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Dog Point, Marlborough

Last January I joined the Marlborough Pinot Safari, as a guest of Dog Point. I've always enjoyed their wines, even the ones I wouldn't necessarily love personally (evidently my H₂S threshold is lower than James Healy's*), as they were always very smartly made and with plenty of energy, personality and integrity. We all need more of those wines in the world, and Marlborough more than most needs the flagbearers. The Dog Point Pinot Noir was one of my favourites from the Pinot Safari (alongside Fromm, Greywacke and Seresin wines) and James, Ivan (Sutherland) and Murray (Cook) were very honest, forthright and charming guides for the day. I was therefore very pleased when the three recent releases arrived on my doorstep.

2015 Dog Point Marlborough Pinot Noir

Spicy, quite dark with a bunched lift of perfume and herbs, quite a bit going on, changes a lot across the glass too. Core of sweet dark red plum, berry and cherry with very nice line of fine-grained firm tannin to offset all the fruit sweetness and concentration, which could almost have been a bit much, but the wine walked the knife's edge well with a satisfying burst of acid giving lift and vibrancy. Sat well in glass and bottle across a few days, seemed to be settling into itself, which is always reassuring.

2017 Dog Point Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc

Very (very) thioly. Has the rich, juicy succulence of last year's release but much more overt thiols which I found a little overwhelming, moving as they did into sweaty armpit territory. Can't fault the intensity and concentration though, with a characteristic lick of flinty reduction. Pleasingly dry on finish and with good texture and depth of flavour. A smart wine to be sure, but your enjoyment (rather than appreciation) may vary depending on how much you love thiols.

2015 Dog Point Marlborough Chardonnay

I can't decide if I am simply becoming more sulphide tolerant or if DP are actually dialing things back a little. Perhaps it's a mixture of the two. Either way, there's no mistaking the telltale whack of struck match and flint on the nose but mercifully, there's plenty more to enjoy in the rich aromas of lemon curd, white peach, cashew nut and sizzled butter. The palate too has the tightly wound, linear nature of a reductive wine but offset with a fleshy richness of citrus and stone fruit, juicy acidity and skillfully integrated biscuit-and-spice oak, adding layers of texture and complexity. It has an underlying mealy/savoury density - there's more here than just fruit (or oak & sulphides) which sets it apart from some of its similarly styled competitors. The finish is compact, dry and long, with real freshness and verve. It really is a very moreish wine, one it seems almost silly to be drinking so young as, like the pinot, it opened up beautifully in the glass and sat well in the bottle over several days. There's no doubting it'll be truly lovely given a few years to mellow. Especially as those sulphides will be even more in retreat by then. Hah.

Emma Jenkins

* see the Greywacke review later in this issue

TexSom, Dallas 2017

Back in April James Tidwell MS, co-founder of the TEXSOM Conference, emailed to say he'd like me and Elaine Chukan Brown to present a seminar on the Red Wines of NZ. An invitation I couldn't refuse.

The trickiest part was deciding which ten wines to show but after many, many lengthy email exchanges, Elaine and I drew up a wish list and to our delight, all the producers we contacted were more than happy to send over their wine. There was only a slight hiccup when one winery didn't make the shipping deadline but I agreed to take the bottles with me and having the extraordinary good luck to meet a US customs official who enjoyed red wine (cue a lengthy debate on the relative merits of different grape varieties) I managed to arrive into Dallas with my humour, and 18 bottles of wine, intact.

Having never been to TexSom before I was unprepared for the scale of the event. Arriving to breakfast on the first morning I was greeted by a room of almost 500 uber-enthusiastic wine professionals discussing the merits of Champagne Louis Roederer whilst tasting through the wines on offer. James had graciously arranged for a kettle, teapot and a selection of fine leaf teas to be in my room so I had fortified myself with a couple of cups of the drink of the gods before breakfast, but I could in no way match the enthusiasm nor sense of energy in the room at 7.30am in the morning. I realised that travel-weary or not, I was going to have to lift my game.

TexSom is based around a programme of educational seminars and I was a little apprehensive that ours wouldn't be as popular as others - when you live in a country that is missed off maps regularly and seems destined always to be the last entry in any book on wine then I feared that more, dare I say, glamorous sessions would have greater appeal. So imagine my amazement to find we had sold out, and were presenting in the largest seminar room, to an audience of over 350 sommeliers, buyers and professionals assembled from all over the US. We'd done a fair bit of preparation beforehand but on the day the quality of the wines told the story for us.

