

Record wins for NZ at IWSC

Four Trophies, plus 10 gold medals for New Zealand wines and a gold for a Bay of Islands distillery gave the Kiwi contingent plenty to toast at the 2019 International Wine and Spirit Competition.

IT WAS a record-breaking year for New Zealand at the 2019 International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC). In what looks likely a record, local wines won four Trophies at the major international Competition. One of these was not only the winner of the IWSC's inaugural Semi-aromatic White Trophy, it was also the first ever New Zealand Pinot Gris to receive a Trophy at the IWSC. That New Zealand wines won this and the Trophies for Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir also signalled to the world that the country is making benchmark examples of varieties beyond the 'big two'.

Crown Range Cellar Moon Rock Waitaki Valley Pinot Gris 2018 took home the Semi-aromatic White Trophy, proving that when made in the right places with the right treatment New Zealand Pinot Gris deserves fine wine status.

Church Road Grand Reserve Hawke's Bay Chardonnay 2018's award of the Mission Hill Chardonnay Trophy is an international seal of approval for the exciting recent quality and stylistic developments in expressions of Kiwi Chardonnay.

While New Zealand is no stranger to securing the Sauvignon Blanc Trophy, the win for Saint Clair Barrique Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2016 as an older barrel fermented example showcases the diversity of the country's flagship grape, whose best can evolve with interest. Finally, the Pinot Noir Trophy for the Jackson Estate Vintage Widow Marlborough Pinot Noir 2015 – another more mature vintage – suggests not only a coming of age for the variety in its soils, but the country more generally.

Winning a Trophy at the IWSC is a major achievement. It starts with being

awarded a top medal in the nationally grouped heats. These winners then go up against competitors from all the other country classes in the final Trophy tasting, assessed by teams of top judges made up of panel chairs and members of the IWSC's wine committee. All wines are tasted blind throughout. While some competitions award Trophies based on price and across multiple sub-categories, the IWSC's Trophies are based solely on the quality in the glass for that variety, style or major product category. Given the IWSC also attracts entries from around 90 countries, which are assessed by 400 judges from over 30 countries, an IWSC Trophy is a truly first-class international award.

📄 **Full details of all the Trophy and medal winners at this year's IWSC can be found at iwsc.net**



IWSC 2019 NZ Gold Medal Winners



Church Road Grand Reserve Hawke's Bay Chardonnay 2018
97 points – Mission Hill Chardonnay Trophy

An intense lemony, brioche, succulent stone fruit nose is followed by a luscious full-bodied, complex and layered palate, with vanilla, lees, mineral and a touch of well-crafted reduction. It evolves beautifully in the mouth, suggesting improvement is still to come.



Saint Clair Barrique Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2016
96 points – Sauvignon Blanc Trophy

With beautiful richness and weight to the palate, this shows sweet apples and pears, plus hints of sweet spice and nuts. Beautiful toasty and mealy characters add richness, but there is also freshness throughout the long, complex and textured finish.



Brancott Estate Letter Series O Marlborough Chardonnay 2018
95 points

Really intense on the nose, with rich, toasty and leesy characters and well-integrated oak. White stone fruit and a lovely citrus twist to the palate, together with a mineral element, provide the wine with great freshness. There is a great finish and a marvellous texture to this wine.



Stoneleigh Latitude Marlborough Chardonnay 2018
95 points

Intense and complex fruit showing plums, mango and guava marries with spice, flint and well-judged, subtle oak. This is well made, with a lovely weight and texture to the palate. It is elegant and restrained, yet assured and complex. Very long finish.



Jackson Estate Vintage Widow Marlborough Pinot Noir 2015
97 points – Pinot Noir Trophy

Lovely deep colour. Great intensity of fruit and forest floor notes leap from the glass. The palate adds smoke, spice and lovely savoury hints. Very well structured, with great harmony and balance from the fresh acidity and well-handled tannins. Long complex finish.



Babich Black Label Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2018
96 points

This wine has everything. The intense and expressive nose is complex. The concentrated palate leads with grapefruit and quickly expands to show an abundance of fruit and mineral and mealy characters. This is very complex and sublimely textured, with great depth and an exciting finish.



Bristol Farm Central Otago Pinot Noir 2013
95 points

A mature edge on the rim of the colour leads on to a great nose, with clear brooding Pinot character and lifted high aromatics. The palate is well made and structured, with fabulous elegance, complexity and length, including notes of leather, spice and earth – but it remains pure throughout its long finish. Excellent.



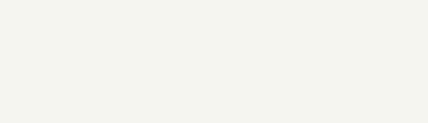
Two Sisters Central Otago Riesling 2011
95 points

A pale green/gold colour belies the intense development of this wine. An initial sweet burst of lime, toast and spice fruit is followed by a nicely balanced palate, with a touch of sweetness. There's also delicate yet assertive fruit, with notes of lemon curd and intense white fruit. This is a wine of refinement and great balance.



