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# 7 Incredible Red Wines From New Zealand to Drink Now

The country may be famous for Sauvignon Blanc, but it also produces great reds.

By MIKE DESIMONE AND JEFF JENSEN

Tim Kiser/Cindy Kirsopp/Jon Thompson

New Zealand has over 100,000 acres of vines, but only one-third of those are dedicated to growing red grape varieties. The other two-thirds are planted with—you guessed it—Sauvignon Blanc—for which the country has become extremely well known in the international market. Pinot Noir plantations only account for about 14,000 acres and rank as the number two grape grown. Other red varieties include Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec, and Cabernet Franc.

Grapes were first planted in New Zealand in 1819, and most historians credit the variety of vines to James Busby, the Scotsman known as the Father of Australian Viticulture, who brought cuttings here in 1836, but the New Zealand wine industry truly owes its success to French Catholic missionaries and vineyard workers from Italy and Croatia. When you visit New Zealand, you'll notice that many of the wineries have other geological names, local Maori names, or Croatian family names. We tasted about 30 wines this week to pick these seven stunning examples for you:

## Pyramid Valley 2020 Earth Smoke Pinot Noir Canterbury

Photo: Pyramid Valley

Burgundy-trained winemakers Mike Weersing and Claudia Elise Weersing founded Pyramid Valley in 2000 and farmed their grapes using only biodynamic principles. In 2017, they transferred stewardship of the land to experienced NZ winemakers Steve Smith and Brian Sheth. Their 2020 Earth Smoke Pinot Noir is drinking nicely with a few additional years in the bottle after release. It has delightful aromas of cranberry, red cherry, and a touch of anise flower with rounded tannins and flavors of pomegranate, candied orange peel, and cranberry.

BUY NOW $75


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## Villa Maria 2021 Taylors Pass Pinot Noir Marlborough

Photo: Villa Maria

Croatian-born George Fistonich began his winemaking career in 1961 when he leased five acres of land from his father and produced his first vintage of Villa Maria only a year later. He was knighted in 2009 for his contributions to the New Zealand wine industry and continued making wine for 60 years. In 2020, Villa Maria was acquired by the New Zealand wine company, Indevin Group. Their 2021 Taylor's Pass Pinot Noir has aromas of freshly picked cherry, cherry cola, and caramelized orange peel, and flavors of cranberry, cherry, brown baking spices, and red raspberry.

BUY NOW $45

## Craggy Range Winery 2023 Te Muna Road Vineyard Pinot Noir Martinborough

Photo: Craggy Range

In 1993, the Peabody family started their search for the perfect place to plant a new vineyard, and their adventure took them to the Americas, France, and Australia before finding their forever home in New Zealand. They planted vines in the ancient riverbed of the Ngaruroro River in the Gimblett Gravels region of Hawke's Bay and craft amazing wines grown in alluvial soils. Their Te Muna Road Pinot Noir has aromas of cranberry, pomegranate, and brown baking spices with soft, velvety tannins and flavors of cherry, red plum, and cranberry.

BUY NOW $55

## Felton Road 2024 MacMuir Pinot Noir Central Otago

Photo: Felton Road

Felton Road is located in the Bannockburn subregion of Central Otago and grows grapes in four vineyards planted on north-facing slopes comprised of glacial silts. All four are farmed biodynamically and certified by BioGro and Demeter, two of the largest certifying bodies in New Zealand. Felton Road's MacMuir 2024 Pinot Noir has aromas of cherry, cranberry, and a whiff of cardamom that lead to flavors of dried cherry, pomegranate, and brown baking spices.

BUY NOW $90

## Two Paddocks 2022 The Fusilier Pinot Noir Central Otago

Photo: Two Paddocks

A few years back, we had the honor of having lunch with Sam Neill, the well-known actor who turned winemaker, and we have been staunch fans of his wines ever since. He first planted Pinot Noir in the Gibbston Valley in 1993 and then doubled the size of his holdings in 2008, planting different Pinot Noir clones to increase the complexity of his excellently crafted wines. One of the spicier Pinot Noirs we tasted, Two Paddocks 2022 The Fusilier has aromas of sweet baking spices accented by finely ground white pepper, red raspberry, hickory smoke, and red cherry. It has supple yet fine-grained tannins and flavors of red currant, raspberry, pomegranate, and dried cherry.

BUY NOW $75

## Te Mata Estate 2022 Bullnose Syrah Hawkes Bay

Photo: Te Mata Estate

Te Mata Estate's original winery was part of English immigrant John Chambers's landholdings at Te Mata Station. He built a home for his family and stables for his animals in the 1870s, and his son Bernard planted Pinot Noir, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Chardonnay on the property's north-facing hills in 1892. Although the property was sold in 1929, the winery has been in constant use since its inception and still uses the original winery buildings to make wine. Their 2022 Bullnose Syrah is inky purple in the glass with aromas of violet, black cherry, and cherry cola. It is full-bodied with voluptuous tannins and flavors of black raspberry, ripe cherry, and red plum.

BUY NOW $60

## Escarpment 2022 Martinborough Pinot Noir Martinborough

Photo: Escarpment

Escarpment is named for the geologic term describing a steep slope that lies at the end of a plateau of earth. Soil types here include rocky and alluvial soils from ancient riverbeds. Grapes are tended by viticulturist Rowan Hoskins, who wines are made by winemaker Tim Bourne. Their 2022 Pinot Noir has enticing aromas of cherry cola, cinnamon, and red raspberry that lead to delicious flavors of cherry, raspberry, cranberry, and brown baking spices.

BUY NOW $60


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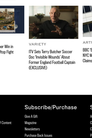

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