Rippon and Gladstone Pinot Noir

1 Jun 2011 by Jancis Robinson

From £15.95, $49.99

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All this week Monty Waldin has been treating Purple pagers to a welter of technical detail about current wine production in New Zealand for some of his favourite organic and biodynamic producers. A real role model and opinion former in this respect has been Nick Mills of Rippon Vineyard, whose progress on the vineyard founded as long ago as 1974 by his late father Rolf Mills, since Nick's many and varied experiences in Burgundy, I have been following with increasing delight.

The fact that the Rippon Vineyard, possibly the most beautiful and certainly the most photographed in the world, is relatively isolated on Lake Wanaka in the south of the South Island has meant that he has had to plough his own furrow, sometimes literally. With his mother Lois and other family members they are now fully committed to biodynamics and go specially to the distant coast to import seaweed and some marine influence, all, they believe, in tune with the land here and its origins. You can read several thousand words of detailed background courtesy of Monty in NZ profiles – Rippon. Soil, especially soil structure, is all to Nick Mills, who revels in the schist underpinning the slope illustrated here.

At a recent tasting of around 70 summer wines from independent wine merchants Lea & Sandeman described here, I was particularly impressed by Rippon's current offerings. The **Rippon, Mature Vine Pinot Noir 2008 Central Otago** is a grown-up, sophisticated, antipodean riposte to red burgundy that, unlike most three-year-old Kiwi Pinots, is nowhere near ready. At closer to £30 than £20 for a single bottle, it is not cheap, but it is possibly the most complex Kiwi Pinot I have ever tasted – and certainly the driest and purest. This is a very different style from the flattering fruit bombs with which New Zealand Pinot made its international reputation. But it is not austere and curmudgeonly. I felt that it was almost flirtatious – again in a rather burgundian way – on the finish. 14% alcohol, mind.

This is the style of Pinot Noir about which I will be writing in detail tomorrow – although in this case the provenance is even more unlikely: California. See Free for all and the FT tomorrow.

This wine, a blend from Rippon's oldest vines, is available from Lea & Sandeman in the UK for £29.75 for a single bottle, £26.75 if it is part of an assorted dozen. It costs more, NZ$54.50, from the vineyard itself and more, $49.99, from K&L in San Francisco but it should be of real interest to any Pinotphile.

I'd like also to give an honourable mention to **Rippon Sauvignon Blanc 2010 Central Otago,** which again is quite unlike the Kiwi norm – not that Otago is known for its Sauvignon but I really appreciated this appetising, dry, lime-flavoured wine with 13.8% alcohol and much more depth than most. L&S charge £14.95 for a bottle of this in a mixed case.

But if you are looking for a New Zealand Pinot Noir that is more serious than the norm but is not encumbered by too serious a price tag, check out **Gladstone Pinot Noir 2009 Wairarapa** at £15.50 per bottle in a mixed case from Lea & Sandeman. Wairarapa, like Martinborough, is in the well-favoured gastronomic hinterland of Wellington in the south east of the North Island and Gladstone has always impressed me. The wines have real depth of flavour, no jamminess, the structure to develop for another few years and some attractive liquorice and spice.

In this case you can find the wine only very slightly cheaper direct from the winery website, run, like everything else, including a café and accommodation, by Glaswegain émigrés Christine and David Kernohan, who show real determination and ambition in everything they do – including tracking me down over breakfast in Martinborough once.

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