

MATRAVINA

Winter 2007

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Beautiful bunches – Riversun's Nick Hoskins (left) unveils the import crop from ENTAV-INRA® for Craggy Range viticulturist Simon Radburn.

First fruit

Imports take centre stage

Not many winemakers or viticulturists willingly budge from the vineyard during vintage, but that's precisely what happened earlier this year when key industry people from around the country travelled to Gisborne to see the first fruit on Riversun's imported grapevine selections.

"We planted over 40 different varieties and clones after the first round of material was released from quarantine, but we didn't really expect fruit until next year," says Nick Hoskins, Riversun viticulturist. "By early February, we realised we were going to have a small but very clean crop, and so word went out."

It was a "Big Ask," but the thought of seeing that first fruit

proved too tantalizing to miss. "Most of our visitors were blown away," says Dr Rod Bonfiglioli, the company's technical director. "New varieties and clones generated a lot of interest, but many of the re-imports were equally impressive."

Rod cites Pinot Noir ENTAV-INRA® clone 777 as one of the biggest surprises. While many Pinot producers in this country already have something known as "777" planted in their vineyards, the fruit and even the entire vine structure differ significantly compared to the licensed clone imported directly from ENTAV-INRA® in France.

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Riversun
Growing Excellence

Riversun Nursery Limited
PO Box 1199
Gisborne, New Zealand

Freephone: 0800 11 37 47

Phone: +64 6 867 1120

Fax: +64 6 867 8800

Email: riversun@riversun.co.nz

www.riversun.co.nz



Three sixty

by Geoff Thorpe

Executive Director

The “clean green” vineyards of New Zealand engender envy around the world for many reasons, but genetic diversity is not among them.

Consider our signature wine, produced from a single selection of a single variety. While other countries attempt to emulate the fresh flavours of “Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc” – at a much lower price point – can we really afford complacency?

New Zealand has always had to position itself at the premium end

of the market, and historically our winemakers have done a great job of targeting that niche. Wine trends change, however, and sooner or later other styles and varieties are going to take the world by storm. Without new planting material that can offer superior fruit quality and yields, our wine industry stands in danger of losing its creative and competitive edge.

Early on, Riversun undertook to produce the highest-quality grafted grapevines in the world. With over 40 new imports available for delivery in 2008 (and a further 60 close behind them), we believe we’re close to achieving that goal. Establishing our own importation programme has

been costly, demanding, and time consuming; but we didn’t embark on this journey for short-term returns.

At Riversun, we believe in the future of New Zealand wine. We also believe that we have a key role to play in that future. It’s early days yet, but we’re pretty confident that in the years to come our selections and imports will help this country maintain – and enhance – its privileged position on the world wine map.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Riversun Nursery. We have grown up alongside the New Zealand wine industry, and we thank you all for your support and encouragement – it’s been a blast every step of the way.

First fruit from our imported vines

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“Our suspicion is that earlier imports suffered some sort of genetic degradation – whether that’s because grafted material infected with viruses was used as mother vines or mix-ups occurred after material was released from quarantine, we don’t know,” Rod explains.

Genetic Integrity

The imported material represents the largest single release of grape varieties and clones in New Zealand viticultural history. Some grafted material will go out to customers later this year, with larger quantities available in the years to come.

“After 10 years since our first visit to ENTAV, it’s very exciting to have something tangible to share with people,” says Geoff Thorpe, Riversun’s founder and executive director. “We know that, in some respects, the hard work has only just begun – it will be another four to five years before we can say with certainty which wines work for New Zealand.”

Clonal Wines

In the meantime, Riversun has embarked on an ambitious microvinification programme. Test-batch wines from each imported variety and/or clone bearing a sufficient crop were made in Gisborne (by KEW’s winemaker Anita Ewart-Croy) and Marlborough (by Kerrie Stronge, winemaker at the Wine Research Centre).

“We’re in the early days of experimentation,” says Geoff, “but we know how anxious winemakers are to assess the imports’ characteristics – if all goes well, we should have something to share with the industry very soon.”

