

IWSC 2016



Variety was most definitely the spice of life among New Zealand's top award winning wines at the 2016 International Wine and Spirit Competition, as *WineNZ* discovers.

Looking back over the last decade of New Zealand results at the International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC), it's clear the country has maintained a near monopoly on the show's top sauvignon blanc and pinot noir trophies.

This year was no exception, with Kim Crawford and Giesen awarded the sauvignon blanc and pinot noir trophies respectively.

However, new trends emerging are more gold medals won by local wines across the board for an increasingly wide array of styles and varieties.

This year, New Zealand took home 14 gold medals for wines that included a spectrum of riesling styles, a chardonnay and a gewürztraminer in the whites, and a syrah, merlot cabernet and malbec in the reds. It's a result that demonstrates on the world's wine stage New Zealand should not be typecast as the producer of a couple of key varieties, but a player

that's able to excel with a wide range of cool climate styles.

"New Zealand has established itself as a world-beater in sauvignon blanc, and more recently pinot noir," comments Jo Burzynska, a long-time IWSC judge and a New Zealand panel chair at this year's competition.

"However, in all the years I've been judging at the IWSC, this is one of the widest range of styles I've witnessed winning top awards."

About the IWSC

The IWSC is one of the world's truly international competitions. While based in the UK, it attracts entries from over 90 countries and is judged by 400 experts that hail from across the globe.

It was founded in 1969 by the wine chemist Anton Massel, which makes it the longest established major UK-based competition. Massel had the idea of creating a competition that was based not solely on judgement by tasting, but where all entries also had to undergo chemical

analysis. This two-stage judging process remains today.

How the wines were judged

The IWSC has its own cellar and tasting room that permits products to be judged for seven months a year. It also allows for no more than 60 wines to be assessed in any one day. This avoids palate fatigue and permits time for panels to discuss and re-taste more contentious wines before arriving at their final decision.

Marking system

Gold Outstanding

Quality of the highest order

Gold

Superior example; setting the standard

Silver Outstanding

Outstanding example; excellent quality

Silver

Fine example; excellent quality

Bronze

Good example; well above average



IWSC judges at the London Wine Fair.

NEW ZEALAND'S TOP AWARD WINNERS

TROPHY



GIESEN SINGLE VINEYARD "RIDGE BLOCK" MARLBOROUGH PINOT NOIR 2013

This wine unfurls to reveal complex layers of red and black cherry fruit, notes of sweet spice, earth, herb, hints of smoke and a savoury, gamey undercurrent. These are wrapped in a silken texture and supported by fine tannins and fresh spine of acid. An elegant, complex and harmonious wine. *Jo Burzynska*



KIM CRAWFORD SMALL PARCELS "SPITFIRE" MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC 2016

Punchy green aromas of fresh Thai basil and oregano laced with lime and grapefruit abound on the nose. On the palate there's classic Marlborough sauvignon gooseberry fruit and a lush hit of guava, infused with fragrant notes of green herb and blackcurrant leaf, all underpinned by a vibrant line of mineral and limey acid. A wine in which power and elegance combine. *Jo Burzynska*

GOLD OUTSTANDING



MATUA SINGLE VINEYARD CENTRAL OTAGO PINOT NOIR 2013

Medium purple red colour. Lovely fresh summer red fruits on the nose, with dried sweet herbs and a whiff of smoke. Succulent fleshy mouthfeel, touches of spice and great depth of flavour. Smooth tannins and lovely balance. Long well defined finish.

GOLD

BABICH WINEMAKERS' RESERVE HAWKE'S BAY SYRAH 2015

Medium deep crimson with purple hues. Rich black cherry and blackberry aromas, with notes of allspice and pepper. Spiced plum flavours in the mouth, a darting lick of acidity and a firm tannic structure with some gravelly, mineral base notes. Fine intensity and a strength without any heaviness leading to a soaring finish. Fantastic wine.

BRANCOTT ESTATE LETTER SERIES 'B' MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC 2016

Pale straw lemon with green glints. Vibrant expressive nose with passionfruit, citrus, stone fruits and mown grass aromas. Crisp acidity leads the palate and the flavours follow. There is a wonderful mineral backbone here. The whole is lively, exuberant and very long on the finish.

MATUA SINGLE VINEYARD HAWKE'S BAY MALBEC 2014



Deep crimson with an opaque core. Intense mulberry and wild bramble fruit aromas, with touches of blue flower scents and smoked meat. Deep and delicious in the mouth, incredible vibrancy and style. Its fruit is intense without being heavy; with the background structure of tannin, acidity and body perfectly in balance and leading to a graceful, elegant finish.

NGATARAWA WINES ALWYN HAWKE'S BAY MERLOT CABERNET 2009

A beautiful wine with a succulent core of dark fruit, mocha and mature currants. Rich and long; showing beautiful maturation and good use of oak.