The first two wines showed just how rapidly Central Otago is evolving. I'd venture that of all NZ's pinot noir regions, Central shows the greatest diversity and breadth of style. This pair are very much from the quieter end of town, not so immediately upfront but nonetheless showing sense of place.

2013 Prophet's Rock Home Vineyard Pinot Noir, Central Otago

I'm not entirely convinced I'd recognize this as NZ if I tasted it blind. Shy at first on the nose but unfolds to give wonderfully precise aromas of raspberry, redcurrant and a little hint of damson with some lifted, almost peppermint hints too. Very structured, tightly bound but slowly evolves to reveal a core of fruit nestled amongst the tannins, which are firm but perfectly in balance. This needs time but will reward those with patience handsomely.

2014 Doctor's Flat Pinot Noir, Central Otago

The fruit sits very much in the cooler bright red spectrum with a vibrant note of raspberry and wild strawberry. There is a lift of lavender/violet florals too. A hint of cinnamon spice suggests maybe some whole bunch. Sounds odd but there is a real energy to this wine as well as a stillness and harmony with beautifully judged silky tannins and a spine of acidity giving lift. The wine continues to open up whilst in the glass revealing ever more elements. A wonderful, charming wine that could almost be drunk now but would continue to evolve over the next 5-8 years.

2015 Te Whare Ra Pinot Noir, Marlborough

This wine seems to leap from the glass such is its vitality. Maybe not the most concentrated of the wines in the line-up but one with a drive that is positively infectious. Plenty of juicy red fruits, a little hint of florals, a mouthwatering spine of acidity that lifted the entire profile and just a little cinnamon spiced tannin to provide backbone and structure. Wonderfully energetic.

2013 Seresin Rachel Pinot Noir, Marlborough

Starting to move away from its primary aroma profile and instead take on bottle aged characters of forest floor, game and spice. There is a lovely richness to the palate with compact tannins forming a tight frame around the dark berried fruit. A more savoury, less vigorously fruited wine that is more about structure.

Showing the Marlborough wines also provided an opportunity to explore the theme of organic and biodynamic farming. Several people came up afterward to tell me they didn't realise Marlborough made excellent pinot noir. Another story to tell.

2015 Craggy Range Aroha Pinot Noir, Te Muna

A very polished, seamless wine. The aromatics are appealing; lots of dark fruit; damsons and bilberries and though there is a definite layer of new oak, it in no way overwhelms. Very silky and supple, graceful tannins coming through on finish. Great length. Again, a wine that seems dangerously drinkable now but will reward cellaring.

2015 Ata Rangī Pinot Noir, Martinborough

Not so polished as some but with a wonderful edginess that spikes both the senses and the intellect. The aromatics are all red fruited; raspberry, cranberry, even a touch of redcurrant. There is a positive edge of whole bunch here with some cinnamon spice and dried herbs. The palate is structured with a definite core of firm, yet silky tannin. New oak plays an essential yet supporting role. A wine that needs time to really hit its straps but will be remarkable when it does so. Superb.

2014 Trinity Hill Gimblett Gravels Syrah, Hawkes Bay

Plenty of blackberry and blueberry fruit with some dried violets and more than a touch of black pepper. Concentrated and dense yet with a silky suppleness to the tannins. Tasting beautifully on the day and shows just why there is so much interest in Hawkes Bay Syrah.

We didn't dwell on the prices of the wines but it was great to show wines that had modest price tags yet more than held their own amongst ambitiously priced bottles.

2014 Bilancia La Collina Syrah, Hawkes Bay

Magical. A captivating aroma; red cherry and raspberry with floral notes of lavender and dried rose petal. No mistaking the variety with the seasoning of fresh cracked pepper. Tannins are ripe, silky and well-judged with the oak very much in the background. A profound example of syrah and whilst so immensely enticing now must be a candidate for the cellar.

2014 Esk Valley The Terraces, Hawkes Bay

Huge colour. Intense nose packed with dark fruits; damson plum, bilberry and blueberry. There is an exotic note to the aroma, almost a touch of star anise. The wine has tremendous opulence but there is a freshness and florality that keeps the palate balanced and controlled, the tannins beautifully managed. This isn't a subtle Hawkes Bay take on Bordeaux but instead a wonderful expression of site, a wine that manages to walk the line between wildly exuberant and superbly poised. One of those wines that will continue to develop and mature in bottle but will need the consumer to have the strength of character not to consume too early.