Crown Range Cellar Moon Rock Waitaki Valley Pinot Gris 2018
96 points – Semi-Aromatic Trophy

A lovely green lemon colour seduces the drinker into smelling the delicious pure fruit and creamy nose, suggesting some barrel ferment. The palate is beautiful, long and succulent, with real texture and notes of peaches and cream. The finish is floral and honeyed. Beautiful.



Peregrine Central Otago Pinot Noir 2016
95 points

A purple-red heart fades to a mid-red rim. The lovely pure nose with rich strong herby fruit is backed by spicy oak. Elegant, refined palate, with spicy powdery tannins; this is followed by some wonderful developed characters. Rich with fruit, this still has a purity and a strong herby, fruit finish. A very serious style.



Black Collar Vodka
95 points

The start on the nose is elegant, grassy and clean, with some lime blossom notes. It is fresh and easy to drink and cooling on the palate. This is a perfectly balanced and very well-polished example, with class and elegance throughout. It is made in a refreshing and light style. Highly recommended.

It was a remarkable run for New Zealand at the International Wine and Spirit Competition 2019



Chris Scott

MISSION HILL CHARDONNAY TROPHY Church Road

"New Zealand Chardonnay is definitely looking the best it has ever done," states Church Road's Chris Scott. Given he's the maker of what has just been judged the world's best Chardonnay at the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC) with his Church Road Grand Reserve Hawke's Bay Chardonnay 2018, he's well qualified to comment on what's behind the variety's recent quality wave.

"New Zealand has always had the potential with Chardonnay and there have certainly been wines that have demonstrated this for some time," he acknowledges. "What we are seeing now is a wider range of producers doing some seriously good things and some critical mass that is really starting to get noticed internationally. Obviously, an award like this just helps to cement that further."

Scott notes the pendulum has swung from heavy, overly oaky and ripe styles to low or no oak styles that could lack interest, and arrived at a current point of balance for Chardonnay. Less and better oak, earlier and hand harvesting, whole bunch pressing, wild fermentation, better handling of malolactic fermentation, higher solids ferments, less lees stirring and improved viticulture and site selection have all played their part, he observes.

As for the wine that won the IWSC's Mission Hill Chardonnay

Trophy, Scott explains it was made from fruit from two of Church Road's vineyards in the Tuki Tuki valley, close to the coast and fanned by cooling sea breezes that help retain freshness and acidity.

"With Chardonnay we aim to harvest at a ripeness level that will give us a balance between weight and freshness," he expands. "We want the wine to be substantial but not cloying or heavy. We tend to find the less we do in the winery the better it is, so it's all about getting it right in the vineyard, then resisting the urge to interfere! Pick it, press it, put it in a barrel and walk away, we like to say. In reality it's a little more complex than that, but not much."

"Personally, it is obviously a nice endorsement of what we are doing to win the IWSC's Mission Hill Chardonnay Trophy," says Scott. "The style has been slowly refined over the last few years and we have a new vineyard coming into its own. It's a great reward for the team as there is a great deal of collective experience, skill, thought and commitment reflected in that wine."

"More generally and more importantly, it's great to see so many New Zealand wines beyond the Sauvignon Blanc category doing so well on the world stage. We're very pleased to be doing our little bit to support that."

PINOT NOIR TROPHY Jackson Estate

"I'm stunned, having literally just found out that our Vintage Widow Pinot Noir 2015 has won the IWSC Pinot Noir Trophy," says Jackson Estate head winemaker Matt Patterson-Green on being informed that his wine had been judged the top Pinot Noir at this international competition. However, as the news sinks in, he recalls the "crazy violet" aromas that came off vats fermenting some of the best grapes he'd ever handled and the convergence of factors that resulted in this world-beating wine.

"2015 is one of the best vintages I've ever experienced in Marlborough," Patterson-Green states. "We were 30% down on volume, but the quality was exceptional with longer hang time, small berries and hyper-concentration. It was one of those years when everything went right."

"It's testament to the quality of our vineyards though. We spent a hell of a lot of time and money on them to get the equilibrium right and as pristine fruit as possible, and have started to see the quality coming through in our Pinots."

Like many of the first wave of family wineries in Marlborough, Jackson Estate focused initially on Sauvignon Blanc. However, early on it decided to plant Pinot Noir on the clay pans of the Gum Emperor vineyard in the Waihopai Valley – this was 25 years ago, at a time when the Southern Valleys were not recognised as the prime Pinot territory that they are today. The estate's commitment to Pinot has been further reinforced in recent years by the establishment of a new winery dedicated to the variety.

