

THE INDEPENDENT WINE MONTHLY

Welcome to the first issue of The Independent Wine Monthly.

The aim of this monthly online wine magazine is to provide an independent and honest commentary on wines available to the consumer in New Zealand. We have become increasingly aware of a lack of critical wine reviews in the media. We know how difficult it is to attend a tasting, enjoy a special lunch and then return to the keyboard and type an unflattering article. However we both felt that wine writers do consumers a disservice if they don't provide objective and honestly-held views.

This is one of the benefits of launching this magazine as a joint venture – we both have strongly held opinions and enjoy the forthright discussions that accompany each tasting session ! Together, we hope we can provide a more balanced view than if we tasted alone.

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We will also publish articles and opinion on current events but have decided against the idea of a 'wine blog'. Whilst we may find our pets enthralling or dinners fascinating, we have yet to be convinced that anyone else will.

The current fashion is to award each wine a score out of 100. But in our opinion this is too exact and detracts from a written tasting note. Words convey a truer sense of a wine's character than a numeric score alone. However we are aware too that most people love to receive a 'mark' to rate themselves against others and so we have succumbed to the inevitable and chosen to score out of 20.

The magazine is free of advertising or sponsorship as we believe that this is the only way to keep an independent and objective outlook. We hope that we are providing a useful and relevant addition to the wine scene in New Zealand. If you have any questions or comments on Independent Wine Monthly, please email : info@thewineschool.co.nz.

Jane Skilton MW
Emma Jenkins



Bordeaux 2003 Tasting

Emma Jenkins

An opportunity to taste wines from the much lauded 2003 Bordeaux vintage was one I couldn't refuse. Scenic Cellars holds an annual Bordeaux Tasting as part of its September Festival Weekend and with the 2003 vintage under the microscope it was with a spring in my step that I made my way to the Scenic Room.

The tasting is limited to twenty people and this year's ticket cost \$250, a snip considering the stellar line-up of wines: Chateaux Gazin, Angélu, Léoville-Barton, Montrose, Cos d'Estournel, Haut Brion, Margaux, Lafite-Rothschild, Mouton-Rothschild, Rieussec and d'Yquem plus a glass of rather smart Champagne Jacquesson No.730 NV to start and a good Cru Bourgeois and Sauternes to accompany lunch. Sadly Chateau Latour was unavailable but it seemed churlish to grizzle.

The wines were all poured ready to go on arrival and the room was redolent with the smell of fine claret. Several attendees had taken part in the previous evening's Debate Dinner (where wine industry figures battle it out over a topical moot) including Steve Bennett MW, Tony Bish and John Porter. Geoff Kelly who had kindly supplied the Montrose whilst Steve Smith MW led the tasting. There was much robust discussion of the wines although Mr Porter who was rather suffering from the effects of the previous night kept sneaking off for more Champagne to revive his flagging body and soul. Never has a man looked more dismayed by a flight of First Growths than poor old John).

The 2003 vintage in Bordeaux has been much hyped and prices are high. I have to confess to feeling nervous about any vintage labeled a "heat wave vintage" purely because I do, in general, like typicity in the wines I drink, especially those from the classic regions. I love the elegance and complexity of Bordeaux and I was nervous that these characters might be overwhelmed by masses of overripe fruit or worse, lack balance from the vines not coping from the heat.

I thought that these vintage conditions combined with the increasing popularity of the so-called 'Parkerised' wine style (overtly fruity, highly extracted and often overly alcoholic) just wouldn't be my style of Bordeaux. For these reasons I didn't buy any 2003 *en primeur* (excepting a couple of Sauternes –Rieussec and Yquem which were first offered at a decent price) but I was eager to see what how the finished wines measured up.

First up was **Gazin** (13% alcohol), the only Pomerol in the flight and possibly not showing the best of the appellation. It had a dense yet slightly faded garnet colour and was slightly closed on the nose but still showing black cherries and plum, cedar, bitter chocolate and gamey notes from *brettanomyces*. There was a hint of herbaceousness on the nose, suggesting perhaps that the vintage's extremely hot temperatures had closed the vines down before full phenolic ripeness was achieved and the unusually sweet (for Bordeaux) plump palate seemed to back that up. The palate was very plummy with masses of rather luscious fruit and certainly a tonne of oak. The intensity of the fruit at this point coped with the oak but the slightly hollow, rather extracted tannins made me wonder whether perhaps they might outrun the fruit in time. As the wine opened up, it displayed more cassis and licorice notes but still retained an overt 'fruit-cakey' character, common enough in Merlot-dominant wines. There was no doubt that this was still a good wine, but it just lacked the intensity, length and really, the character that would put it in the top league. **15.5 points.**

Angélus (13.5% alcohol) followed as the offering from St-Emilion (Premier Grand Cru Classé B). It was densely purple tending to ruby-black. Again slightly shy on the nose but beautifully fragrant with violets and rose petals as well as deep cassis and plum notes and a hint of pencil shavings and menthol. Evidently this wine has the highest percentage of Cabernet Franc ever used at Angélus (58%) hence the dominance of violets and deep colour. The palate was intense with big, ripe and silky tannins, very fine with masses of ripe plum, cassis and fat black cherry fruit.