2013 Villa Maria Ngakirikiri Gimblett Gravels Cabernet Sauvignon Hawkes Bay

Intensely fruited, reflecting the heat of the vintage, with crème de cassis, blueberry and currant, right at the upper end of the ripeness spectrum. A big wine in all respects; a real wave of finely grained tannin lies right across the palate, rich, warming alcohol, this is a full throttle style of wine that really needs time in the cellar to show at its best, as you'd expect for a wine with a lofty price tag. An exciting wine that highlights Hawke's Bay's potential with this stellar variety.

Someone in the audience tweeted the tasting was 'a revelation'. I hope so.

Jane Skilton

Thanks to

- TexSom, for inviting me and for paying my airfare and accommodation.
- Jason Hisaw, who organized the shipment of the wines and co-ordinated the huge team of sommeliers
- The sommeliers who washed and hand polished 3500+ glasses for the seminar, opened and decanted the wines and poured with speed and efficiency.
- Elaine who was the most gracious and thoughtful of co-presenters.

And lastly to the 10 wineries who generously donated their wines for this seminar.

Brancott Estate Limited Release 'Reflection' Series

With the tagline 'where wine and design meet', Brancott Estate's recently released 'Reflection' duo are a collaboration between chief winemaker Patrick Materman and designer Dror Benshetrit, who is responsible for the rather striking installation, 'Under/standing', now set on the Brancott vineyard. Intended to reflect the alchemy of art and science present in both sculpture and winemaking, the gift-boxed bottles were designed by Benshetrit and have a neatly sandblasted geometric pattern that reflects his 8m high, 52-piece steel matrix work. The wines are limited editions available only online or at the Brancott Estate cellar door, where they now accompany the inaugural 2015 collaboration winerack, 'Present'.

Standing out in the market place is a challenge for all wines, and there's plenty of evidence that in the absence of any other knowledge, many consumers buy based purely on wine labels. Brancott Estate have certainly created an eye-catching package, so what of the wines?

2016 Limited Edition 'Reflection' Sauvignon Blanc Sauvignon Gris \$60.00

Inspired by the great white wines of Bordeaux, which are typically blended with semillon or more occasionally, sauvignon gris. Brancott Estate of course, has quite a bit more of the latter than the former. An opulent nose of tropical and stonefruits, gentle oak spice (having undergone 18 months of barrel/bottle aging before release), ripe gooseberry and dry hay. The palate is textured with some waxy, leesy richness across the mid-palate (with just a touch of sweetness, though it is hard to discern if this is just fruit rather than a touch of residual sugar?) and a lick of phenolics on the finish, where the acidity also tightens its grip. As with the pinot noir, the palate is mostly front-weighted with alcohol poking through a bit on the finish. Apricots, mango and ripe citrus abound, with the more tropical and spice notes of the sauvignon gris (and oak) dominating the nose and the palate's crisp, quite linear nature belies sauvignon blanc. Not sure you'd immediately spot the varieties blind. The style works fairly well, though the alcohol mars the finish and I'm not entirely convinced by the prediction it will cellar well for up to 10 years. Or the price.

2015 Brancott Estate Limited Edition 'Reflection' Pinot Noir \$80.00

Released after 20 months in barrel, and eight in bottle, the wine is a barrel selection in which “a bold, dark-fruited style with a savoury expression” was sought. The key initial aroma is a rather vanilla-esque perfume, presumably from the oak as there's a coffeeish note too but also an odd, almost exotic perfumed note, that seems somewhat artificial, like those flavoured instant coffee mixes. Alcohol is apparent too. Medium bodied, with a richly fruitiness, classic sweet-fruited style but strangely lacking core intensity. You get a whoosh of sweet red/black fruit upfront then an oak/alcohol finish but it's oddly hollow in the middle, indeed my notes made bare mention of the actual fruit. Tannins are fairly fine, it's really pretty soft and innocuous, apart from the hot finish which contributes to an overall disjointed, rather manufactured experience. If I didn't like Patrick Materman so much, I'd be inclined to liken this to an over-made-up teenager trying a bit too hard to be sophisticated, but he's better than that and I have tasted some smart wines from him in the past. The bottles are striking and high quality but, for me at least, also reminded me of my parents' latticework pool fencing. Though anyone who remembers those ghastly Jean Paul Gaultier Piper Heidsieck bottles will realise this sort of exercise is fraught territory to begin with.

