

Wine Orbit

Independent Extensive Reviews featuring New Zealand Wines and Wines of the World

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Waipara's Got Talent



A Waipara vineyard ready for harvest

Waipara's got talent. It is no secret and certainly no surprise to find winemaking talent in Waipara. This unassuming and unremarkable stretch of valley floor, surrounded by gently rolling hills, produces some of New Zealand's finest rieslings, chardonnays and pinot noirs. It's partly due to the relatively dry climate, warm summer days and cool nights, as well as a diverse range of soils from Glesnevin gravels to rich clay and limestone. It is also due to the dedicated grape growers who produce fruit with concentration and talented

winemakers whose gently bubbling ferments seem to metamorphose that wonderful natural fruit intensity.

When you taste a selection of outstanding Waipara rieslings you could be convinced that this is the riesling capital of the New World. Of course there are other regions where riesling is so well expressed but Waipara is, without question, one of the best. It's cool enough to retain vibrant acidity yet warm enough to ripen the grapes fully so they display wide-ranging aromas and flavours from lemon/lime to mandarin, and on occasion stonefruit and honey notes from botrytis influence. There are often elusive chalky mineral characters both on the nose and on the palate making these wines delicately graceful and immensely appealing.

Waipara is of course much more than a fantastic riesling region. They also do amazing aromatic whites such as beautifully textured pinot gris and strikingly aromatic gewurztraminer. And some of New Zealand's best pinot noirs come from here. The best of the best from the region is undoubtedly Pegasus Bay with their complete range of wines with no weakness in their repertoire. A Pegasus Bay riesling sings like a soprano hitting the very high notes with precision and clarity. Their pinot noir on the other hand, resonates like a baritone with richly textured and expansive mouthfeel.



'In Praise of Riesling' Dinner at Pegasus Bay Restaurant.

Muddy Water is another top-flight producer making wines of refinement and immaculate finesse. The exceptional chardonnay and pinot noir maker, Mountford Estate, has made a riesling from 2008 and it's a serious contender. You would be more than satisfied with any wine from Bascand, Black Estate, Camshorn, Dancing Water, Fiddler's Green, Mud House, Torlesse Wines, Waipara Hills or Waipara Springs. The most promising producers are Greystone Wines, Terrace Edge, The Crater Rim and Weka River. They are small volume producers but definitely worth hunting down. Then there is the incomparable Daniel Schuster with the most classically structured and framed wines – full of character and strength.

By the way, the talent of Waipara doesn't stop at excellent winegrowing. Brent (Harry) Harris, viticulturist for Weka River, does part-time stunt driving which he skillfully demonstrated some months ago when he 'drove' down a near vertical cliff, with some air time, finally hitting a vineyard post and a row of vines abruptly stopping an otherwise graceful landing. His dog now refuses to get in the ute but Harry doesn't seem to have lost the edge as Weka River wines show outstanding concentration and balance.

We simply need to sit back and enjoy the talent and hard work of Waipara winegrowers as there are dozens of delicious wines available.

Weka River Riesling 2007

A wonderfully pure expression of the variety showing lemon/lime characters with a touch of toasty notes and a superbly well-textured palate. \$22.00

Terrace Edge Pinot Gris 2008

Beautifully fragrant, this wine shows apricot, pear and floral aromas followed by a luscious palate with gentle sweetness and rich texture. \$19.00

Greystone Gewurztraminer 2008

A classic Gewurztraminer displaying lychee, floral and spice characters with subtle sweetness and seamless mouthfeel. \$27.00

Black Estate Chardonnay 2007

A stunning chardonnay displaying stonefruit, cream and vanilla notes with a richly textured and refreshing palate. \$32.00

Pegasus Bay Pinot Noir 2007

The stunning bouquet shows black/blueberry, floral and spice characters leading to a sumptuous and rich palate with satin smooth texture and firm tannins. \$48.00