

# WINE OVERVIEW



## NEW ZEALAND

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Closely review the syllabus for this wine level to determine just what items require your attention in each of the region/country overview documents.

The Sauvignon Blancs from the Marlborough region of New Zealand are arguably among the most recognizable to wine drinkers. The fresh aromas of grapefruit and gooseberries are a calling card for the region. Considering how well recognized the country is by wine drinkers, it may surprise that the industry as we know it is only a few decades old. Serious wine production in New Zealand was almost non-existent until late 1960's or early 1970's. Even so, it wasn't until 1984, when a government sponsored vine pull served to clean out many of the "wrong" varietals, that the region's winegrowers began to focus and market the grapes and areas that we see today.

While there are then stand-alone wine regions in New Zealand, only a handful generally appear on store shelves and wine lists in the US. One notable GI, Martinborough, is actually a sub-region of Wairarapa, and is much more recognizable than its parent region. In general, the regions on the North island, such as Gisborne and Hawkes Bay, produce more red Bordeaux varietals and more Chardonnay, while Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir dominate the South island.

### NEW ZEALAND WINE LAW

New Zealand, like many new world regions, has relatively simple regulations for wine and wine labeling. As of 2007, the old restriction of 75% varietal has been adjusted higher. The 85% rule is the new standard, stating that 85% of the wine must be exactly what the label claims. Any blending of vintage, grapes or regions must be noted on the label. There is, however, currently no restriction on the use of regional names as a brand name, so there is the very real possibility that a "Marlborough Heights" brand Sauvignon Blanc could be sourced entirely from Hawkes Bay.

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### MAJOR VARIETALS OF NEW ZEALAND

#### RED

- Cabernet Sauvignon – Generally grown in the warmest areas of New Zealand. The regions on the East coast of the North Island are producing some elegantly made Cabernet and Bordeaux blends.
- Merlot – Also restricted mostly to the North Island, Merlot can ripen in spots, but is generally made in a red-fruit driven, lighter-weight style.
- Pinot Noir – Grown across many areas, it produces solidly made wines in Hawkes Bay and Marlborough, and can be world class in the Central Otago.

## WHITE

- Sauvignon Blanc – This grape is the driving force behind the New Zealand wine industry. Showing a good combination of racy acidity and minerality, it has the potential to be among the world’s best. It can also be fairly non-descript, and rely on the grapefruit and gooseberry flavors to mask a lack of interest.
- Chardonnay – Grown to a minor extent in the Marlborough region, but made nicely on the North island, especially in Gisborne and Hawkes Bay.
- Riesling – Not widely planted, but the relatively few examples being made are of high quality, especially when specimens are produced as dry examples of the varietal. Pinot Blanc and Pinot Gris also show the potential to be second in quality to Sauvignon Blanc.

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## REGIONS OF NEW ZEALAND

### SOUTH ISLAND

#### MARLBOROUGH

The driving force behind the New Zealand wine industry, Marlborough sits perched on the northern tip of the South island, which turns out to be a very advantageous position. Sandwiched between Cook Straight and the Southern Alps, Marlborough rests on a broad alluvial plain, and enjoys the cooling maritime winds and the sun-rich northern exposure. The resulting balance and acidity, along with the unique and powerful aromatics, make the Sauvignon Blanc coming from Marlborough one of the world’s most recognizable wines.

#### NELSON

The tiny appellation of Nelson is tucked away at the Northernmost tip of Marlborough, and enjoys many of the same advantages. Wrapping around the Tasman Bay and atop an ancient riverbed system, the gravelly soils and large diurnal swing produce some of the more aromatic wines that New Zealand has to offer. Along with Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, aromatic whites such as Pinot Blanc, Gewurztraminer and Riesling thrive here. Production here is small, but quality is very high.

#### WAIPARA

South of Marlborough and centered on the city of Christchurch, this emerging region shows an ability to turn out interesting wines that are frequently more complex than the typical Marlborough offerings. While the Pinot Noir lacks the intensity of the Central Otago to its south, it can be more aromatic, spicy and ripe than one finds to the north.

#### CENTRAL OTAGO

Simply put, the Central Otago is a world-class location for Pinot Noir. At the southern end of the South island and ringed by mountains, this inhospitable terrain has been sending out small quantities of beautiful wine for years now. The climate here is very dry, with well drained soils and hot summers. The nature of the area, with many inland lakes and lots of deep river valleys, provides cool nights that slow the ripening, resulting in Pinot Noir of stunning depth and complexity.



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## **NORTH ISLAND**

### **WAIRARAPA**

Starting from the Southern end, the Wairarapa/Wellington region is best known for one of its sub-regions, Martinborough, at the Southernmost tip. Although exhibiting a climate and growing season very similar to that of its neighbor across the Cook Strait, the yields here tend to be lower, and most producers here focus on making smaller quantities of high-quality wine. It can be thought of as less commercial than Marlborough, but with a similar profile.

### **HAWKES BAY**

Hawkes Bay is New Zealand's second most widely producing region, and the best home of traditional European red varieties, especially Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and even some Syrah. It is becoming common to see Bordeaux blends from Hawkes Bay, which show pretty dark red fruit character and nice acidity. As hot and dry as New Zealand gets, it can ripen many red grapes that other areas cannot. About 50% of the production here is red, much higher than any other region other than the Central Otago, which makes about 80% Pinot Noir.

### **GISBORNE**

Along with Hawkes Bay to the south, Gisborne runs along the eastern edge of the island. Chardonnay is at its best in this small region, which boasts the Easternmost situation of any winegrowing area. While warm, it generally lacks the ability of Hawkes Bay to reach adequate brix on Cabernet and Merlot. It does, however, produce Chardonnay with a higher degree of richness than any other region in New Zealand.