Emma Jenkins

We couldn't help but notice, over Christmas and New Year the paucity of Instagram posts of anyone remotely connected with NZ wine actually drinking the stuff. Our feeds were positively deluged with bottles of grower Champagne, Mosel Riesling, aged Burgundy, Barolo etc etc but there was nary a glimpse of anything from the Land of the Long White Cloud. Yet there are plenty of advocates for #eatlocal and there were many photos of people enjoying home grown vegetables and fruits. Maybe we aren't following the right people but did appear strange that so few seemed to be drinking anything from the homeland.

2014 Vidal 1888 Chardonnay, Hawke's Bay

Vidal's winemaker Hugh Crichton has made something of a speciality of crafting chardonnays that display gunflint, struck match sulphides in quite large doses. His much awarded Legacy Chardonnay really does push this style to the limit and, whilst the wines are impressive, and no doubt made with care and attention, sometimes one can't help feeling that striking and lauded though they are, at the end of the day they don't always make for the easiest of wines to enjoy.

So when the limited release 2014 Vidal 1888 Chardonnay arrived I approached the wine with some trepidation. Was I about to take the train to Sulphide Central?

2014 Vidal 1888 Chardonnay, Hawke's Bay

\$120.00

The nose and palate are quite different. Mouthwatering aromas of red grapefruit, lemon, acacia blossom and toasted hazelnut sit alongside quite pungent notes of reduction; gunflint, smoky bacon, struck match and toast. Tight and taut. Yet on the palate the wine has flesh and richness; concentrated citrus fruit, creamy hint of malolactic, oak definitely there but in support. A long, sustained finish. This is a bold wine to be sure but has much more drinkability (for me anyway) than the Legacy wine. Ambitiously priced, it will be interesting to see how it develops.

Emma tasted the wine independently and sent through her notes:

'Less sulphidey (than the Legacy release), more malo, butter notes, bran biscuit, intense, quite silky but firm acid, good concentration and length, less tight and more open knit across the palate than the Legacy, almost broad. Seems a step up in richness and concentration but style is pretty different too. Still has that overt grapefruity intensity but not such a hard edge, more flowing. Nice but surprisingly one dimensional, though it does build on the finish. Which is the least you'd hope at \$120 a bottle.'

She also emailed her thoughts;

"Tasting New Zealand wines day in, day out, you can see where the desire to work sulphides etc into chardonnay comes from, no doubt the hope of offsetting the intense sweet core of fruit that's so easy to obtain in NZ but which can as equally easily slide into overwhelming or simplistic styles. The problem is, much like with oak, it's a tricky proposition to get right. Too much is just that, but even in skilled hands, it can easily look like an adjunct rather than a harmonious part of the wine. Pure fruited intensity is NZ's blessing and while it would be hyperbolic to also say its curse, it undeniably makes creating compelling and savoury wines that much harder."

Jane Skilton

Greywacke Wild Sauvignon : A Retrospective

In May 2017, Kevin and Kimberley Judd with their co-winemaker Richard Ellis travelled the country presenting the seven vintages of Greywacke Wild Sauvignon produced thus far. Any time spent with Kevin is time well spent and whilst I wouldn't describe him as exactly loquacious, when he does say something it is either funny, insightful or unprintable. The tasting was an opportunity for more priceless quotes; "James Healy never minded the H₂S liberated by wild ferments because he was born in Rotorua", but there was plenty of insight and discussion on winemaking.

Greywacke Wild Sauvignon is sourced from 12 different vineyards, mainly around Fairhall. The grapes are pressed gently at night, the juice settled and then pumped into Mercurey oak barrels, usually around 5-7% new. The barrels are left alone for 11 months so that the 15-20 different yeast strains can go to work. Fermentation temperatures are relatively high at around 25C. Approximately 75% of the barrels go through malo. Some lees stirring to dissipate diacetyl. My notes were taken at the Auckland tasting. Emma was away at the time but Kevin kindly sent the wines and her notes are added here.