NOBILO ICON MARLBOROUGH PINOT NOIR 2014

Shows very classy winemaking with beautiful use of oak. Has a good density of colour. The palate and nose have a great concentration of lifted rosehips and fragrant summer berries. Punchy yet elegant, it evolves in the glass adding layers of complexity with fine tannins giving a grip on the seamless long finish. Benchmark pinot noir.

SEIFRIED WINEMAKER'S COLLECTION NELSON SWEET AGNES RIESLING 2016

Mid straw gold in colour. Inviting ripe tropical notes of lychee, pineapple, pomelo and mandarin drenched with dried honeycomb. A smashing bite of acidity keeps the luscious sweet sensations in check and supports the palate with a zesty kick. Great balance which lasts to the elongated finish. This will age well.

SPY VALLEY MARLBOROUGH GEWÜRZTRAMINER 2015

Great mix of aromas including lychee, Asian spice and lush tropical fruits, rosewater and ginger. A solid core of these aromas runs through the bold structured oily body, balanced by a hint of phenolics and fresh zesty acidity that add texture to the wine. Great voluptuous and persistent finish.

TE PA MARLBOROUGH CHARDONNAY 2015

Watery pale lemon green. The nose offers citrus blossom, with a whiff of smoky oak. Refreshing pomelo and lemon flavours dominate with a speckling of spice from the rich toasty oak. A flinty, mineral undertow courses along to the long nutty finish. Amazing depth of flavour for such a young wine.

TOI TOI MARLBOROUGH RESERVE RIESLING 2014

A very pure fruit driven style. The nose is packed with pear, apple and honeysuckle, and the lavish flavours are spicy ripe peach with a hint of fennel. The unctuous texture and hint of sweetness are enlivened by a kick of citrus. The finish is very long and seamless, leaving a lovely perfume in the mouth. Delicious!



TWO SISTERS CENTRAL OTAGO RIESLING 2010

Brilliant straw-yellow colour; pale-edged with light green hues. Intense mineral and oily citrus aromas in a medium dry wine with a refreshing acidity and concentrated lime and cordial aromas, complex layers of toast and kerosene, and creamy nuances. The mouthfeel balances freshness and richness and the complex secondary flavours of toast and honey lead to a soft long finish.

VILLA MARIA RESERVE CLIFFORD BAY MARLBOROUGH SAUVIGNON BLANC 2015

Typical fruity and floral aromas. Among the fruity aromas we can experience the elixir of gooseberries, passionfruit and white grapefruit, all wrapped in harmony with honey suckle, jasmine and fresh spicy aromas of boxwood, sage and anisette.



Matua is New Zealand Producer of the Year

Each year the IWSC assesses the overall performance of wineries from all major wine nations that enter the competition. The producer that is judged to have excelled across all its entries is awarded the country's producer of the year at the IWSC's Awards Banquet.

This year, the wineries on the shortlist are:

- Giesen
- Matua (Treasury Wine Estates)
- Kim Crawford (Constellation Wines New Zealand)
- Brancott Estate (Pernod Ricard NZ)



IWSC managing director Ewan Lacey presenting some of the competition's award winning wines.

GREAT THINGS COME IN SMALL PARCELS

Grace and power were qualities attributed to the Spitfire, the fighter plane that helped win the Battle of Britain. These were characters also noted by International Wine and Spirit Competition (IWSC) judges in the Kim Crawford Small Parcels Spitfire Sauvignon Blanc 2016, which seized its own victory with its award of the IWSC's top sauvignon blanc trophy. But it wasn't stylistic similarities that led this Marlborough wine to take its name from the classic aircraft, as *WineNZ* discovered on quizzing Kim Crawford senior winemaker Anthony Walkenhorst about the story behind the sauvignon.

"The first Spitfire sauvignon was sourced from a vineyard that was formerly an airforce training base where Spitfire pilots were trained before heading off to war," Anthony explains of a wine that can now be a blend from other sites around the Central Wairau sub-region. "We liked the name and felt that the wine lived up to it."

"The philosophy behind the wine is to make the best wine that we can from the huge resources that we have," he elaborates. "I want to have the flexibility to use different vineyards that have performed the best in a particular season. We blend wines to achieve the best wine that we can make, so some years it might be a single vineyard (like 2014) and other years it might be from multiple (like the 2016)."

"The Spitfire sauvignon blanc is an evolving wine style, and so it should be, reflecting our learnings and experimentation to achieve the best wine we can," he comments in response to an observation that the style appears to be following an increasingly elegant trajectory. "Where previously there was a strong focus on the aromatics, we now focus on

making more of a complete wine – not only with aromatics, but the palate weight and texture. For us, it's about making the best wine that we can from each vintage."

Launched in 2005, the Small Parcels range is all about highlighting "the best wines of the harvest" and "to recognise the grapegrowers for all their hard work providing us winemakers with beautiful fruit," according to Anthony. "These are truly small batch wines that we sell to specific restaurants and stores around the world, wines that sommeliers get excited about," he states.

