

The Sydney Morning Herald

Frequent flyer: Blair Walter

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This winemaker knows New Zealand from the ground up.

Q You live in the South Island's Central Otago region. Describe the seasons.

A Dramatic: hot summers, the coldest winters with low rainfall. Summer time is cherries, apricots and waterskiing on the lakes, and the autumn colours are spectacular.

Q You work at Felton Road winery. When is the best time to visit?

A When one of our importers visits, as we'll have our full range of wines open and quite possibly some older vintages, too. Just ask at the cellar door: "Are you sure Blair doesn't have some 'Block' wines open?"

Q Why does Central Otago attract so many mountain bikers?

A It's such a great way to explore the stunning high country's awesome tracks and downhill runs without having to be an ironman. There's also the more sedate but no less scenic four-day Central Otago Rail Trail. We have it all. Even our helicopters have bike racks. Just this morning as I was driving out of Queenstown Airport, I (rather jealously) saw a Squirrel helicopter heading to the mountains with three bikes strapped on each side.

Q Your favourite country to visit?

A Japan. I have a reputation among our import sales team for enjoying the weird and wonderful foods that Japan offers. Last year I got off the plane and immediately sat down for one of the most memorable meals I have ever had, in a tiny yakitori restaurant in Kobe, which served most of its chicken raw. Then there was the horse-meat restaurant in Kumamoto.

Q What's in your hand luggage?

A Everything. I only do carry-on. We export to more than 35 countries and I'm only ever in the one place at most for three days, so a few shirts and hotel laundry services get me by. Wine people have an acute sense of smell, so the laundry bit is important.

Q Greatest indulgence when travelling?

A Our wines sell in many of the most spectacular restaurants, hotels and lodges in the world, so visiting to do tastings and dinners is quite the indulgence for a country boy from Central Otago.

Blair Walter co-hosts an annual dinner at The Farm at Cape Kidnappers in June; see capekidnappers.com. Felton Road is on the Central Otago Wine Trail. See feltonroad.com; otagowine.com.

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