Lovely balance with cedary oak and clearly beautifully made but just a hint of heat on the palate and a slight 'obviousness' to the style let it down a bit. It is interesting that 13.5% is hardly considered high in alcohol these days and yet it is a level somehow more noticeable in Bordeaux wines. Certainly a modern style with the emphasis on big fruit and big tannins and I suppose tending away from the style I personally prefer but it would be difficult to argue that it lacks quality. **17 points.**

Shifting to the Left Bank, we moved onto **Léoville-Barton** (13% alcohol) representing St.-Julien (Second Growth). Finally a wine that looked a bit more like the classic Bordeaux I fancy, even in this vintage displaying the somewhat masculine character of the appellation. Like the previous wines it had a dense, ruby-black colour but this time with a big obvious nose, though tight and not showing a lot of complexity at this point (fair enough in a wine this youthful), just pencil lead and cedar with some underlying cassis. The other obvious part of the nose was the *brettanomyces* and as to be expected this caused a fair amount of debate (with Bennett and Kelly particularly vociferous – Bennett at one point likening it to 'a mole on a pretty girl's face'). Personally, I felt that this wine was just teetering on the border of the Brett overwhelming the fruit and it will be interesting to see whether this is exacerbated by time in the bottle. Particularly interesting if you happen to own bottles I imagine. However, that aside this is a classic Cabernet Sauvignon wine with tobacco leaf and capsicum prominent alongside the chewy cassis fruit and ripe, grippy tannins. Massive, slightly extracted with an almost 'hard' character that should hopefully soften with time, this is a wine with great balance and length and at the price it fetches offers brilliant value. **16.5 points.**

The next two wines of the tasting were both Second Growths from St.-Estèphe; first up was **Montrose** (13% alcohol), very dense garnet in colour and a super-spicy nose with quite vanillin oak, masses of black fruits and some pencil lead. It opens up very fragrant, gamey and spicy and gives an impression of quite modern Cabernet rather than classic Bordeaux, although you would not mistake it for a New World wine.

The palate is smooth, bold and rich – this is a huge wine with seemingly endless sweet fruit but fabulous acid balance, masses of tannins but so silky and ripe (lots of fruit tannin as well as oak tannin) and it is just delicious. Lots of spicy oak on the palate but masterfully handled. Despite there being just so much of everything, this is a very refreshing wine to drink due to its finely balanced acidity. Seemingly endless length, and hinting at much complexity and harmony to come. You would be a pretty happy wine lover to have this in your cellar (especially at the relatively modest price it sells for) and delicious though it is now, I would love to see this wine in 15 to 20 years. **19 points.**

It was obviously a cracker of a vintage for St.-Estèphe as the Cos d'Estournel (13.5% alcohol) was even better. Amazingly deep garnet, almost black in colour with a restrained yet complex, complete nose of juicy black cherries, currants, cedar, black fruits, menthol, not as fragrantly and spicy as the Montrose, more smoky with meaty, almost mushroomy hints. Just lovely really, but then one gets to the unbelievable palate, so intense and concentrated and yet refined and elegant. Very, very youthful but somehow opening up with masses of complexity already – hot tar, coffee, mocha, tobacco, tea leaf, game; all there and more besides. Rich ripe fruit is finely balanced with oodles of tannin and poised acidity and well-integrated oak. This is a stunning wine, and if you get the chance to buy some leap at it. Could drink now but what a treasure this will be to uncork when it really hits its straps 15 or so years from now. **19.5 points.**

Onwards then to the First Growths and first up was **Haut Brion** (13% alcohol) from Pessac-Léognan. This wine split the room; not only because of the presence of Brett but because it was at the lighter, and some said simpler, end of the scale although this was possibly accentuated by coming after the supersonic Cos. It was commented by Steve Smith that Haut Brion has frequently not been up to the standard expected of the First Growths and even on the basis of this one tasting it would be difficult to argue against that with wines like the Cos snapping at its heels.

