

THE WHITE WAVE

July 5, 2014, by Joelle Thomson

Here is my guide to the new great whites.

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It's official. This year was a record breaking one for New Zealand wine. There were 29% more grapes harvested from the country's tip to toe than last year. This means the world will drink a record-breaking amount of New Zealand sauvignon blanc and our country will earn a record-breaking amount of money from it. Wine is a good earner for New Zealand. Its production generates employment in rural areas and every litre of the stuff that's made contributes nearly \$3 to the government.

But what difference does a big harvest make to wine drinkers in New Zealand? Apart from more sauvignon blanc (it's already 70% of total production), there is a groundswell of obscure new wine styles here. The fourth Gisborne Regional Wine Awards in May highlighted this trend. Where else in the world would albarino, arneis, chardonnay, chenin blanc and gewürztraminer grow in the same area and taste great, to boot? I judged at the show this year and was part of the team to award medals to these wines and to top chardonnays. The little-known newcomers are made by experienced winemakers to spread the risk; nobody likes all their eggs in one basket, no matter how successful its contents (sauvignon blanc) look. Gisborne is the gateway to these new wines because the country's biggest vine nursery, Riversun, is based there. And here is my guide to how they taste.

Albarino (aka Alvarinho) Albarino comes from the Spanish-Portuguese border, which has an uncannily similar climate to ours; namely, moderate, maritime and often wet. It grows well in Gisborne for this reason, says Doug Bell, who was the first to plant albarino in the Southern Hemisphere. It is ideal for kai moana with its fresh herb flavours.

Arneis Arneis is from Piemonte in north west Italy where it produces dry whites and historically grew next to red nebbiolo grapes; to attract birds to its powerful perfume (and away from precious nebbiolo). Villa Maria has the biggest plantings here.

Chardonnay Chardonnay is not new but it is definitely

on trend, having gained from pinot gris' popularity because Kiwi winemakers are working harder today to make a wider range of top-quality wines.

Gewurztraminer The German gewürztraminer grape has controversial origins but unmistakable flavours. If Turkish delight, canned lychees and old-fashioned red roses sound far-fetched, crack open a bottle and take a whiff. These are stock in trade aromas of 'give-urts-tram-eener'. If pronunciation is a barrier to enjoyment, try saying 'give-urtz'. Warmer climates like Gisborne produce honeyed, full bodied gewurz' like the divine 1994 Vinoptima made by Nick Nobilo, whose winery is devoted solely to it.

Viognier? Viognier looks tricky to pronounce but 'vee-oh-nee-ay' rolls off the tongue once you know which vowels to accentuate. It nearly died out last century in France but is now trending up globally thanks to its full bodied, rich apricot flavours.

Wines of the week Mystery shoestring buy 2013 Wise Owl Hooting White \$9.99 to \$13.99 This succulent white remains a mystery, which its makers invite us to solve. The back label clue is: it's a combo. A group of wine students I tasted it with decided on pinot gris and Riesling. I have settled on sauvignon blanc, viognier, pinot gris and Riesling – or is it? You be the judge. From New World supermarkets nationwide, Pak n Save in Dunedin and Riccarton.

Voluptuous viognier 2013 Rod McDonald Wine Quarter Acre Viognier \$26.99 Apricot, peach and nectarine flavours make this viognier is a star in the mouth, even if it is a pain in the proverbial to make - some vines are so miserly they only yield two bunches per vine; it's pricey to make, so this is a top buy. From Regional Wines, Wellington; Vino Fino, Christchurch; The Hamilton Beer & Wine Company. www.rmwwines.co.nz

Dry white 2013 Coopers Creek Bell Ringer Albarino \$24 Bone dry with a salty tang, medium body and citrus flavours; this is my top New Zealand albarino. From Glengarry's, Wellington; Vino Fino, Christchurch; Hamilton Wine Company.

Chardonnay 2013 Tony Bish Fat n Sassy Chardonnay \$24 This new Hawke's Bay chardonnay has a foot in both camps with its seductive creamy body balanced by a tangy citrus finish. From Vino Fino, Christchurch; Regional Wines, Wellington and Liquor King. www.bishwines.co.nz