

Whither Lion Nathan in NZ?

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Some time after being vanquished in the battle for Montana by Allied Domecq, Australasian brewers Lion Nathan have finally acquired a New Zealand wine operation. But far from being an internationally successful and nationally dominant company (Montana/ Corbans controls an amazing 60 per cent of the NZ wine market), their acquisition is the relative newcomer Wither Hills.

Wither what? Wither Hills is the conjunction of the Marris family vineyards in prime Marlborough land and the winemaking and marketing expertise of son Brent, once winemaker at Delegat's. He and his viticulturist father John will continue to run the company, sweetened by Lion Nathan's offer of 52 million New Zealand dollars for a brand of which we will all be hearing more, I'm sure.

Total production this year was just 80,000 cases, more than two-thirds of it Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. But the Marris have only planted about half of the land they own and already have their own easily expandable winery there.

Until now, quality has been well above average, with Pinot Noir particularly interesting.