Nevertheless, I thought it had a lovely nose, very pure with creamy vanilla brûlée, perfumed cherry, cassis, cedar, tea leaf, cigar box, tobacco and pencil lead, it was a nose you could smell all day and it continued to offer up aromas as the tasting wore on. The palate was also lovely, again lighter and elegant with mineral and earth notes mingling with cassis, plum and blueberries. Very ripe tannins and lots of fruit but perhaps slightly hollow, but still a very finely tuned wine. **18 points.**

Next up was **Margaux** (13% alcohol), again exhibiting a deep garnet colour but this time with more crimson apparent. The nose showed charry oak, toast (or should I use the more exotic *pain grillé?*), chocolate, licorice, cassis and hints of white flowers and menthol. The palate was slightly closed but exhibited plenty of power and great density with a very persistent yet rather delicate and perfumed finish. Not as high in acid as some of the earlier wines but still beautifully balanced. Certainly an elegant wine, the Margaux hallmark of course; very fine and just dandy. This wine looked more of a baby than others in the lineup at this point in time but certainly doesn't lack the stuffing to go the distance. **18.5+ points.**

To finish, a couple of Pauillac First Growths. **Lafite-Rothschild** (12.5% alcohol) has always been my favourite First Growth and by crikey this wine did not disappoint. Yes, there was a touch of brett again and a definite leafy cabernet nose but it also showed masses of very ripe fruit, perfumed with cedar and spice, graphite and menthol. A very classic, beautiful palate, almost creamy and the very picture of balance. Oozing power but utterly seamless with it. A very dry and fine finish, this wine was all that is good about Bordeaux. Several tasters whipped out scores of twenty (Parker himself gave it 100 points) but I have restrained myself with **19.5++ points.** I'll bet it will be 20 points-plus in twenty years, no trouble at all.

Last of the First Growths was **Mouton-Rothschild** (13% alcohol) and again a room-divider, though purely on style this time. Deep inky garnet, it has a rather leafy nose, toasty and vanillin from the oak and also strangely prune-like amongst the strong cassis. Of all the wines in the tasting, this was the one that showed the most obvious signs of the vines closing down before reaching phenolic ripeness and suffering from excess sugar ripeness. The palate was certainly very ripe and powerful with plenty of tannins but it was not as seamless as its other First Growth cousins, instead showing a somewhat hollow centre and coarseness to the palate. Very grippy tannins persist and there is a hint of heat on the finish. Having said all that it is still a very good wine, but at this level, one should be picky and the Mouton just didn't quite seem to pull it all together as the other wines had. It was somehow just not as satisfying or complete and lacked the freshness of the other wines. **17 points.**

Next up were the Sauternes and we began with **Rieussec** (14% alcohol), the First Growth that could be said to be definitely in the 'Super Second' class. I was eager to taste this wine, having bought half a dozen bottles, but to be honest I was pretty disappointed. It was certainly fragrant ; almond blossom, flowers, toasted bread, marmalade, honey and citrus blossom,; all this on what was regarded as a slightly shy nose. The palate was an absolute whopper, very, very sweet, lots of spice and oak and yet somehow lacking lushness and depth. The alcohol showed and it seemed to lack the acid that would have stopped the rather cloying finish. All fur coat and no knickers sprang to mind (mine, anyway) and I prayed fervently that it would transform into a more balanced, complete wine with time. I sat on the fence for a bit with 16-18 points, but dammit, it really was a **16 points** wine. Look for the 2001 instead.

But boy were we in for a treat with the **Yquem** (13.5% alcohol). This wine was from the 2001 vintage (the 2003 being some while from release) and what a wine! I can't even begin to do justice to how delicious this wine was, the best Yquem I have ever tried (out of around fifteen different vintages including the great 1990) and all I can say is rush out and buy a bottle at once.

Except that at \$1100+ per bottle and very little still available in New Zealand, that is not so easy to do. However, should you ever get a chance to lay your hands on some, do so; you will not regret it whatever you pay. It is that good. Luscious, exotic, seamless, complex, rich, concentrated, elegant, exquisitely balanced, amazingly textural, very sweet but so fresh. Incredible. **20 points**, no question at all. Probably more.

