

Wines of New Zealand

March has come in like a lamb, albeit a somewhat chilly one. The stunning cobalt blue skies and the first flowers in hedgerows make me think of spring even though it will be very slow in blossoming. It is the time when the southern hemisphere wine growers are busy with their harvest, so it's a good time to look at a few of the recent vintages down under.

New Zealand has always had many things in common with Wales: the green countryside, the lamb, seafood, rugby and the people. There are of course many ex-pats living in New Zealand. The wines of New Zealand are relatively small in production compared to other new world countries, and so wisely many have looked at the quality end of the market, rather than the mass market; just like many of the food producers in Wales.

It coined the term cool climate which befits the style of many of the wines. Hence they tend to concentrate on grape varieties such as Sauvignon blanc, Riesling, and Chardonnay. The success with red is undoubtedly Pinot Noir which has proved difficult in so many newer producing countries.

I tasted a duo of the burgundy varieties Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from 2009 and 2008 from the great producer Villa Maria. The Chardonnay 09 was distinctly restrained yet showing many layers of ripe fruit without overpowering. Pear and peach was balanced with citrus and it was quite delightful with a lunch of seafood, starting with mussels, then lobster, then red mullet, guilt head bream and cod in a sort of a bouillabaisse. The wine rode out the rich and racy flavours with distinction.

Pinot Noir from 08 had the time in barriques to soften the fruit and make it supple with complex savoury vegetal and spice nuances over the distinctive ripe cherry and raspberry fruit. Needless to say it was superb with Welsh lamb, but will be even better with the new season's Welsh lamb that we shall be able to enjoy over the coming months. March might go out like a lion and we shall have to wait a little longer than usual for the pastures to grow and the livestock flourish.

Villa Maria Private Bin Chardonnay 2009 £7.99

Villa Maria Private Bin Pinot Noir 2008 £8.99

Oyster Bay Chardonnay £6.99

Oyster bay Pinot Noir £9.99