Superior Savvies

Nick Hoskins believes that the micro-vins made from the new clones of Sauvignon Blanc will generate especially strong interest.

“It’s been said that we have a proven winner with ‘Mass Selection,’ so why mess with a good thing?” he adds. “There’s always room for improvement, not to mention keeping one step ahead of competitors overseas.”

By way of comparison, Nick points to Pinot Noir producers who typically plant a variety of clones. “Blending produces superior wines,” he says. “Most winemakers are unwilling to gamble on a single Pinot Noir clone.”

Since each clone performs differently in any given season, mixing things up also makes good viticultural sense. “Martinborough experienced the value of clonal diversity in December 2006 – certain clones did well in a cold season for flowering while others struggled,” Nick says. “What it comes down to is hedging your bets.”



Inside this issue of Matravina, you’ll find four “Savvy Pin-ups” profiling the imported ENTAV-INRA® clones of Sauvignon Blanc. Photographs showing the first fruit from our imported vines can be viewed on the Riversun website at www.riversun.co.nz – just click on the searchable database entitled “Vines available for grafting.”

Certification for the nation

The grafted grapevine standard is now in effect

Riversun customers who received their potted vines earlier this year may not have realised it, but they were the first beneficiaries of a new industry-wide certification scheme for grafted grapevines produced in New Zealand.

Although they carried no visible “stamp of approval” or logo, the Riversun potted vines were the first in the country to be certified to the New Zealand Winegrowers Grafted Grapevine Standard.

Developed with input from viticultural nurseries throughout the country and approved in 2006 by New Zealand Winegrowers (NZW), the new standard aims to provide assurance to viticulturists, winemakers and other stakeholders that grafted grapevines certified to its specifications can be described as “high health plants,” in that they have been tested for and shown not to have Grapevine Leafroll-associated Virus Type 3 (GLRaV-3). The standard also includes requirements for physical specifications and for trueness to type (traceability); all related processes and facilities must be audited by an external auditor before the plant material can be certified.

According to Martha Kelly, quality control and risk manager at Riversun, the potted vines were audited the day after the specifications were signed off by the standard-setters. “We were determined to have this season’s production certified under the new scheme, so we checked each update and revision to ensure that we could meet and/or exceed New Zealand Winegrowers’ requirements,” she adds.

First inspected by an NZW-appointed auditor in late November 2006, Riversun was required to demonstrate that the nursery’s management systems, particularly with regard to propagation material collection and traceability, were in compliance with the standard.

“The auditor scrutinised this aspect very seriously in November 2006,” Martha continues, “and our second audit in late December focused on end-of-process practices to confirm



Riversun potted vines – first in the country to be certified to the New Zealand Grafted Grapevine Standard.

that the physical specifications of the potted vines were also in compliance.”

Of course, most of Riversun’s production is what’s known as “grafted field-grown” vines – the majority of those vines were certified to the standard in July and are now being delivered to clients throughout the country.

The stated objective of the Grafted Grapevine Standard (and its associated certification programme) is to minimise the probability of infected plant material being released to the industry. A copy of the standard can be found on New Zealand Winegrowers’ website at www.nzwine.com.

The ‘plus’ factor at Riversun

The New Zealand Winegrowers Grafted Grapevine Standard is good news for the wine industry, and Riversun is proud to have played a role in its establishment – and to have produced the first vines certified under the programme.

While the standard has already been recognised as an international benchmark, it does not yet match our own certification protocols designed



under HACCP (Hazards Analysis of Critical Control Points), a risk management system commonly employed in the food industry.

That’s why Riversun grafted vines not only meet, but significantly exceed the NZW standard. Visit our website at www.riversun.co.nz and click on “Products” to view the complete specifications and virus-testing regimes for all three offerings of grapevine material: Premium Mass, Premium Plus, and Premium Import.