So it seems I need not have worried about 2003 producing big, flabby monsters rather than typical 'classic' Bordeaux wines (ahem, nobody mention Chateau Pavie). The wines certainly reflected the atypical vintage but I would like to think that in a blind tasting they really could not have been anything but Bordeaux. The finesse and fineness of the wines, the complexity and elegance, the seamless tannins; (yes, I know that wines with those attributes are produced elsewhere (and Mr Bish and Mr Smith will give spirited cases for their own wines) but no where do they seem to appear in the characteristic gracious combination as they do in top Bordeaux. It appears that in 2003 the Bordelais for the most part have taken the opportunity to produce stunning wines that still have their legendary *terroir* expressed in every inch in the bottle. Even more 'modern' wines like the Montrose, are very much Bordeaux wines and utterly delicious with it. I am now cursing not having bought *en primeur* and will have to take my chances finding any remaining bargains still on the shelves. A tasting like this really is a wonderful opportunity to both get a snapshot of a vintage and also taste a number of fabulous, often difficult to obtain, expensive wines for very little outlay. I shall certainly be putting my name down for next year's tasting of the 2004 vintage.

Esk Valley Tasting

Jane Skilton

When I think about what first attracted me to my husband – I'd have to say his shoes. Beaten up deck shoes, worn without socks, were simply irresistible to a working class girl from the Midlands. When I first introduced him to my parents, my father took one look at the naked ankle and almost threw him out. Nearly twenty years later it seems my love of shoes doesn't arouse quite the same ardour in him. When I return from a shopping expedition we always have to run through the same ritual.

Him : " Did you buy anything ?'

Me : " Yes "

Him : " Don't tell me "

Me : " Then I won't "

Him : " Tell me it's not shoes. How many pairs do you need ?

Whereas once I would have put up a spirited argument now I leave him to rant and rave, his voice becoming but a distant noise as I go into the bedroom to unwrap the box and inhale the smell of new leather.

You can tell a lot about someone by the shoes they wear and New Zealand winemakers are easy to spot. The average home grown winemaker will have affected a touching ensemble, usually comprising shorts, tee shirt and polar fleece, often topped off with a woollen hat, always accompanied by sunglasses. Scruffy boots are de rigeur.

When I visited Gordon Russell at his Esk Valley Winery last year it was raining so hard the winery roof was leaking, torrents of water rushed under foot and visibility was down to mere metres. Yet when I followed Russell up the rickety winery steps I couldn't help but notice he was wearing an immaculate pair of chocolate brown suede shoes. Suede shoes and torrential rain. Only a true man of style could have pulled that one off.

Gordon Russell has been at at Esk Valley since 1990, and was promoted to chief winemaker in 1993. The collection of ramshackle buildings clinging to the side of the hill is deceiving. The winery may be old fashioned but the winemaker and his wines are anything but. Though Esk Valley is part of the Villa Maria group, it doesn't share the same high profile as its bigger sibling. And I get the feeling that this is just how Russell likes it.

At the launch of the new releases in Auckland, Russell was clear about his hopes for the 2006 vintage. "Undoubtedly the 2006s are the best wines we have made at Esk Valley. There was no rot in the vineyards, the fruit was clean. The vines were a year older and I had another year of winemaking experience under my belt." I get the feeling that Russell doesn't need a lot more experience. He is a quiet man, not intent on making rash decisions but refining his style each vintage. The Esk Valley wines may not be as powerful nor bold as those made at Villa Maria but they have just as much personality and class.

When I sat down to write this article I was mindful of the Wine Review's main aim - 'to provide an objective view' These wines were tasted, not blind, at the annual Esk Valley new release launch in Auckland, with a rather agreeable lunch served afterwards. .

2005 Esk Valley Black Label Riesling 17.5

Blended from two parcels of fruit, hand harvested and whole bunch pressed, the fermentation was stopped to retain a certain level of sweetness.

Already approachable with a strong, floral and lime peel aroma. A touch of minerality coupled with mouthwatering acidity. Residual sweetness gives a kabinett style of wine. Bright and clean. Would cellar but delightful already.

2006 Esk Valley Black Label Sauvignon Blanc 17.0

A blend of different Hawke's Bay vineyards this is an outstanding effort. Very zesty and up-front with passionfruit, orange peel and lime aromas. Excellent fruit ripeness with strong acidity providing lift. A small percentage of semillon (3%) was fermented in old french oak and though not apparent on the nose, adds an extra dimension of richness on the palate.

2006 Esk Valley Verdelho 16.5

From the Omahu vineyard, hand harvested and fermented in two batches; one tank fermented with inoculated yeast, the other barrel fermented. Quite muted on the nose; marzipan, stone fruit with touches of talcum powder. and apricot. There is an almost viognier-like opulence on the palate. Some residual sweetness balances the pithy, citrus peel characters. At 14.5% alcohol it's a robust, fairly intense wine.

