

Snubbing the snobbery

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The wine industry needs to stop “clinging to the debris of ‘fine wine’” and instead speak in a language future customers can relate to, Nigel Greening told attendees at Pinot Noir New Zealand 2025. “Instead of pontificating about minerality, texture and palate length, what’s wrong with deliciousness? Instead of ‘wait a decade, what’s wrong with ‘it will be gorgeous tonight?’”

It’s not about “dumbing down” but binning pretension, says the owner of Central Otago fine wine producer Felton Road, urging industry to “abandon exclusivity and embrace inclusivity”, demystifying wine to broaden its appeal.

That includes ditching an obsession with ageing fine wine, he says. “Historically, winemaking often needed a long period for the harshness of the product to resolve, and so we came to revere the taste of old wine... Now, we can enjoy old wines, I have no problem with that, but it shouldn’t be a requirement.”

The notion of fine wine is feeling stale and tainted, as “an overpriced piece of snobbery largely created by ageing white and Asian males”, the self-described ageing white male says. “Add to that weather chaos caused by climate change, enormous social instability, the prospect of continued and worsening conflict and political anarchy. It is easy to see that there is a rough landscape ahead.”

Navigating the waters the industry finds itself “adrift” in will require looking ahead to a better future, rather than back at an alluring past, he says. That includes



Nigel Greening

building credibility as producers who are socially aware, successful, in demand, environmentally responsible, and good value. “The list of possible desirable hats is a long one, and being able to wear several undoubtedly can help build resilience. I suppose that’s one reason why Felton Road seems to be collecting certifications like they are going out of style. With consumers more and more suspicious of generalised puff, it’s a way to try and say, ‘we really mean it.’”

Felton Road is uncomfortable being seen as part of the tradition of fine wine, “which is tedious, snobby and pretentious”, Nigel says. “It seeks to create exclusivity and I’m through with that. We no longer want to be a surrogate Burgundy; wines that are about insane prices, unreliable quality and increasingly tenuous clinging to outdated ideas of terroir.”

While Felton Road is certified organic, biodynamic, a member of International Wineries For Climate Action, and B-Corp, it doesn’t necessarily fit easily in such groups. “These are hats we can

wear, rather than a broader banner to head out into the market under,” he says, describing the shortfalls of organics and biodynamics when it comes to climate change or social impact, for example. Instead he suggests the banner could align with Pascaline Lepeltier’s notion of Living Wine. “By that she means wines that are artisan made and grown; wines of integrity, individuality and interest... Wine grown in a way that respects life.” That requires a wine producer to value ethics as much as aesthetics, he adds. “This idea encompasses social, ethical, climate, environment, low impact, light touch, sensitivity, to create something that is both aspirational and inspirational. Not exclusive wine, but inclusive wine.”

A great wine is a conversation piece, Nigel says. “Not in its majesty or its scarcity, or its price, but in its unique interest and wonderful flavour. So, that’s my plan to weather this storm: Don’t throw hats away just because they aren’t perfect. Demystify, be inclusive not exclusive, and embrace ‘Living’ as the core of our communication.” ❖