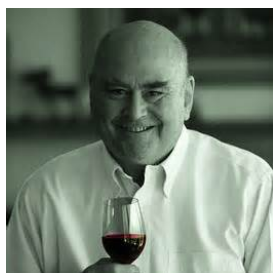


WINE JAMES HALLIDAY



You might think that Central Otago winery Felton Road's recognition as one of the greatest New World producers of pinot noir would allow owner Nigel Greening and long term winemaker Blair Walter to take their feet off the pedal. Yet their restless hunger and curiosity continues apace.

When the opportunity to purchase half the Calvert Vineyard recently came up, Greening did not hesitate. The half he has acquired are three pinot noir blocks; Willows, Aurum and Springs – designed and planted by Felton Road in 2001 in conjunction with a long-term lease-back arrangement. Walter is delighted, saying: "Calvert produces what may be our most elegant cuvee of pinot noir. It is a wine of finesse and purity rather than muscle." English wine writer Matthew Jukes described it as "New Zealand's first pinot noir grant cru vineyard".

Felton Road now has three of its four vineyards on its eponymous road – The Elms (its first vineyard, planted in 1992), Calvert and MacMuir. The last is 5.8ha of bare land acquired from the Calvert family in 2010, which will be fully planted to pinot noir this coming spring.

I have written before of the relentless marketing of Felton Road wines around the globe by Greening and Walter. Two weeks before the Melbourne presentation of the 2012 vintage wines, I met the duo in Burgundy, Walter on his way home for some quick R&R after visiting Oslo, Copenhagen, Helsinki and Stockholm.

For 2014 the size of the picking crew will be doubled to ensure each block is picked at its optimum. Walter says, "I have realised we should seek to achieve appropriate ripeness, not phenological ripeness, which may involve picking earlier in some instances." He was like a dog gnawing at a bone as he also ruminated about vine age and picking decisions, and made it clear he hoped to make even better wines in the future.

2012 Felton Road Bannockburn Pinot Noir

Bright, clear colour; super-fragrant cherry, plum and spice aromas all seek to dominate the bouquet, but none succeed, with a hint of oak in the background. The palate has exceptional texture and length, 30% whole bunch, 30% new oak.

14% alc; screwcap

95 points; drink to 2019; \$72

2012 Felton Road Calvert Pinot Noir

The deepest colour of all four Felton Road 2012 pinot releases, setting the scene for a slightly atypical wine; the complex bouquet has a range of sage, forest and dark spice aromas, with black cherry on the fore-palate, then a complete change of pace with lift and brightness on the back palate; raspberry and red cherry fruit wrapped in a web of fine but persistent tannins.

14% alc; screwcap

96 points; drink to 2022; \$85

2012 Felton Road Bannockburn Chardonnay

White peach and grapefruit drive the bouquet and palate, 10 per cent new oak totally absorbed by the fruit. Long, mineral acidity cleanses the mouth, leaving the finish fresh. 100 per cent malolactic fermentation, and neither fined nor filtered.

14% alc; screwcap

95 points; drink to 2018; \$55