2006 Esk Valley Pinot Gris 18.0

Russell believes that pinot gris has no flavour before it reaches 24.5 brix. He picked the bulk of the grapes at 27 brix but then the rain set in. This delayed harvesting and when the final batch was picked it came in at 30 brix. If fermented to dryness the alcohol would have been too great so to overcome this the fermentation was stopped leaving a residual sugar of 25g/litre. Almost a late harvest style; baked pear, and wood smoke with spice and almost a

touch of honey. Concentrated and intense with a lovely thread of mineral acidity lifting the profile. Great length.

2005 Esk Valley Black Label Merlot

16.5

A black cloud passed over when Russell declared he was looking to make this wine in a more immediate, new world style, softer and generous with possibly more new oak. Thankfully the wine hasn't completely moved over to the dark side. Whereas there is plenty of spicy, creamy oak to counterpoint the fruitcake and dark plum flavours the wine still retains a pleasing touch of herbaceousness. (I like a touch of sappy, stemmy character in Bordeaux varietals. It adds a refreshing, almost brisk note and can prevent reds from becoming too soupy and dull).

Jackson Estate (www.jacksonestate.co.nz)

2006 Sauvignon Blanc	Marlborough	16.5
2006 Sauvignon Blanc 'Grey Ghost'	Marlborough	16.5

The **2006 Sauvignon Blanc** exhibits pungent aromas; nettles, gooseberry and passionfruit so typical of Marlborough. The palate has a good degree of richness and weight, balanced by crisp, crunchy acidity. The wine tends towards the herbaceous spectrum of the variety and thankfully avoids the overtly tropical, slightly cloying style that a lot of producers seem to be aiming for. Not massively intense but has an appealing textural elegant quality that lends itself to food and wanting to have another glass. A contrasting style to the regular bottling, the **2006 Grey Ghost Sauvignon Blanc** (named after a gum tree planted in 1867) is a spare-no-expense, limited volume, partially barrel-fermented offering. It shows a similar restraint to the standard label, with oak aromas noticeable on the nose but not overwhelming the grassy, gooseberry, red apple notes. There is a more exotic, glacé pineapple and guava note with a hint of vanilla and spice from the oak. The palate is softer than usually expected for a sauvignon blanc but the acidity still belies the variety and adds good structure to the smooth, ripe fruited palate. Like the aromas, the flavours are slightly more tropical, with pineapple and mango hints, but also showing the gooseberry and nettle of sauvignon. This is a good honest attempt at a different style of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc and it is pleasing to see they are not attempting to overwhelm the hallmark pungent fruit of the region but to offer consumers an interesting alternative on the groaning shelves of sauvignon.

Clayridge Vineyards (www.clayridge.net.nz)

2006 Sauvignon Blanc	Marlborough	15.5
2005 Excalibur Sauvignon Blanc	Marlborough	17.0
2006 Pinot Gris	Marlborough	16.5
2005 Pinot Noir	Marlborough	16.5
2004 Pinot Noir	Marlborough	16.0
2004 Excalibur Pinot Noir	Marlborough	17.0

As befits a winemaker who likes medieval sword-fighting, the **2006 Sauvignon Blanc's** pungent aromas spear the nostrils with green capsicum, nettle, gooseberry and spearmint. A herbaceous style on the nose but the palate offers more tropical fruit with pineapple and passionfruit alongside gooseberry and cut grass. The palate has moderate to good intensity with sweet (too sweet?) ripe fruit lingering on the finish. It has a slightly hot finish, although the bottle states 13.5%. The extra weight and texture (from partial cask fermentation) of the wine suggest this is a sauvignon blanc aimed at grown-ups. The **2005 Excalibur Sauvignon Blanc** is a more 'serious' wine. Very powerful with a rich fresh apricot and acacia honey nose, the wine was fermented in older French oak barrels, using wild yeast.

The result is a complex, strongly textural wine with a rich, intense flavour. We liked this wine; it is well-made and attractive drinking but couldn't say that we could readily identify it as sauvignon blanc. Does this matter? Should the wine be judged on the quality alone rather than varietal purity? Hard to say but we think anyone plucking this off the shelf expecting classic Marlborough Sauvignon could be in for a big fright. However, good on Mike Just for striking out in a new direction and clearly he has the skills to make it work. With a very slight pinkish hue, the **2006 Pinot Gris** is a youthful restrained wine with touches of apple compote, baked pear and digestive biscuit. Off dry, it has a smooth silken texture, very intense fruit sweetness (14.5% alcohol) and a powerful, warm finish. The **2005 Pinot Noir** has an appealing aroma; dark plum, wild raspberry and morello cherry with a very slight hint of fresh mushroom and dried herb. The palate has good fruit sweetness, softish tannins and a generous, almost fleshy flavour. This is a good example of Marlborough Pinot Noir, offering ripe fruit, nicely balanced acidity and a long finish. Not much complexity at this stage but then it is very much in its youth. The **2004 Pinot Noir** is starting to hit its straps, the nose showing savoury plum and red fruit aromas with a little forest floor developing. The slightly leaner vintage character shows through; this isn't a wine for extended cellaring but offers attractive mid term drinking. **2004 Excalibur Pinot Noir** is a clear step up from the regular bottling. The nose is impressive with a very attractive aroma of plum berry and spice with quite noticeable mocha, toasty oak. A voluptuous pinot with plenty of generous fruit flavours, a touch of dry tannin and a silken, smooth texture. Perhaps just a touch hot on the finish? The persistence of flavour suggests the wine will develop well.

