

A star is born

By Paul Taggart

When our three venerable wine judges are in their dotage, if they receive a visit from a journalist to record the finest achievements of their lives in the wine industry, I hope at least one of them has the recall to say, “We discovered Banks Peninsula as an appellation for fine pinot noir”.

Who knows, the guys may or may not end up in the same rest home, but the comment about the quality reputation for Banks Peninsula wine really could come to pass.

The trio’s discovery came at the new releases tasting for this issue, when wines under the Whistling Buoy label, were tasted blind by Simon Nash MW, Ant Mackenzie and Barry Riwai.

The beauty of our professional new release tastings, unlike some Kiwi wine enthusiasts’ tastings, is that ours are blind, so pre-conceived ideas, perceptions, favourites, thoughts about people you’ve done business with in the past, those who haven’t paid their bills, wineries you don’t like, whether you’ll get any more payments from them in the future if you say something mean, plus 101 other considerations, are not part of the decision-making process. With *WineNZ*, it is solely about what’s in the glass.

And what was in one of the sets of glasses at the summer tasting was pinot noir, and it was very good indeed.

In our spring issue of *WineNZ*, I visited a number of wineries on Banks Peninsula to look at the region’s past and its possible future. Generally the wineries are small, family businesses, more hobby than grand chateaux.

However, a glass of Neil Pattinson’s Whistling

Whistling Buoy Kokolo Vineyard Pinot Noir 2015

\$36

Buoy pinot noir from his Kokolo vineyard made me think this wasn’t your regular Kiwi vin ordinaire, as it had similar cherry notes, chalky tannins and balance as the best wines in our autumn pinot noir tasting. Therefore I was pleased when Neil entered it, along with his 2015 chardonnay, into our new releases section to get an expert opinion from our judges.

Barry loved the pinot noir, noting bright cherry and brambles, sweet vanillin on the nose and palate. He also had strawberry notes.

Ant chipped in with savoury, spicy, toasty, pure, clean, with a



nice tannin structure. “Very good.”

Simon liked the colour, and considered the wine ripe, quite fleshy with a lovely palate, soft, toasty, with cinnamon/vanillin.

While the new releases are not generally given star ratings, the judges do record their scores and the Whistling Buoy pinot would have been a four star wine based on those scores. In the last major pinot noir tasting we did for *WineNZ*, there were only four wines that reached five star, so Whistling Buoy joins some heavy hitting company from the established pinot noir regions in the four star category.

The 2015 wine tasted on this occasion — which retails for \$36 — is a step up from the winery’s 2014 vintage. We won’t know if any further improvement is possible until the next release, but this is certainly a wine to watch.

Some fabulous chardonnays are

Whistling Buoy Kokolo Vineyard Chardonnay 2015

\$36



coming out of Marlborough and Central Otago, where some of our finest pinot noirs are also being produced, so it isn’t a surprise that Whistling Buoy is also producing a Banks Peninsula chardonnay in its range, alongside its pinot noir. The chardonnay has a fairly big price tag of \$36, but received good reviews from the team.

Simon liked the colour. It had a nice nose, and was ripe, balanced and round.

Ant considered it developed, peachy, long, pure with a rich palate.

Barry noted caramel, toffee notes and sweet spice. It had fresh acidity, he added.

The remaining new releases tasted were all Australian, and there were some fine wines among them.

Taylor’s St Andrews Single Vineyard Clare Valley Riesling 2015 went down exceptionally well with the judges, with riesling enthusiast Ant Mackenzie describing it as fine, pure, toasty, dry, vibrant and very good.

Simon considered it had a very nice nose, was limey, elegant, dry, with nice acidity, was clear, lean and good.

Barry noted lime zest and said it was a dry wine with very crisp acidity, some hints of toast and had a clean finish.

Cabernet sauvignon is a wine New Zealanders have slowly learned we don’t do particularly well.

