

**FELTON ROAD 2009 RELEASES**  
**INCLUDING THREE CALVERT PINOT NOIRS**

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In just over a decade, Felton Road has become one of the superstars of Central Otago and one of the top producers in the country, making particularly fine Pinot Noir that is highly respected in the wine world. The style of the Pinots is one of burgundian complexity with New Zealand fruit sweetness, and it compares well with that from anywhere in the world. However, Felton Road is equally successful with the other varieties it produces. Felton Road's Riesling is nearly as highly sought after as the Pinot Noirs, and Chardonnay is handled superbly, arguably superior to any other maker in the region.

With a 12,000 case production, Felton Road remains a small, boutique label. Its output is based on vineyard plantings in the approximate proportions of 70% Pinot Noir, 20% Chardonnay and 10% Riesling. Owner Nigel Greening, hailing from the U.K. is now resident in Central Otago, and his team led by winemaker Blair Walter and viticulturist Gareth King continue to develop Felton Road, taking the operation closer to full Demeter certification for its biodynamic regimes. The sense of settled purpose pervades, and Felton Road looks to maintain its position at the head of the field.

This tasting of Felton Road's latest releases with Blair Walter was a superb one, with a range of wines that are at the very top level of what New Zealand is achieving. The standard is truly international, and the wine expressions are individual and representative of 'terroir', as the single vineyard and 'Block' wines across all three varieties tasted demonstrate. However, this tasting also included a special look at 'winemaker signature'. Three different winemakers with identical lots of fruit putting their 'stamp' of style on the resulting wine. We tasted 2008 'Calvert Vineyard' Pinot Noirs from Felton Road, Craggy Range and Pyramid Valley. This was an intriguing part of the tasting that continued an experiment begun with the 2006 vintage.

Here are our notes and scores on the wines tasted:

**Flight One: Chardonnay.**

This variety has been difficult to handle in Central Otago. There are ripeness issues and oak handling must be sensitive. Unoaked expressions similar to Chablis, have been touted as the way to go, yet these do not measure up well in general. Felton Road picks relatively early, recognising a narrow optimum window for balance, employs oak, but with great care. The **Felton Road Chardonnay 2008** (18.5-/20), at 14.0% alc, was all barrel fermented in 10% new oak and given batonnage with malolactic conversion. With slight golden hues, this showed a full, ripe citrus and mealy nose with plenty of barrel ferment nuttiness. Tight on the palate, this possessed very fine cool citrus fruit flavours, delicate mealiness, refreshing acidity and real elegance of style. The **Felton Road 'Block 2' Chardonnay 2008** (18.5+/20), at 13.5% alc, was all Mendoza clone, barrel fermented and matured 12 months in 12% new oak. Pale straw in colour, this was tight and backward in expression, but the purity and clarity stood out. The palate was very powerful, concentrated and brooding, very much a white burgundy style, that will need another 2-3 years before its true potential will be realised.

**Flight Two: Felton Road Pinot Noirs**

Blair Walter sees the Felton Road Pinot Noirs as expressions of site and vintage, and his 'intervention' has evolved to a minimalist degree, believing that much of the quality of the wine is the result of the

biodynamic-based work of viticulturist Gareth King. Three Pinot Noirs were tasted in this flight. Firstly the 'regular' **Felton Road Pinot Noir 2008** (19.0+/20), at 14.0% alc, 11 clones of fruit from the three estate sites, 20% whole bunch and aged 11 months in French oak. Bright purple ruby colour, this had a full, harmonious and balanced bouquet of dark plums and cherries, sweet and well-ripened. Full, fresh, ripe and plummy on the palate, the integration and balance of the extraction and excellent oak subtlety allowed immediate accessibility. Classic Central Otago vibrancy of fruit. A wine that will drink well over the next 5+ years easily. Next was the **Felton Road 'Cornish Point' Pinot Noir 2008** (19.0/20), at 14.0% alc. A single vineyard wine, vines planted in 2000, 20% whole bunch and 11 months in Burgundian coopered oak. Full purple ruby-red in colour. Tightly bound in expression on nose, but with excellent floral perfumes, minerals and steel, along with dark berry fruits. Fine, firm, tight, with tannins showing prominently as well as acidity. Great intensity and depth and real length. A wine that will develop well over the next 5-7 years plus. Then on to the rare **Felton Road 'Block 5' Pinot Noir 2008** (19.0-/20), at 14.0% alc, from Block 5 in the Elms vineyard, vines planted 1999, 16-23% whole cluster, 18 months in 38% new French oak. Purple ruby red with light edge. A backward wine at this stage, tight and taut with lifted black fruits, oak and minerals. On the palate, great extraction with finesse, black fruits and savoury forest notes along with minerals. Dramatic wine with the potential to develop over a decade.