From the "dark, dense and brooding" fruit of the Gum Emperor vineyard and the "lifted floral and herb" character of the estate's Somerset vineyard (also in the Waihopai), the Vintage Widow emerged. Launched in 2005, examples from its inaugural vintage are still drinking well, notes Patterson-Green of a wine that's given plenty of time, spending at least a year in barrel and two in bottle before release.

Patterson-Green reflects: "It's never just about one person, there's a deep-seated pleasure in the fact something the whole team has worked so hard on has won a trophy."

This recognition extends to the team's families and his own wife, a "Vintage Widow" over the time of harvest which, in a small company, means losing loved ones to long days that only finish when all the work is done.

"But the result in barrel or bottle is worth it," Patterson-Green concludes. "You forget the hours when you open a bottle and enjoy a glass that contains a trigger to that vintage."



Matt Patterson-Green

SAUVIGNON BLANC TROPHY Saint Clair

"Barrique was born in secret in the 2013 vintage as a fun, experimental interest project, coincidentally by both of our white winemakers, each unaware that the other was doing a similar project," says Saint Clair winemaker Heather Stewart, explaining the origins of the barrel fermented Sauvignon, which won the IWSC's top Sauvignon Trophy with its 2016 vintage.

"We each put some Sauvignon Blanc juice, fresh off the press, into a few seasoned oak barrels and let them go," she recounts. "It was only after the harvest period when we slipped these wines blind into our grading tasting with the full winemaking team, that we realised we'd both had the same idea."

Well received, but regarded as a little "out there" by some of the team, the wine came into being after

Stewart and her colleague campaigned to get a blend of the three best barrels bottled. The winemakers' three favourite barriques remain as the blend, but the wine now hails from three of Saint Clair's best vineyards in the lower Wairau Valley and has evolved through continued experimentation.

"This trophy means so much to us," says Stewart. "We would be exceptionally happy to win this trophy with any of our Sauvignon Blancs. However, we were especially excited that it was the Barrique that won. What began as a pet project, and has been a labour of love ever since, has become one of our favourite wines. We were waiting for it to get the recognition that we believed it deserved. We feel like proud parents!"

Saint Clair is already known for its wide range



Hamish Clark, Heather Stewart, Kyle Thompson, Stewart MacLennan and Chloe Gabrielsen of Saint Clair

of Sauvignons, which often see Stewart and the team working with over a hundred small tanks of the variety in any vintage. However, this barrel fermented version is something new, and a style that Stewart considers New Zealand should feel more confident in sharing beyond the cellar door.

"For an alternative style of Sauvignon to go up against both more classical styles

of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc and a diverse range of international Sauvignons, and take out the top award, shows that New Zealand is capable not only of diversifying, but of doing it at a high quality level," Stewart states. "I hope this award may give producers the courage to showcase their alternative style Sauvignon Blancs more, and not be afraid to release them to a wider market."

SEMI-AROMATIC WHITE TROPHY Crown Range Cellar

"We are extremely proud to win the first Semi-Aromatic White Trophy," says Crown Range Cellar's Jing Song of the success of her Moon Rock Waitaki Valley Pinot Gris 2018. Not only awarded this inaugural IWSC Trophy, the Moon Rock was the first New Zealand Pinot Gris to win a Trophy at the prestigious international wine competition, just four years after Song became the country's youngest Pinot Noir Trophy winner at the IWSC with one of her debut releases.

This most recent win started with a trip Song made to the Waitaki Valley on a sunny day with Grant Taylor, who makes a number of Crown Range Cellar's wines. "Grant took me to the new vineyard that had recently been purchased," Song explains. "It was in the middle of nowhere, near Lake Aviemore, which was glowing like a moon. Talking to viticulturist Murray Turner about its soil, I found out that it contains the element selenite which, when translated from the ancient Greek, is 'Moon Rock'."

It was this lunar confluence that inspired



Jing Song

the name of the label, while the huge potential of making great Pinot Gris in the Waitaki Valley inspired Taylor in the making of the wine. Although Pinot Gris is made all

over New Zealand, Taylor points out that traditionally it performs best in the coolest of the cool climates of Northern Italy, Alsace and Germany.

"Our coolest region, literally and figuratively, is Waitaki Valley, North Otago," he observes. "The cool climate means small berries, and small berries lead to better concentration of all things. It also means the grapes retain acidity and have lower sugar levels so can be hung on the vine a long time and develop ripe flavours, yet not go 'over the hill'."

In the winemaking, where he was assisted by Jen Parr, Taylor notes that the best was brought out from the grapes by her experimentation with techniques such as barrel and stainless steel fermentation, lees stirring and malolactic fermentation.

"With the 2017 vintage receiving a gold medal at the 2018 IWSC and the 2018 taking a Trophy this year, I think it's safe to say there is a developing understanding of the grapes and how to treat them," notes Taylor.

"And why is it New Zealand's first Pinot Gris Trophy at the IWSC? Because there have been very few others entered made from the Waitaki!" he concludes.