

Fabulous Felton's first 25 years

Joelle Thomson raises a glass to Felton Road's milestone and samples a very special new release...



A century is a long time for a human life, but it's not a long stretch for a fine wine brand, which can take at least a couple of decades to build brand awareness. This is exactly what Nigel Greening and Blair Walter from Felton Road Winery have been doing extremely successfully for the past quarter century. So successfully, in fact, that it may seem surprising to know that Felton Road Wines is only 25 years old and, for the first time in 15 years, the team has launched its first new single vineyard Pinot Noir.

That new wine is MacMuir Pinot Noir, named for the vineyard of the same name on Felton Road, which is situated alongside the better-known Calvert Vineyard. The new wine was launched at the 25th anniversary of Felton Road Wines, in October last year.

A handful of wine writers were invited to the winery's home in Bannockburn, Central Otago, to taste a selection of Felton Road's old and new wines, focusing mainly on single vineyard Pinot Noirs from Block 5, Cornish Point, the Calvert Vineyard, the new MacMuir and also the Bannockburn blend: a wine made from grapes grown on nearly all of these different blocks of land around the winery and along Felton Road.

This is a dramatic corner of countryside. Gold mining sluicings define the landscape as much as the mountainous majesty of the arid surrounds. Lush green vines struggle to find their footing in the craggy dry rocks and the variation of the land's aspect to the sun, wind and its elevation all bring depth and a meaningful expression to the term 'single vineyard' wines.

Felton Road winemaker Blair Walter produces 100% biodynamically certified wines, meaning that all the grapes are grown without any chemicals and that the land is farmed in a sustainable fashion, with all waste recycled back into the property.

In a broad sense, the term 'single vineyard wine' has, I believe, been over-used, often in a meaningless fashion; in a similar way to the buzz around the term 'craft beer'. Both terms can fall victim to marketing hype and don't always carry as much mana as I would like to see; speaking as one who is asked to critique these products.

But in the case of Felton Road, the wines do speak of a sense of place, even though these single sites sit right next to each other, in some cases. The two wines that speak to me of place more than any others, at least this early in their lives, are the 2021 Felton Road Calvert Pinot Noir and the 2021 Felton Road MacMuir Pinot Noir. Incredible differences are apparent, from their aromas to the body, structure and feel of these two wines in the mouth and also the taste of the fruit.

It's still early days for New Zealand's young wine industry but a lot has happened at Felton over the past 25 years, not least climate change and the profoundly positive impact that has had on the wines, says Blair Walter. But that's another story.

2021 Felton Road MacMuir Pinot Noir

RRP \$96.99

This first vintage of MacMuir Pinot Noir comes from the single vineyard site in Bannockburn of the same name. This wine has a superb fragrance of red berries, plum jam and elegant florals, which sits in a full-bodied silky Pinot Noir with enormous depth and complex spicy flavours. It drinks beautifully now and will keep for the long haul in a cool, temperature-stable cellar.