### **Flight Three: 'Calvert Vineyard' Pinot Noirs**

Identical parcels of fruit from the Calvert Vineyard, managed by Felton Road were given to Blair Walter, Adrian Baker of Craggy Range and Mike Weersing of Pyramid Valley to vinify. This was an exercise that first started with the 2006 vintage. Our tastings of the three Calvert wines from the 2006 vintage have yielded consistent results in style for the producers. Appreciation and preferences vary according to personal and subjective taste. Would the 2008s appear to follow this pattern? We served the three 2008 Calvert wines blind. First in this flight was the **Pyramid Valley 'Calvert' Pinot Noir 2008** (18.5+/20), 14.3% alc, 25% whole bunch, 14 months in 25% new French barriques. Mike Weersing made 700 cases. Dark, deep purple-red coloured. This had tightly bound, classical dark cherry and berry aromas, very fresh, with a steely and mineral aspect to its expression. This tightness and taut tension was carried on the palate, and the acidity was prominent. Violets and florals gave the wine a real lift, and a spicy element came through. Fine-grained tannins also showing through. This has obvious potential to develop over the next 5-7 years. It was the second preferred by the group of tasters attending. Next was the **Felton Road 'Calvert' Pinot Noir 2008** (19.0+/20), at 14.0% alc, 20% whole bunch and given 11 months in French barriques. Dark purple hued ruby red. This was a wine with great beauty and elegance, the bouquet particularly redolent of florals. Also seriously structured with fine tannins, this had a sumptuousness, sweetness and juiciness of fruit expression. Great length. Somewhere in between the style of the 'regular' Felton Road Pinot Noir and 'Block 5'? Easily the most preferred wine of the flight for this group of tasters. Finally, the **Craggy Range 'Calvert' Pinot Noir 2008** (18.5/20), at 14.2% alc, 15% whole bunch and 10 months in 33% new French barriques. Dark, deep, purple ruby-red colour. Solid, full, broad, with dense dark plum aromas, very concentrated on bouquet. Again, dense and solid in expression on palate, full tannins, but open and attractively accessible. Black fruits with smoke and spice notes. What it may lack in elegance, it more than makes up for with its richness and breadth. However, the least preferred of the three wines by the attendees. Generally, the wines were identified correctly by the tasters. Many felt there was a family resemblance in all of the Felton Road Pinot Noir wines. I felt the wines continued the style expressed with the 2006 'Calvert' wines, made by each of the three different winemakers, all of them of great quality.

### **Flight Four: Riesling**

Seen now as the variety that is next successful in Central Otago after Pinot Noir. Felton Road has been extremely successful in the varied interpretation of the varied styles. With the 2009s tasted, all were very youthful, and all three were capable of aging very well, soaking up or throwing off any reductive notes. One attendee felt tasting the wines was 'infanticide'. First was the **Felton Road Dry Riesling 2009** (18.5+/20), at 13.0% alc. and 5.9 g/l rs, fruit from the Calvert and Elms vineyards. Pale straw yellow in colour. This had great purity and clarity of florals and limes, with a steel edge. Excellent concentration and depth to the nose. Dry on palate, the richness of lime fruitiness and its intense up-front expression gave it a sense of power. Showing extremely well and will continue to do so for 5-6 years easily. A crowd favourite was the Mosel styled **Felton Road Riesling 2009** (19.0-/20), at 10.0% alc and 53 g/l rs, fruit from the Calvert and Elms vineyards. Very youthful in appearance, pale straw with green hues. Gentle aromatics of florals, jasmine and limes with a tinge of honey. Medium sweetish, but absolutely no cloying on the palate. Beautiful and subtle with its marmalade, florals and honey, some soft textures on palate, but fine, soft acidity keeping the balance. A keeper for 6-8 years. Thirdly was the **Felton Road 'Block 1' Riesling 2009** (18.5/20), at 9.5% alc. and 65 g/l rs, fruit from Block 1 of the Elms vineyard. Gemanic in style, this was very youthful in colour with straw green hues. A wine of immense subtlety and finesse, with delicate florals and blossoms, a touch of honey, but a slight touch of reductive sulphide, a sign of its youth. Sweetish palate, this possessed fine concentration, richness in a refined way, a delicacy of floral expression, somewhat shy and subdued, partly from the reduction. This will develop beautifully over the next 7-9 years.