

THE MAGIC OF MARLBOROUGH

Wine regions usually involve generations of gradual evolution – even in the New World. The Barossa valley was planted as long ago as the 1840s, and only achieved worldwide recognition in the late eighties.

But Marlborough, one of the world's most exciting wine regions, now that is a different story altogether!

When I grew up in New Zealand in the nineteen fifties and sixties the region was a relatively poor agricultural district. The soils weren't up to much and farmers eked out a living – just. Yes, it was hauntingly beautiful, especially around the coastline and inland mountain ranges, but this didn't produce much money. Anyway in those days New Zealand hadn't worked on the tourist industry, so if a few hardy Americans turned up there was no way they could spend their money. I remember staying in a hotel in 1967 and asking for a bottle of Champagne, from the restaurant wine list, in the bar. The manager was summoned and he was able to help my education along by informing me “This is a Bar. It is for beer. See that room through there – that's the restaurant where ponces like you drink their wine.”

My how things have changed in such a short time! In 1973, a visionary New Zealander .Frank Yukich, the owner of Montana, changed everything dramatically. All of New Zealand's vineyard owners, based in the North Island, considered the South Island too cold for commercial grape growing, but Yukich had read reports to the contrary. He argued with the doomsayers, and his own board, and with the erudite support of Professor Berg of Davis University, California's viticultural department won support for 'Project Marlborough'. Montana began planting a 2,000 acre vineyard in August of that year. It would be great to report that everything went brilliantly. Unfortunately it didn't. The vines were planted just before one of the region's worst droughts and 80% of the grapes didn't survive their first summer ! In the next March 20,000 replacement vines, each grown in individual terracotta pots, were trucked down from Montana's Auckland nursery – and these survived. Two other years are crucial - in 1976, Montana harvested their first crop of Muller-Thurgau and Cabernet Sauvignon. The grapes were packed in wooden apples crates and trucked back to the Gisborne winery, on the east coast of the North Island, for processing. In the same year they planted New Zealand's first commercial Sauvignon Blanc vineyard. Then in 1978 they built a winery in the region.

In 1984 I visited my home country and was amazed at the quality of the ‘new’ wines, in particular the Marlborough Sauvignon Blancs. I wrote my first book, “Enjoying Wine” in 1985, and dedicated a whole chapter to New Zealand. No other wine book had ever done this – even Hugh Johnson’s lofty “World Atlas of Wine” only acknowledged the country as an appendage on the last page of the Australia section, so my publishers weren’t exactly happy, and considered my attitude to be a touch of over-zealous patriotism. I took a chilled bottle of Montana’s first UK release of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc along to the editorial meeting and poured – after tasting the wine there were no more objections. In 1990 at London’s International Wine & Spirit Competition, Montana won the prestigious ‘Marquis de Goulaine’ trophy for the world’s best Sauvignon Blanc

From relatively impoverished sheep rearing to the world’s finest wine. All this in the space a mere sixteen years. ! It is one of the great contemporary wine stories.

TINDALL ESTATE SAUVIGNON BLANC
from
A UNIQUE MARLBOROUGH VINEYARD

This magnificent estate is a rarity in the region where there are very few wineries that only process fruit from their own vineyards. Here are a few interesting facts and figures.....80% of the New Zealand wine industry is owned by overseas giants. And, there are over 550 growers in Marlborough, most of them supplying the big guns. For instance the ‘boutique winery’ image of the iconic *Cloudy Bay* is totally erroneous. It is owned by the Louis Vuitton Moet Hennessy group. Yes, they do have vineyards, but they buy in huge amounts of grapes from contract growers in order to fuel the financial demands of their French shareholders.

Tindall Estate is totally different. A family owned spread of 22 hectares in the Wairau River valley. The grapes were planted in 1995 so are beautifully mature now. They prune ruthlessly for low yield fruit and don’t buy in any grapes. They hang a little longer than most “to ensure slow ripening which gives delicious flavour profiles. We are not fans of the overtly aggressive Sauvignon Blanc style.” Their winemaker is the superstar Dr. John Forrest.

Terry & Linley Sowman put it succinctly to me:
“We are proud to put our face behind the label. Small family producers such as us must survive to ensure the passion and romance associated with wine.”
Quite

WE ARE OFFERING THE SUPERB 2010 SAUVIGNON BLANC
AT THE SPECIAL PRICE OF £21.50 A BOTTLE
Or £20 for VIP and mailing list customers
As long as stocks last...
Available by the Glass & Carafe

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