Calling all Chardonnays

Riversun is a proud sponsor of the International Chardonnay Challenge, held this year from 17 - 19 October in Gisborne. The call for entries has now gone out and full details of the rules and regulations can be viewed online at: www.internationalchardonnaychallenge.com



Super commuter

As Riversun's IT development manager, Cleon Pinto says he can work "wherever there's an Internet connection for my computer." That's why he frequently opts for the peace and quiet of his home office where the only interruption comes in a pint-sized package known as "Kylie," his adorable little girl.

In theory, the physical distance between home office and head office shouldn't be an issue, but recently Cleon put that theory to the test. Deciding it was time Kylie met her German grandparents, he and wife Tina wanted more than just a few weeks' holiday. Cleon talked with his supervisor: Could he continue working on software development while the family lived for six months in the town of Boostedt, Germany?

After some deliberation, the company gave its blessing. Cleon has been with Riversun since 2001 and has been the "can do" factor behind its customised computer systems. If he could continue managing the database from afar, the nursery would try to get by without the "face time."

And so, after a short period of sightseeing with the in-laws, Cleon was back in business – only this time, his Internet connection was approximately 12,000 kilometres away from company headquarters.

Now back in the Land of the Long White Cloud, Cleon says the super commute worked really well. "Because of the 12-hour time difference," he adds, "what often happened was that Riversun would email me with a request, and I would be able to finish the assignment and send back my reply before the next working day started at the nursery."



In the vineyard

with Nick Hoskins
Riversun viticulturist



Why is it that some vines don't achieve their full potential? Vine establishment, health, and longevity can be compromised by a combination of factors: incorrect planting depth, drying out during or prior to planting, poor root positioning, poor moisture management, insect damage and soil fungi. Problems may not show until veraison of the first crop – the driest and hottest part of the season, when a compromised root system is unable to supply enough moisture and nutrients to the fruit and canopy. Certain stages in the planting schedule warrant your undivided attention – here's my checklist.

Storage: Riversun provides planting instructions with each delivery, and it's worth reading them even if you're not doing the actual planting. While instructions for storage are included, it's much better to leave the vines in our hands until you're ready to plant. The nursery has specially designated coolstores that are monitored for temperature, carbon dioxide and ethylene build up, and all vines are inspected to ensure correct moisture levels. Work with the nursery's logistics co-ordinator so that vines can be delivered as required, week by week.

Pre-planting treatments: There is good evidence that Trichoderma and/or Micorrhizal fungi assist in the uptake of nutrients and suppress antagonistic soil pathogens during the vines' establishment. The following treatment is recommended for new and replacement vines, and comes courtesy of Grower Business Development Manager Dr Rengasamy Balasubramaniam (Dr Bala) at Delegat's Wine Estate.

Dip vine roots (still in the bundles) in the treatment, ensuring roots are coated. The mixture needs to be continually agitated to keep it in suspension (use an electric or battery drill with a paint mixer attachment):

- Mycorrmax 1kg (symbiotic Mycorrhizal fungi)
- Superzyme 1kg (2 strains of beneficial Trichoderma fungi and 2 species of beneficial bacteria)
- Zeba 1kg (super-absorbent polymer based on natural cornstarch that helps the mix adhere to the vine roots and then slowly releases moisture after planting)
- 125 litres of water

J-rooted vines: Whether machine-planted or hand-planted, severely J-rooted vines often establish poorly and/or develop fungal problems. Since even mildly J-rooted vines are likely to be less vigorous and fruitful than vines planted correctly, why take the risk? Vineyard managers should make a point of digging up and examining the root positioning of a number of random vines each day, especially at the start of planting. Once contractors realise you are concerned enough to do this, they will take greater care.



J-rooted vines continue to plague many vineyards.

Moisture: On a windy day, exposed vine roots dry out in minutes (another reason for using that pre-planting mix). I usually meet with contractors and stress the importance of keeping vine bundles covered and moist, but given the pressure to complete jobs on time this is often the last issue on their minds. That's why it's imperative to get the irrigation running as soon as possible in machine-planted vineyards. Your infrastructure (water source, pump, mains and submains) all need to be installed before planting, leaving only the laterals to connect and run. *Feel free to call Nick on 027 248 7724 if you have any questions on planting.*