

New Zealand's MAGIC TOUCH



Michael Pinkus is an award-winning wine writer and past president of the Wine Writers' Circle of Canada. Follow him on Twitter at @thegrapeguy.

First they put their own spin on Sauvignon Blanc; now other grapes are under their spell



There's something to be said about how New Zealand wineries have convinced, or dare we say manipulated, the world of wine to lean in their favour. There is no question they've got people thinking and talking about them.

And any wine region (say, Ontario) could learn a little something by following their example.

The modern New Zealand wine industry is really no older than the one we have right here in Ontario (started in the mid-1970s), but it has grown by leaps and bounds, eclipsing Ontario in stature and in number of wineries. Today, Ontario boasts just over 200 wineries, while New Zealand has a staggering 675 wineries – 2,040 vineyards spread over 11 regions.

On the world stage, when you say “Ontario,” some people have no idea what or where you are talking about; “Canada,” of course, has great brand recognition the world over. But tell people we make wine in Canada and they are gob-smacked.

New Zealand, on the other hand, has made



the world take notice because they stormed the wine store shelves with one grape variety – Sauvignon Blanc.

It's easy to say they took a page out of the book written by their larger neighbour to the northwest, focusing on one grape as an in-road to wine drinkers' consciousness. And like Australia, they also "stole" their grape from the French.

Now, saying the word "steal" infers larceny. They didn't exactly steal the grapes – Sauvignon Blanc is grown all over the world. But in the 1990s, when New Zealand reintroduced it, its place of origin was not exactly a household name.

By comparison, the grape Australia used became a household name worldwide. They turned Syrah (known primarily as one of the main grapes of the Rhone Valley in France) into Shiraz.

Sauvignon Blanc has made its home in France's Loire Valley for centuries, but New Zealand still turned it into their calling

card, putting their own unique spin on it in the process – even though they kept the original name.

But that's how you get recognized these days: take something that quintessentially belongs elsewhere and make it your own (think of the remake of a movie or the re-mix of a popular song).

Now, when you talk about New Zealand wine the first thing that pops into any wine drinker's head (even the casual ones) is Sauvignon Blanc – that's great brand awareness.

But Sauvignon Blanc is not the only thing New Zealand does, and that has become their greatest challenge – to turn people's minds' on to something else.

Over the past few years, New Zealand has been trying to get people to think of them as a Pinot Noir-producing region, and just recently the focus has been on Syrah (Shiraz under a different guise), which is flourishing in some regions of their little

island country.

Considering their locale, Pinot Noir seems to be a no-brainer for New Zealand. They are a cool-climate region – that's where all that acidity comes from in their wines. (Warm days and cool nights drive much-needed acidity into grapes, which helps them make balanced wines with little to no intervention). Pinot Noir, the grape of Burgundy France, is loves a cool climate.

On the other hand, Syrah would seem an odd choice. Australia showed that the grape loves heat, and its natural home is in southern France (Rhone Valley), which is hot. But Syrah has also adapted to northerly climes (read: cool) as well. Ontario is making some really attractive classic versions, and so too is the Hawke's Bay region of New Zealand, which is rumoured to be on the brink of a Syrah-volution in that country.

New Zealand wines can easily be found on LCBO shelves, Sauvignon Blanc being the

most prevalent of all the grape varieties and styles. But keep your eyes open for Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Syrah, Chardonnay and Sparkling wines as well – all offer excellent drinkability on their own but especially with food.

This holiday season, switch it up a bit and bring a little wine to the table from Down-Down Under, New Zealand. And for those looking for the complete lineup of New Zealand wine available at the LCBO, check out the specialty boutique store dedicated to New Zealand wines the next time you're in Toronto. The store is located at Avenue and Lawrence.

•••

Larry Horne, former co-owner and sales manager of Calamus Winery in Niagara, has written a book about his experience in the wine industry.

I bring this up is because he calls New Zealand one of his favourite places on Earth.

Wines to Buy

Enjoy the tastes of New Zealand with one of these selections:

- Babich 2014 Black Label Pinot Gris (\$19.95 - #447417)
- Elephant Hill 2013 Pinot Noir (\$24.95 - #309583)
- Wither Hills 2015 Sauvignon Blanc (\$19.95 - #919514)
- Matua 2015 Hawke's Bay Sauvignon Blanc (\$17.15 - #619452)
- Nobilo 2015 Regional Collection Sauvignon Blanc (\$16.95 - #415745)
- White Cliff 2015 Sauvignon Blanc (\$14.95 - #610972)
- Saint Clair Family Estate 2014 Chardonnay Marlborough (\$16.95 - #417618)
- Stoneleigh 2014 Marlborough Pinot Noir (\$18.95 - #54353)
- Toi Toi 2014 Sauvignon Blanc (\$17.95 - #454785)
- Whitehaven 2015 Sauvignon Blanc (\$19.15 - #308288)
- Fox by John Belsham 2014 Pinot Noir (\$27.95 - #462028)
- Akarua 2015 Rua Pinot Noir (\$27.95 - #295592)

His book, "Besotted: My Love Affair With Wine," is an easy read and a great account of how a personal obsession can guide your life choices and have you fall into friendships you never thought you would. It's

engaging and fun and might be a stocking stuffer this holiday season.

Contact Larry by email to get your hands on a copy – you won't be disappointed: (horneland@msn.com). 



GOLDEN WINDOWS LIMITED

VISIT ONE OF OUR SHOWROOMS AT:

888 GUELPH ST.
KITCHENER, ON | 519.579.3810

309 EXETER RD.
LONDON, ON | 519.652.1677

1112 MARCH RD.
KANATA, ON | 613.592.9111

*"A name you can trust,
you can count on us."*

LOCALLY MANUFACTURED SINCE 1961



1.800.265.2290
SALES@GOLDENWINDOWS.COM
WWW.GOLDENWINDOWS.COM



Bring home the Holidays

Studio 428
design & décor

www.studio428design.com | facebook.com/studio428design

428 GAGE AVENUE, KITCHENER | (519) 579-5225