**Taylor's
St Andrews
Single
Vineyard
Clare Valley
Riesling 2015**

\$36

Our summers aren't quite hot enough, apart from Hawke's Bay in good years, so to get consistent quality cab savs we've had to look across the Tasman. Taylor's is the leading producer of cabernet in Australia, and has also been the top cabernet brand in certain price ranges in New Zealand.

Taylor's St Andrews single vineyard release cabernet sauvignon 2013 is a star example of the variety. It is a step up from the value Taylor's offerings, and its quality is reflected in the \$65 price tag. For a great Australian example of the king of grapes, St Andrews is hard to beat.

Shiraz can be a word to turn your nose up at in New Zealand, as we are syrah people. And there can't be many of us who haven't been given a glass from an \$8 a-bottle Aussie shiraz that tastes more like cough medicine than wine.

However, we are equally aware that great Aussie shiraz exists; Penfolds' Grange and Henschke's Hill of Grace — both from South Australia — are probably the two best-known examples, and command huge respect and prices.



**Reilly's Dry Land,
Clare Valley
Shiraz 2013**

\$34.99

While we didn't have either of those examples for our tasting team this time, we did have three shiraz offerings from another South Australian winery — Reilly's. And they hit the spot for our judges.

The Reilly's Dry Land, Clare Valley, Australia Shiraz 2013 (\$34.99) was a wine with a four star, close to five-star score from our judges.

Simon said it was concentrated, quite soft, woody, with good depth, good weight of fruit, and was chunky, chewy, grippy and balanced.

There was spice and menthol notes for Ant, who considered it savoury-sweet with a rich, toasty palate. It was, he said, clean and pure.

Red plum, leather with a touch of prune jumped out for Barry. He said it was a ripe and rich warm climate wine.

The same company's 2014 shiraz produced in Clare Valley (\$19.99) was rated almost equally highly by the judges, at close to five star.

Simon noted blue gum. It had a good weight of mid-palate fruit, was chunky, chewy with a nice finish.

It was savoury and gamey for Ant, with vibrant blue fruits. It had nice tannins, great balance and was very, very good.

Dawson plum, violets and blackberry were on Barry's mind. He said the char carried through to the palate, where oak gives extra support.



**Reilly's
Clare Valley
Shiraz 2014**

\$19.99

The third offering from Reilly's was their second label Barking Mad Claire Valley Shiraz 2014 (\$17.99). While it didn't hit the heights of the first two wines, it was still considered a good representation of the variety.

It was a soft, rounder, quite generous wine. It was quite chunky, a bit fleshy and good.

Ant was sensing graphite. He said it had a measured nose, was brooding, was sweet-rich, had Christmas cake and spice and was "very good".

Mulberry, leather and sweet spices were noted by Barry, who liked the wine's round chalky tannic structure and long, charry finish.

These were all good Aussie shiraz — and ideal for those who want to sample quality examples of the variety without spending the \$600 to \$800 a bottle needed to have a taste of some of the superstar labels.

These wines are imported by Alastair Picton-Warlow of PWines Ltd of Christchurch and are available at a range of good retailers.

\$17.99

**Barking Mad
Claire Valley
Shiraz 2014**



Rather than run adverts dressed up as reviews, *WineNZ* attempts to keep its reviews real. Our team isn't under pressure to say nice things, so they deliver an honest verdict. The *WineNZ* magazine, website and smartphone app readers are our audience.



Sometimes the reviewers' comments are glowing — when they are, our readers can depend on what they say. *WineNZ* bottle stickers are badges of honour — earned in the baptism of fire that is our tasting process. If you see them on a bottle, they mean something.

Entries for our new release section are welcome. The wines will be tasted by our team of stars in our quarterly tasting events, held at EIT in Hawke's Bay. The wines are tasted blind and are given the same professional scrutiny as the entries in our regular specific variety tastings.

Invitations to enter the new releases tastings are sent to wineries a month before each of our tasting events.