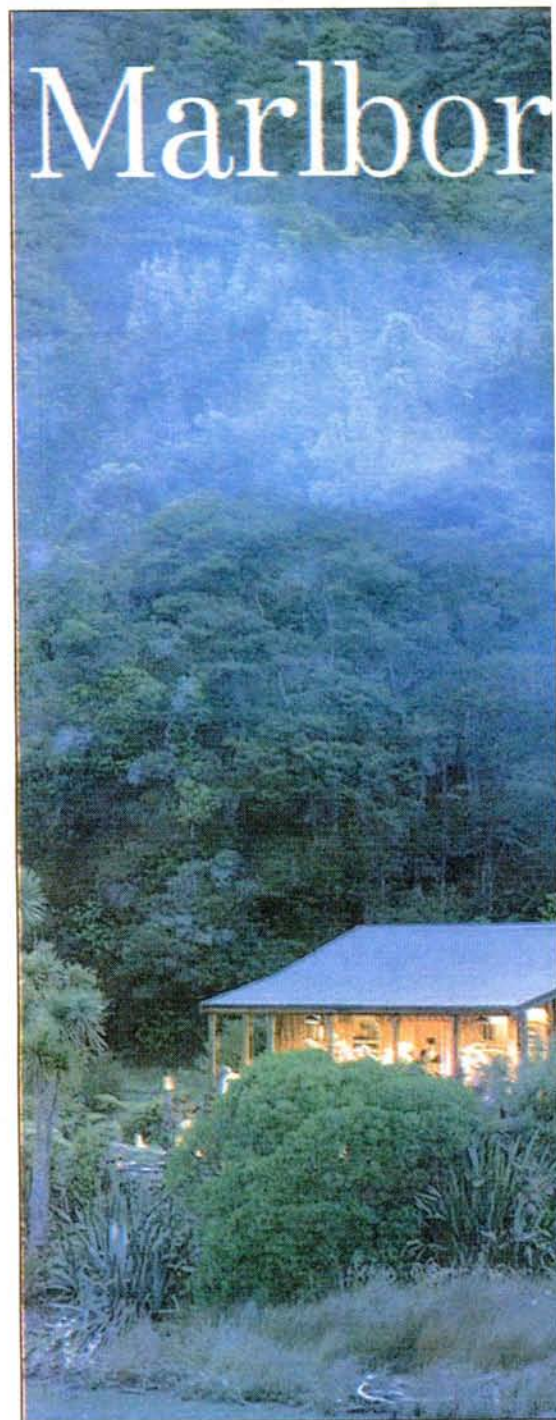
Showcased on Saturday was the 2005 sauvignon blanc (\$28), a wine which is less about aromatics and fruit; more about texture and purity than the archetypal Marlborough sauvignon blanc. It complemented perfectly the steamed ravioli of smoked salmon with puree of parsnip, and the coconut chili broth with a fragrance of kaffir lime.

And with the cheese, aged Windsor blue with figs in port, what better than one of Herzog's unashamedly powerful, flavourful and classy array of wines, in this case a fragrant and substantial blend of merlot, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and malbec called Spirit of Marlborough, which at \$56 a bottle is a good investment for the cellar.

The dessert was created to match a wine from Swiss-owned Fromm, most noted for its pinot noir but also for merlot, syrah and increasingly for rieslings, such as the 2001 La Strada Auslese (\$25 for 375ml) which was matched with a mousse of quince with chocolate cake and sauce anglaise infused with saffron. It was not served as a dessert wine, but in larger glasses because, as Hatch Kalberer, the man who made it says, it might be sweet but it is never sticky. In fact it finishes dry — an extreme example of the kinds of low-alcohol, sweet but dry rieslings that are now starting to turn New Zealanders on.

And for anyone turned on at the thought of dinner at Waterfall Bay: Seresin can provide the details.

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good buying



CHEERFUL
Commissioners Block
2004 Shiraz, about
\$14

Here's a warm and cheerful shiraz from northwest Victoria to go with the lamb shanks and the other meatier meals that signal winter is just around the corner. Black-fruited, pleasantly spiced, tweaked with viognier to enhance the aromatics, texture and colour.



CONSISTENT
Alpha Domus, The
Navigator, about \$27

A consistently good, full-flavoured blend of merlot, cabernet sauvignon, cabernet franc and malbec, massaged in this case with some sweet and toasty oak to produce a very attractive wine. A hint of cloves and other spicy, gamey characters add complexity.