2015 Restrained, some red capiscum and snowpea. Floral. Doesn't seem to have much wildness about it but instead seems focussed and pure with lovely depth. Crisp and crunchy. (JS)

Pretty pure (though when tried alongside the 2017 estate sauvignon blanc it showed greater complexity and a hint of creamy funk). Snowpea and pineapple with basil and lime, a tightly wound palate, at this youthful stage a bit of a shapeshifter with creamy rich elements giving way to bright, succulent vivid acid directness. Lovely concentration and length. (EJ)

2014 More buttoned down and tight. Pure citrus with some capsicum and even a little white nectarine. Sulphide characters more noticeable. Seems a little leaner than the 2015, higher toned. (JS)

Less overt on the nose, with stonefruit, citrus and fresh cut grass plus a flinty, smoky edge. Youthful, tight with a pleasingly silky palate though without the weight of many of the others and a leaner, relatively clipped finish, albeit one with attractive wet stone traces. (EJ)

2013 Some real complexity starting to emerge, hints of bran biscuit. Chalky, smoky and crunchy. Plenty of vivid acidity with a touch of gun smoke. Appealing pithy texture. (JS)

Poised at the edge of primary fruit, just before the plunge into proper secondary complexity. A lovely medley of lemon/lime curd and white flower with passionfruit, grapefruit pith and wet river stone. Palate is creamy, textural with a mouth-watering, acidity offset by silky ripe concentrated fruit. Good length; dry, pithy finish is very moreish. One to watch. (EJ)

2012 Pungent asparagus. Bright and grassy. Not so much of the wild notes here, a more open style. Maybe doesn't have the richness nor concentration of some of the other vintages but still drinking beautifully. (JS)

Certainly an outlier in the bunch, with a more typical expression of bottled aged sauvignon and a less complex style overall. Punchy, classic herbaceous-driven aromatics, a lighter body, delicate green notes, balanced acid. It's pleasing to see the style has been adapted to reflect a more challenging year, the wine still ageing gracefully, just differently. (EJ)

2011 Seems surprisingly youthful, still very tight. An attractive almost biscuit bottle aged note emerging. Creamy and silky with a definite note of struck match. (JS)

Creamy, biscuity nose with flint and key lime pie highlights, has a sweet-fruited richness to the aromatics, the palate a richly fruited core with citrus, spice and textural leesy elements plus vivid, sleek acidity that draws an anchoring line down through the wine. (EJ)

2010 Still tight, still focussed still youthful. Strong fresh lime and lemon spine, some capsicum and basil. A hint of toasty complexity emerging. (JS)

More reticent aromatics, with more herbaceous tones. Lime and basil with lemon blossom, the palate is linear with a bright lemon finish. Dry and taut, with driving crunchy, vibrant acidity. Pulls up a bit shorter than some. (EJ)

2009 Really delightful, has taken on a creamy smoky quality. Kaffir lime and ripe lemon, almost a little bit of passionfruit hiding in there. Perfect now. (JS)

Mellow, creamy and complex with a lovely smoky undercurrent. Very harmonious. Plenty of concentration and vibrancy with good length and freshness. Super delicious, hitting its stride beautifully. Sits really well in the glass, suggesting no great hurry too. (EJ)

Whilst the tasting was put on to presumably highlight the ageing potential of these wines, I came away thinking there was no need to mature them if you didn't want to. It wasn't as though the wines were awkward and shy in youth – far from it. They were delightful and bold with pure, focussed fruit and a high degree of drink-me-now appeal. Yet if you did want to cellar the wines you'd be rewarded with a slight muting of the fruit and the emergence of some delightful bottle aged characters.

Though as an observation, may I say that if I never hear the phrase 'serious sauvignon' again, I won't be disappointed. I bristled when I heard a fellow judge at the Decanter World Wine Awards score a NZ barrel fermented sauvignon highly precisely because it reminded him of Pessac Leognan. Whilst the wine was good, and deserving of a decent score, I noted he wasn't quite so fulsome with praise for the unoaked, but to my palate, just as compelling entries.

No doubt there are some fantastic barrel fermented sauvignon blancs out there, sometimes made with a little semillon to add texture and weight, and often with more than a passing nod to oak, either new or old. But I'm not sure who decided for a sauvignon blanc to have gravitas it had to have some sort of barrel influence. To suggest that wines made in, dare I say it, the 'classic' NZ style ie. Fruit! Fruit! Fruit! are in some way second tier seems facile. NZ winemakers produce superb examples of our flagship grape equally well so maybe time to recognize the validity of both styles as serious wines?