Terravin Vineyards (www.terravin.co.nz)

2006 Sauvignon Blanc Semillon	Marlborough	14.0
2005 Omaka Pinot Noir	Marlborough	15.0
2005 Hillside Selection Pinot Noir	Marlborough	16.5
2005 J Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot	Marlborough	16.5

The **2006 Sauvignon Blanc Semillon** is quite heavily reduced on the nose, showing some burnt rubber, burnt match characters overlaying a green, herbaceous aroma. The palate is lean with firm lemon and lime acidity, with a touch of fatness from the addition of semillon. In the past, some Terravin pinot noirs have had noticeable levels of brett, which spoiled wines that would otherwise have been pretty good. Thankfully the **2005 Omaka Pinot Noir** is a considerable step up in quality and free from taint. Deeper in colour than the Hillside selection, with a nose of raspberry, blueberry, and rhubarb compote. Not too much oak which allows the berry fruit to show through. Tightly structured with a faintly herbal and stemmy note to the palate finishing with some quite drying tannins. The **2005 Hillside Selection Pinot Noir** is more dense with a richer nose, more vanillin and plum. Quite tightly knit; plenty of oak. More depth and intensity. Quite an extracted, dense savoury wine. The **2005 J Cabernet Merlot** is a huge increase in quality over the 2004. It is a much

more complex, dense wine with some dark cassis and farmyardy notes combined with toasty new oak. Moderately concentrated with a sweetness of fruit. Refreshing acidity and finely balanced oak tannins adds structure. Elegant.

Taltarni (www.taltarni.com.au)

2004 Taltarni Vintage Brut	Victoria/Tasmania	15.0
2004 Taltarni Vintage Brut Taché	Victoria/Tasmania	16.5

The **2004 Vintage Brut** is a blend of chardonnay, pinot noir and pinot meunier from Tasmania and Victoria, both regions renowned for producing quality sparkling wines. Made by the traditional method (the same as Champagne), it is pale gold with medium bead and a rather pungent nose of lemon, green apples, acacia flowers, a hint of breadiness and just a suspicion of a herbal edge. The palate is light, refreshing with soft acidity but an appealingly crisp finish. This is a relatively simple wine but it is nicely made without any rough edges. The **2004 Vintage Brut Taché** is pale salmon pink in colour (*taché* is the French for stained) and takes its name from the addition of a small amount of red wine at the disgorgement stage. The nose is moderately complex with a strawberry, smoky aroma. The flavours are creamy and berryish, a sort of vinous summer pudding. There is a touch of sweetness that helps soften the acidity yet the wine finishes dry. More complexity and interest than the standard Brut label. Again, a pleasant wine, not particularly distinguished but certainly agreeable enough sparkling wine at this price point.

Escarpment Vineyard (www.escarpment.co.nz)

2006 The Edge Pinot Gris	Martinborough	15.5
2005 Pinot Gris	Martinborough	17.0
2005 Pinot Noir	Martinborough	18.0
2006 Hinemoa Riesling	Martinborough	17.0

The **2006 The Edge Pinot Gris** is a new departure for Larry McKenna, a winemaker renowned for crafting wines intended for the cellar. Immediately aromatic nose, fresh pears, some white flowers and a touch of quince. Quite a broad palate, off-dry with moderate acidity and intensity and a powerful, warm finish. Escarpment Pinot Gris seems to be a work in progress, with each vintage a step along the road of refinement. The debut 2001 vintage was immensely enjoyable; primary and immediate with an apparent sweetness whilst the **2005 Escarpment Pinot Gris** offers a distinctive much, much drier style. An almost creamy nose, some stone fruit and baked apple and a touch of spice. The wine is barrel fermented but the oak doesn't overpower, instead adding a savoury, mealy character. Flavours of fresh butter, baked pear and bran biscuit combine with good fruit intensity to give a powerful densely flavoured wine. Perhaps more reminiscent of chardonnay than pinot gris, this

is a wine that may surprise those more used to the fairly neutral sweeter style of NZ pinot gris.

