



Wine

BY MICHAEL COOPER



What's new?

About 10 New Zealand wines are released every day – new vintages of familiar wines and new labels. From wineries spread from Auckland to Central Otago, here are some of the most memorable recent releases.

Ti Point Vineyard, at Leigh, north of Matakana, is run by three generations of the Haslam family – winemaker Tracy Haslam (who is married to David Mason, managing director of Sacred Hill in Hawke's Bay), her mother, Jan, and grandmother Eileen. Designed for early drinking, **Ti Point Two Merlot/Cabernet Franc 2009** (★★★★, \$22) is a classic claret style with a delicious array of black-currant, plum and spice flavours, slightly earthy notes adding complexity and a silky-smooth finish.

Man O' War, at the north-east end of Waiheke Island, is owned by John Spencer, whose grandfather founded Caxton Printing Works. The vines, first planted on a windy site in 1993, have been slow to reach commercial production, but good wine is now flowing consistently.

Drinking well now, **Man O' War Chardonnay 2008** (★★★★, \$28) is a robust (14.5% alcohol) yet refined wine with highly concentrated, citrusy, peachy flavours and a crisp, long finish. **Man O' War Dreadnought Syrah 2008** (★★★★, \$46) is built for the long haul – boldly coloured, with dense, spicy, nutty flavours, complex, firm and sustained.

After a hiatus of several years, Gisborne's Matawhero brand, highly acclaimed 30 years ago, has been relaunched by the Searle family, who also own the Brunton Road label. All eyes are on the gewürztraminer, which Matawhero's founder, Denis Irwin, declared a decade ago was "served at the Queen's table and is reputed to be one of her favourite wines".

A fully dry style with a perfumed bouquet, **Matawhero Gewürztraminer 2009** (★★★★, \$30) is mouthfilling, with good intensity of peachy, gingery, spicy flavour, ripe and rounded. It's a strong start for the new owners, but it remains to be seen whether the Matawhero magic of the late 1970s and 1980s can be recaptured.

Te Awa Winery, in Hawke's Bay, was quiet for a while, following the 2008 departure of its long-term winemaker, Jenny Dobson. Ant Mackenzie, who is now at the production helm, built a strong reputation during spells at two Marlborough wineries, Framingham and Spy Valley.

Te Awa Syrah 2007 (★★★★, \$30) is dense and still youthful in colour, with bold, plummy, spicy flavours in a "fruit-bomb" style, moderately complex but highly concentrated. To be released in July, **Te Awa Left Field Syrah 2009** (★★★★, \$25) is uncomplicated but attractively scented and chock-full of fresh, vibrant flavour, deliciously fruity and smooth.

Bart Arnst, a viticulturist, and Australian winemaker Chris Darling, say they enjoy sitting down together to watch the All Blacks play the Wallabies, each convinced they know the outcome of the game before kick-off. Setting aside that friendly rivalry, they are working together to produce small volumes of high-quality, organically grown wines in Marlborough.

From vineyards in the Wairau Valley currently under conversion to BioGro, **The Darling Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2009** (★★★★, \$22.50) is mouthfilling

and concentrated, with incisive, tropical fruit flavours, crisp, dry and long. **The Darling Marlborough Pinot Gris 2009** (★★★★, \$22.50) is a weighty, medium-dry style with fresh, pure flavours of lychees, peaches and spices, deliciously ripe and rich.

From two vineyard sites at Waipara, the Porter family – Tom and Sheila, their daughter, Alex, and winemaker son Guy – are producing impressively full-flavoured, characterful wines under the Bellbird Spring label. Blended from four aromatic varieties – pinot gris, riesling, muscat and gewürztraminer – and matured in old oak barrels, **Bellbird Spring Home Block White 2009** (★★★★, \$30) is a distinctly medium style, full-bodied with complex, spicy flavours and a deliciously soft finish.

My favourite is **Bellbird Spring Block Eight Pinot Gris 2009** (★★★★, \$30). Barrel-fermented, it is a lovely, late-harvest style, softly textured with rich lychee, spice and apricot flavours, already hard to resist. ■

Wine of the week

Valli Old Vine Central Otago Riesling 2009
★★★★★

From vines planted at Alexandra in 1981, this is an authoritative wine, strikingly scented and weighty, with grapefruit and peach flavours, deep, dry and lasting.
\$30

