

NZ Pinots - how good?

3 Mar 2009 by Jancis Robinson

Pinot Noir Week continues. New Zealand was already showing signs of Pinotmania at the turn of the century and total plantings of Pinot Noir overtook those of Chardonnay to become the country's second most planted grape variety after Sauvignon Blanc in 2006. With its distance from the equator and naturally high acidities, New Zealand is well suited to this early ripening vine and there is hardly a New Zealand wine region that does not have its own distinctive style of Pinot Noir although the finest examples tend to come from the South Island and North Island regions south of Hawke's Bay.

While I was there recently I had the chance to catch up on how New Zealand's Pinots were evolving stylistically, notably but not exclusively with a collection of wines chosen for their superiority and served blind in regional groups just before the Central Otago Pinot Noir Celebration to us visiting wine writers. You can see my survey of New Zealand Pinot last time I was there four years ago [here](#). Many of today's NZ Pinots seem to be gaining in grace, perhaps partly as a result of increasing vine age, but I think also because of the increasing sensitivities of Kiwi winemakers, if not all Kiwi wine drinkers, to the special charms of successfully subtle and complex red burgundy. There are still some big, bold wines, some of them well made, but the proportion of NZ Pinots that have something more about them and which suggest that they may age well seems to be increasing.

I will be publishing a separate report on my comprehensive tastings of [2007 Central Otago Pinot Noirs](#), but the notes below include Central Otago Pinots from other vintages, as well as Pinot Noirs of all vintages from other New Zealand regions. I have listed them in descending score order within each region, on the principle that few of these producers have an international reputation.

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In the south of the South Island there has been a discernible move away from the flattering fruit bomb style I encountered on my first visit here in 2005. Biodynamic burgundy-worshippers such as Nick Mills of Rippon Vineyards and Blair Walter of Felton Road seem to be having an increasing influence while the region works out how best to go organic. It has a perfect continental climate with warm, dry summers, although the detail is contentious. See [Robin Dacey's article](#) and reactions to it. Pinots here are remarkably consistent, which is perhaps not so surprising since so many of them are made at one of the two major contract wineries in the region. For more detail on 'Central', as the locals call it, see [here](#). Full survey of 2007 Central Otago Pinots to come.

Felton Road, Block 3 Pinot Noir 2004 Central Otago 18 Drink 2008-13

Looks quite evolved. Complex and well knit on the nose – beguiling, perfume – Chambolle! Or is it Vosne. This has real energy! Meaty and supple. Layers. Long. 14%

Felton Road, Block 3 Pinot Noir 2005 Central Otago 17.5 Drink 2008-13

Mild and herby – some wild thyme notes, with lots of ripe fruit underneath. Very gentle and juicy and succulent with good balance now. Bit angular overall. 13.5%

Rippon Pinot Noir 2006 Central Otago 17+ Drink 2012-17

Designed to showcase Wanaka in Rudi Bauer's subregional presentation. Burgundian nose – dry and savoury and subtle. Bone dry finish but this may be an old-vine effect? Sappy and appetising and quite fine tannins yet dry with a spine and good structure.

Felton Road, Block 3 Pinot Noir 2006 Central Otago 17 Drink 2010-14

Big, sweet and powerful with a rather candied nose. Strong dried herbs note. Quite marked acidity but a very slight hole on the back palate compared with the 2007. Not the mellifluous nature of the 2007 - I do see a parallel with 2006 burgundy! 14.5%

Felton Road, Block 3 Pinot Noir 2003 Central Otago 17- Drink 2007-12

Sweet and simpler on the nose than the 2004 – slightly dry and candied on the nose. Rich sweet start then a bit dry on the finish. Even slightly tough. Slightly reminiscent of 2003 in Burgundy. A slightly sour note on the finish. Just a little bit sickly.

Felton Road, Block 3 Pinot Noir 2002 Central Otago 17 Drink 2008-13

Very deep crimson still. Rather racy and still muscular. Lots of density and ripeness. Round and a little simple. Certainly not delicate! Bit of a block indeed!