Larry McKenna is widely regarded as one of the country's finest pinot noir winemakers and his own venture at Escarpment has been watched with great interest since its inception in 1999. **The 2005 Escarpment Pinot Noir** is the fourth vintage and things appear to be moving along nicely. The wine is deep ruby red and the nose clearly varietal with ripe juicy cherry, black doris plum, strawberry and spice notes laced through with slightly charry oak imparting cedar and additional spice. The palate is dense, and expresses that distinctive savoury character that seems to be common throughout the region. It is richly fruited but not overtly sweet and while it has good intensity and length, Larry does not seem to have pushed the wine too hard too soon and it retains charm and softness. It will be fascinating to see what this vineyard produces as the vines age.

Escarpment's first true dessert-style wine, the **2006 Escarpment Hinemoa Riesling** is made in a beerenauslese style with 10.2% alcohol by volume. The nose is light with pure varietal character showing slightly honeyed citrus notes, apple and white flower and slight spice hints. The palate is very rich, intensely sweet (120g/litre residual sugar) and comes as a bit of a surprise after the light nose. It has good balance between acid and sugar and offers attractive citrus and faint marmalade notes. Moderate intensity and length add up to an attractive dessert wine that would happily grace the end of a meal on its own, with cheese or lighter style fruit-based desserts.

Matua Valley (www.matua.co.nz)

2006 Innovator Pinot Gris	Marlborough	14.0
2006 Judd Estate Gewurztraminer	Gisborne	15.5
2005 Innovator Syrah	Hawke's Bay	16.0

From the Shingle Peak vineyard in Marlborough, the **2006 Matua Innovator Pinot Gris** belongs to Matua's Innovator series. However, let's hope they don't follow this little innovation to its completion as the wine is rather disappointing. The nose has a slightly vegetal character and while there are characteristic pinot gris notes of pear, spice and apple there is also an unappealing old oak component that leaves a wrinkle in your nose. The palate has some of the weight and texture that one associates with the variety but the wine is disappointingly insipid and short. It is not a horrible or faulty wine but it is just not much of anything. At \$15 one might excuse this but Matua are asking around \$30 for this wine. It is surprising that this is the case as the company has an excellent reputation for well made and usually well-priced wines. Perhaps we had a bad bottle, perhaps not; either way this is probably not one to seek out from either the Matua stable or the Pinot Gris shelf. The **2006 Judd Estate Gewurztraminer** is a single vineyard selection. Moderately complex with an aromatic nose; jasmine, kaffir lime leaf, musk and root ginger. The palate has a lovely texture with silky, rose petal and lychee flavours. Dry and elegant with decent concentration and a long finish, this is not a powerful nor intense wine but shows good balance and poise.

The **2005 Bullrush Syrah** has a moderately intense nose with dark plum, blueberry and a touch of crushed pepper. The oak is quite dominant and contributes a smoky, vanilla complexity. The palate is youthful and tight with medium dry tannins very much at the fore. The wine has good fruit sweetness and concentration and finishes well but at present is a little bit youthful and disjointed. With a couple of years in bottle it should come together nicely.

Gladstone Vineyard (www.gladstone.co.nz)

2006 Sauvignon Blanc	Wairarapa	15.5
2006 Pinot Gris	Wairarapa	15.5
2006 Viognier	Wairarapa	15.0
2006 Rosé	Wairarapa	15.0
2005 Pinot Noir	Wairarapa	16.5
2004 Auld Alliance	Wairarapa	14.0

The **2006 Sauvignon Blanc** has a faintly tropical nose with hints of fresh straw, guava and gooseberry. The palate is moderately intense with balancing acidity and a clean finish. A restrained style. The **2006 Vineyard Pinot Gris** is drier than most, definitely leaning in the direction of pinot grigio. Gently spicy, with ripe peardrop and talcum/sherbert notes on both nose and palate. Moderate intensity with a pleasant spicy finish. A pleasant wine but not distinguished and just lacking concentration. **2006 Viognier** is gently aromatic with touches of orange peel, jasmine and faint herbal notes. The palate has some concentration with firm acidity. Almost a touch nutty, with a hot, spicy and just off dry finish. Lacking flesh and fruit intensity, this is a fairly lean style viognier. **2006 Rosé** has a pale salmon pink colour and very faint strawberryish soft fruit flavour. Gentle and moderately concentrated. Off dry. The **2005 Pinot Noir** is starting to take on some plummy aromas with hints of black cherry, spice and a touch of mushroom and undergrowth. Tightly knit, some drying tannins. Vanilla and spice. A the lighter end of the muscular Martinborough style. The **2004 Auld Alliance** is a blend of merlot and cabernet franc and has a pale ruby colour with advanced bottle developed characters on the nose of leather, spice and coffee grounds. Really very advanced. Just a hint of brett. A soft, style, lacking fruit and weight. Drink now.