Small may not be a word immediately associated with the Kim Crawford brand nowadays. It may have started from humble beginnings over two decades ago with Kim Crawford at its helm. However, Kim sold the label to the large Canadian Vincor group in 2003 and it's now part of the world's largest wine group, Constellation. So how can such a huge company make high quality limited production wines?

"I actually feel extremely fortunate that I have access to so many vineyards around Marlborough to produce this wine," says Anthony.

"The options that a large company with so many vineyards provides gives me a great advantage compared to a small boutique that might have only one vineyard to source their wine from. Depending on the vintage, single vineyard does not always equate to quality fruit."

"Personally, I also appreciate the freedom of creative direction when crafting the wines; we don't have a cookie cutter approach despite our company's global reach," he adds.

"The collective knowledge of the whole team gives us an added advantage."



Kim Crawford's senior winemaker Anthony Walkenhorst.

These wine receive all the love and attention that a boutique winery puts in. While we are driven to make wines that people love to drink, it's also great to achieve recognition from your peers and industry leaders that validates the hard work the whole team puts into making this wine. There is always something that we can learn about each wine to improve for next year, and that is our focus. And with the start of the growing season just beginning, it's time to look forward to making our next best wine."

A singular focus



Giesen's organic viticulturist Kurt Simcic among the vines.



Marcel Giesen says the company is on the right track.

Most people will know Giesen through its popular estate sauvignon blanc.

However, in recent years, the family-owned winery has been buying high profile vineyards and adding a growing number of upper tiers to its offering. These include the Giesen Single Vineyard Ridge Block Pinot Noir 2013, which in winning this year's International Wine and Spirit Competition Trophy, became testament to the success of this premium-focused philosophy.

It was back in 1984 that Giesen launched its Estate Marlborough sauvignon blanc from its very first vintage. In the last decade its core "Estate" wines have been joined by "The Brothers" reserve range named after the Giesen brothers - Marcel, Theo and Alex - who remain at the company's helm; followed by its flagship The August 1888 sauvignon blanc and most recently the Single Vineyard Selection in 2013.

Marcel Giesen - whose pinot noir from his personal Bell Hill vineyard in Canterbury is already regarded as one of the finest in the country - felt the time was ripe to home in on special pinot sites in Marlborough. For the Giesen brand, these include the Clayvin Vineyard that it purchased in 2015, and the newly developed Ridge Block.

"Marlborough has come of age: the vineyards have more maturity and personality. How to better capture that with a single site expression instead of blending multi sites together for a regional blend?" Marcel says of the rationale behind

the Single Vineyard range, which employs a Burgundian philosophy to its pinot making, illustrated by measures such as the close planting of the Ridge Block at 5555 vines per hectare.

Ridge Block was an existing certified organic vineyard, which Marcel decided to replant and turn into "a super-premium Pinot site" following advice from the highly regarded Burgundian soil expert, Claude Bourguignon.

"We had input from Bourguignon who looked at the soil pits we dug in the vineyard, whose recommendation was for Pinot, given the ferric iron content of the soil," Marcel explains. "The whole project was focused on high quality before we even planted."

"It is pleasing to see quality early on in the first few harvests we have had from this block," he reflects. "Each season we learn and the excitement is there to see the wines evolve and follow their path."

Organic management is at the heart of the Ridge Block's viticulture and Giesen's new premium drive. It now boasts a dedicated organic team lead by Kurt Simcic, and the next step is to look at biodynamics, according to Marcel.

Giesen's commitment to high-end production has been further cemented by the Clayvin acquisition and the Ara brand.

"Without doubt Clayvin plays a major part in our premium tiers," comments Giesen's general manager, Kyle Skene. "One of its attractions was that, along

with our Ridge Block, both are organic, both close planted with high density and a low fruiting wire; but there is a 20 year gap in vine age between the two vineyards."

"Ara plays a part in continuing to keep our Marlborough portfolio at the premium end of global wine ... and showcase more vineyard sites from within the 13 vineyards that we own in Marlborough" he adds.

For Kyle and Marcel, the trophy win is a signal that the company is on the right track.

"When you start down a path sometimes it is with trepidation," Kyle admits.

"This path had plenty of trepidation, but our conviction was to make world class wines that showcased our sites in Marlborough and also represented the varietal as we believe it could and should be from Marlborough. This is a huge achievement right across the business."

"After Ata Rangi won the [IWSC] Pinot Noir Trophy twice in a row in 1996 and 1997 and with New Zealand holding it for the past 10 years, it has had a strong recognition here. To get our name on that is something special and worth celebrating," says Marcel.

"For the whole business it means that the premium end has a place that will make everyone working for Giesens proud. The learnings from this will trickle down into all our wines and lift our expectations for the future."