Black Ridge Gewurztraminer 2002 Central Otago

2 Nov 2004 by JR

Wine trivia question number 1234: which is the world's southernmost wine producer? Black Ridge in Alexandra, between the ski centre of Queenstown and the blustery port of Dunedin in the south of New Zealand's South Island, claims that honour, carefully, as 'the world's southernmost winery and vineyard' for they are no longer the only vine growers around Alexandra. In fact the promising Dry Gully's vineyards are a little further south than Black Ridge's.

But ex-carpenter Verdun Burgess and Sue Edwards were pioneers and have been growing grapes here on terraces they carved out of the rock from 1981. (I am told by those lucky enough to have visited Black Ridge that it is in a particularly romantic location.) With winemaker Kevin Clark, they began work on their own winery in 1993, prehistory as far as Otago is concerned. Unlike many of the newer investors in this fashionable region, they have established quite a reputation within New Zealand entirely with their own hands and pockets.

Despite the high latitude, more than 45 degrees south of the equator (way south of, for example, Puerto Montt in Chile and more than the southernmost point of Africa), summers here can be extremely hot - so hot that the vines sometimes shut down. Indeed at Black Ridge they have even tried to prove that Cabernet Sauvignon can be ripened this far south.

I came across this 2002 Gewurz in London at the annual New Zealand tasting and was most impressed by its intensity of lovely lychee Gewurz flavour. Gewurzes can often be too oily and fat, but this one is seriously lively, presumably thanks to all the natural acidity that is available throughout New Zealand and is particularly notable this far away from the equator. It is full and opulent on the nose and extremely persistent but is not sweet. I could imagine its being delicious with smoked fish. The only thing I object to is the silly flanged bottle, bane of corkscrews around the world.

Needless to say, this wine is not made in huge quantities. You could find it via the winery, address below, and the UK importer is Bonhote Foster on bonhote-admin@dial.pipex.com. They report that stockists include Philglas & Swiggot in London and Villeneuve in Scotland and that one should expect to pay about 12 pounds a bottle for it.

Black Ridge wines are also exported to Australia.

Black Ridge Vineyard
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Post script - Those who have noticed my comments on accents on the home page may see this as the first sign of my having abandoned the use of accents since I have omitted an Umlaut above the U of Gewurztraminer here but in fact I use the common convention of omitting accents when the word is used in an English-speaking country. Thus Chateau St Jean of California, but Château Margaux of Bordeaux. (But inserting that â, even using the most efficient form of cut and paste that I can think of, took what felt like a precious minute).