Jane Skilton

2016 Amisfield 'Burn' Pinot Gris, Central Otago

It would be fair to say Amisfield is not exactly known for making leftfield styles of wine so I was somewhat surprised to find the half bottle of pinot gris that arrived was in fact a skin contact (orange) wine rather than the dessert wine that I had expected. Amisfield has fermented the grapes in open top barrels plus one clay amphora (hipster cred duly established?) varying the batches so some were destemmed, some not, etc. After a hand plunge, the ferments were left to go dry, then on their skins for another 30 days before pressing. There was some malo in spring before bottling unfiltered (no mention of any sulphur inclusion, or otherwise).

2016 Amisfield 'Burn' Pinot Gris, Central Otago

\$25.00

It's a pretty clean style, quite nicely delicate on the palate with a lightness of red berry fruit, *fines herbes* and distinct though balanced phenolic grip. Maintains a nice fruit intensity as well as a refreshing tonic-like element (it's only 10.5% abv), has a clear limpid character. Not super funky or daring but works the key elements of the style into a pretty approachable (and mercifully, stable) wine that should appeal to those who want to dip a toe in the waters of the wild side.

Emma Jenkins

Te Kano, Central Otago

A new Central Otago producer (Te Kano means seed in Māori) with three vineyards in Bannockburn and Northburn and Dave Sutton as the winemaker. With Central Otago becoming an ever more crowded market place as a new producer I'd be looking for ways to create a point of difference. The packaging in tall flute bottles and label, a stylized depiction of the kowhai tree, are eye catching and should stand out amongst the sea of Burgundy shaped bottles which seem to be the norm for the region.

2017 Te Kano Rose, Central Otago

\$27.00

Brightly coloured pink with an enticing aroma of watermelon, raspberry and red apple. Relatively light bodied with a delicate fruit flavour. Youthful and juicy, there is a just the merest touch of sweetness but this is more than offset by the crisp acidity.

2017 Te Kano Blanc de Noir, Central Otago

\$27.00

Very pale, almost water white. Chalky, tight aroma, cucumber and wet stone. Icing sugar. Youthful, quite soft in texture but the fruit profile is lifted and bright. This was my favourite of the three, reminiscent of varieties like pinot blanc ie. perfect for when you don't want to have a strongly varietal wine, something vinous rather than fruity.

2017 Pinot Gris, Central Otago

\$27.00

Strong baked pear and apple crumble. A tiny note of honey too. Palate has some appealing yellow apple skin flavours supported by citrus acidity leading to a crisp, pithy finish. A pretty, attractive take on pinot gris.

According to the accompanying notes, the 2017 Pinot Noir will be released in Spring 2018. The Rosé and Blanc de Noir are presumably made from less concentrated parcels of fruit (no mention of saignée of the main ferment) and not a bad idea to put these early drinking styles out into the market now to generate some interest (and no doubt cashflow). An interesting new producer and one to watch.

Jane Skilton

New and Noted

2017 Zephyr Riesling, Marlborough

\$23.00

Lovely mouth-watering aroma, almost gin and tonic-like with subtle lemon, freshly squeezed lime but also a little white nectarine. Off dry with very attractive succulent peachy flavours sitting alongside those of citrus and red apple. Nice length, well made, not forced but light on its feet. Super stuff. (JS)

2017 Lawson's Dry Hills 'Ranu' Marlborough

\$28.00

When I worked at Scenic Cellars, I always used to really enjoy the Marcel Deiss field blends, as much for the fact their often quirky blended characters meant you had to leave any preconceived ideas behind. I've been intrigued to see a few home grown examples popping up, quite fun to explore in a sea of mainly single variety whites. 'Ranu' means 'to mix' in te reo, and in this case means a rather nice mix of pinot gris, riesling and gewurztraminer. It has an intriguing nose of light white flowers, nectarines & red apple, a touch of spicy nutmeg and orange peel, more gently than overtly aromatic. Just off dry and lighter bodied, with a leaner, more citrusy fruit profile than nose would suggest (bitter lemon on finish) and a little one-dimensional but there's a nicely judged texture and touch of phenolic grip on the finish that is quite satisfying. Not the most bold or characterful wine but in its less typical blend and its mellow rather than exuberant nature, it's surprisingly satisfying to drink. (EJ)

2017 Ruru Gewurztraminer 2017, Central Otago

\$26.00

A lovely, very appealing style of gewurztraminer full of old bourbon rose, Turkish delight and musk. Pretty and delicate rather than powerful, a little touch of sweetness on the palate compliments the vibrant juicy textural edge. Light on its feet yet retains a great depth of flavour. (JS)