Thornbury Wines (www.thornbury.co.nz)

2005 Sauvignon Blanc	15.0
2006 Pinot Gris	16.0
2005 Chardonnay	17.0
2005 Pinot Noir	17.0
2005 Merlot	16.5

The **2005 Sauvignon Blanc** is starting to show its age, especially in contrast to the new

release 2006s now appearing onto the shelves. Faintly peasy, asparagus and green bean, with firm acidity and lemon fruit, starting to turn a little broad and showing alcohol on the finish. The **2006 Pinot Gris** is highly aromatic with pear drop, talcum powder and apple compote aromas. Off dry with lush, rich fruit flavours, delicately spicy and ripe. Moderate to good length with an appealing touch of spice on the finish. The **2005 Chardonnay** is pale straw in colour and on the nose, oak is immediately noticeable; vanilla, fresh cream and an almost mealy character. Sweetly fruited with ripe peach and nectarine flavours with spicy oak providing a counterpoint. Only 13.5% alcohol but quite warm and powerful with a lush, rich warming finish. The **2005 Pinot Noir** has a deep colour with an lush aroma of dark cherry and plum alongside a touch of cedar/cherry oak. Sweetly fruited with moderately juicy, dark berry fruit, slightly stinky but not unripe nor green. Good savoury depth not just light and pretty. A generous wine, pinot noir for beginners. The **2005 Merlot** is deeply coloured and the nose is at once appealing with a juicy black pastille, dark fresh berry note. A nice herbal edge adds interest with cedary oak adding complexity. The tannins are well integrated. Whilst perhaps not up to the standard of the 2004, this is a very creditable effort.

Craggy Range (www.craggyrange.com)

2006 C3 Chardonnay	Hawke's Bay	16.0
2005 Chardonnay Single Vineyard Te Muna	Martinborough	17.0
2005 Chardonnay Single Vineyard Gimblett Gravels	Martinborough	17.5

The **2006 C3 Chardonnay**, is a new wine from the ever expanding Craggy stable, made from fruit grown in the Kidnapper's Vineyard at Te Awanga. Heralded by Craggy as a "chardonnay for sauvignon blanc lovers", this apparently means it is in a Chablis style, although it's fairly certain we can assume that Steve Smith MW knows there is no sauvignon blanc in Chablis and not usually much oak either. Craggy Range is aiming for a lightly oaked, minerally style of chardonnay, so has it achieved its goal? Well, the nose may disappoint those who are fans of Chablis, although there is nothing intrinsically wrong. It offers white peach and nectarines with a soft vanillin oak component. The palate shows that this is indeed a departure in style from the usual Craggy chardonnays – it is light, although not lacking in intensity, and fruit-dominated. There isn't an excess of the minerality Chablis is famous for but there is some flintiness to the palate and, while ripe-fruited, does have a certain leanness not seen in other chardonnays from Craggy Range. There is moderate intensity and length and the wine should be a good match for seafood. In as far that it offers a fresher, fruitier style, then Craggy has achieved its goal of a 'chardonnay for sauvignon lovers', but it is hard to see that it has really created anything all that different from many other lightly or unoaked chardonnays on the market.

There has clearly been no expense spared when choosing oak in which to age the **2005 Te Muna Chardonnay**. The nose has a strong, new oak character with plenty of cedar, cinnamon and sweet spice. Thankfully there is still some fruit to be found. Lurking beneath the

toasty oak is nutty apple and spicy stone fruit aromas. The palate exhibits much of the same with spicy brown-biscuit oak and creamy peachy sweet fruit. This is a bold wine, well made with good intensity and length and should repay a few years in the cellar, although it is attractive enough drinking now. The **2005 Craggy Range Gimblett Gravels Chardonnay** is textbook Hawke's Bay chardonnay with a lemon meringue nose again laced with expensive oak. The quality and amount of sweet fruit carries the wood but those looking for restraint need not apply. There are pineapple, fig and biscuity notes and the palate is balanced by fine acidity which leads to an attractive long finish. As ever with Craggy's wines it is very well made with excellent integration of all components and crafted to appeal to both the novice, with its rich sweet fruit, and the enthusiast with its quality and emerging complexity. There is already quite a lot going on in this wine and the overall quality suggests it should improve nicely with a few years under its belt.

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