2014 Bilancia Chardonnay Hawke's Bay**\$30.00**

I might be biased in my enjoyment of this wine, as I drank most of it while doing a Wasgij jigsaw (my favourite Christmas present by far, and no, I don't care if you think jigsaws are stupid), so I was in a very cheery frame of mind. Plus I like Bilancia's proprietors, Warren and Lorraine, a lot. But that disclosure out of the way, I think almost anyone who liked wine would enjoy this. Plenty of ripe tree fruit and stone fruit, the gentlest honk of struck match, some sizzled butter and a pleasing nutty richness - all this and more just on the nose. Good palate intensity though not at all overbearing with fine lively line of acidity and lovely texture. Very precise line and good length. Achieves a pleasingly satisfying balance that captures the ripe, expressive Hawke's Bay fruit aligned with skilful winemaking that seemingly employs quite a few of the usual Chardonnay tricks with oak, malo, barrelly stuff etc but reins it all into quite a subtle, elegant example. It's kind of a nice nod to old school and new in one stylish package. Yum. (EJ)

2016 Pegasus Bay Main Divide Gewurztraminer, Waipara**\$21.00**

Pegasus Bay produces some lovely wines but with several now carrying hefty price tags (the 2013 Prima Donna Pinot Noir is truly glorious but is nudging \$100.00 retail) maybe not within the reach of most of us for regular drinking. Yet the second tier Main Divide range can offer some wonderful drinking and offers fantastic value for money. The 2016 Pegasus Bay Main Divide Gewurztraminer is intensely aromatic; musk, jasmine and white blossom with a ripe and generously textured palate full of apricot, gingerbread and sweet spice flavours. Definitely sitting in the medium-sweet category, this is a big, ballsy style of gewürztraminer with a long, sustained finish. An absolute steal at \$21.00. (JS)

Oldies But Goldies**2013 Rippon Gamay Noir, Central Otago**

I have raised children who show very little interest in wine. I don't mind, as it is my passion not theirs, and I'm a firm believer in letting one's offspring find their own path through life. (Our road trips were usually accompanied by small people wailing from the back seat as their father chose to listen to Wish You Were Here rather than the more requested Dorothy the Dinosaur. But 17 years later, having navigated his own way, Will's Spotify account now holds more than its fair share of Pink Floyd). Recently though, and much to my surprise, Will has developed a fondness for Beaujolais. I'd have thought it was a slightly spiky choice but after he'd complained that he didn't like 'heavy reds with that really spicy taste', I opened some Cru Beaujolais I'd bought from Maison Vauron. He loved them and now always looks expectantly when dinner is served. Tonight I realized I didn't have any bottles left so had to have a rootle through the cellar. To my joy, I found a bottle of 2013 Rippon Gamay lurking, so opened that instead.

Colour is vibrant. The nose is amazingly perfumed; loads of blueberry, cassis and damson with an inky florality. The palate is focused with chalky acid, not tannin, carrying the fruit. A backbone of mineral and iron filings. Not especially long on the finish so maybe right at its peak now. A really optimistic sort of a wine that manages to be both cheerful and thoughtful at the same time.

Jane Skilton

2007 Pegasus Bay Aged Release Riesling**\$40.00**

It can be a full-time job keeping on top of tasting samples, which means much of one's drinking becomes predominantly very young wines. Whist there's still plenty of pleasure to be had in those wines, I often find myself wondering what some of them will become with a few years under their belt. Enter Pegasus Bay, who have recently released two mature wines from the 2007 vintage, a riesling and a pinot noir. I particularly enjoyed the riesling, with its distinctly bottle aged, mellow creamy, toasty lemon meringue, beeswax and honeysuckle aromas and concentrated palate of marmalade-and-honey richness. The residual sugar sits up just ahead of its fruit intensity but as there's plenty of acid and the finish is long and clean with a slight stoniness (and touch of pleasingly dry phenolic bitterness), this does not throw the wine out of balance. Nice vibrancy, though there didn't seem any pressing need to keep it much longer either. Of course, ageing a wine doesn't automatically make it more noble than a younger wine but there's plenty of pleasure gained in being able to enjoy it at full maturity, and given how few people maintain cellars, \$40 seems a very reasonable amount to pay to have had Pegasus Bay do so on your behalf.

Emma Jenkins