

**Pinot noir is a cult wine.** No, it isn't some religious sect but pinot-philes do act with common purpose and in a conspiratorial manner. Pinot-philes are seduced by the perfume, the clarity and the sheer sexiness of this minx and will happily pay \$50 or more to have their passion fulfilled. Zealous pinot lovers gleefully email, blog and twitter away about the latest vintage, the newest producer or the hottest region – which, being pinot, must be cool.

The Burgundy region of France is home to this capricious pinot noir vine and it is acknowledged as producing the benchmarks for the variety. Unfortunately, Burgundian pinots are inconsistent and expensive – often resulting in a poor “quality for money” quotient.

New World pinots offer consistency and value and there is a lot of noisy twittering about New Zealand pinot – with Central Otago creating the loudest buzz. Memories are short and converts to pinot-philia have a habit of rushing to the newest region or producer with barely a thought to the past. Central Otago is a boisterous and brash interloper, only coming of age in the last decade.

Mature pinot lovers take a longer-term view and recall the excitement of the first wave of New Zealand pinots from the (then) groundbreaking Martinborough region. Pinots from the pioneering producers – Ata Rangi, Dry River and Martinborough Vineyards – first appeared in the early 1990s. Those founding winegrowers are still at the cutting edge of Martinborough pinot but have been joined by a multicultural blend of newcomers – some local farmers, others refugees from big business or demanding professions. All share a common purpose: to produce pinots in the Martinborough style – wines of modest weight, intense yet savoury fruit flavours, a fine acidity and mild tannins. In short, benchmark pinot noir.

The original plantings were, quite literally, on the periphery of Martinborough, planted on a gravel “wave” that runs down to the Ruamahangu River. In the late '90s, just a few kilometres away, a cluster of newer vineyards were planted on Te Muna Road, including Escarpment – with ex Martinborough Vineyards maker Larry McKenna at the helm – and Craggy Range.

While the Te Muna Road vines have extended the opportunities close to Martinborough, the most exciting developments are to the north at Gladstone and Masterton, less than 40 kilometres away. It was at Masterton that regional pioneer William Beetham first planted vines in 1883. These vineyards have been amalgamated with the original plantings to form the Wairarapa region which, in turn, has been divided into three distinct sub-regions: Masterton, Gladstone and Martinborough.

Just over an hour east of Wellington, Wairarapa is a popular weekend escape and an exhilarating drive through the Rimutaka Hills. And while the Wairarapa region may not have the loud airplay of Central Otago it has the makings of a super-fine pinot region.

**For lovers of pinot noir the grass is greener in New Zealand, writes Peter Bourne.**

Photography **Jennifer Soo**

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**Gladstone 12,000 Miles Pinot Noir 2008 (Gladstone, NZ), \$31**  
Christine and David Kernohan purchased the decade-old Gladstone Vineyard in 1996. The 12,000 Miles range is an easy-drinking style – and this pinot is just that. The sweet perfumes of rose petals and redcurrants are enhanced by a hint of dusky spice. The juicy fruit flavours have soft tannins and a refreshing acid finish.



**Schubert Marion's Vineyard Pinot Noir 2007 (Gladstone, NZ), \$62**  
Kai Schubert and Marion Deimling are German-born winemakers with a passion for pinot. Marion's Pinot comes from their Dakins Road vineyard at Gladstone and shows sweet, ripe raspberry aromas with a lift of ethereal spice. The palate is vivacious and is helped by a lively acidity that adds to the wine's grace and elegance.



**Martinborough Vineyard Te Tera Pinot Noir 2008 (Martinborough, NZ), \$40**  
Martinborough Vineyard is one of the region's stalwarts, with current winemaker Paul Mason maintaining the house style. Te Tera sits beneath the benchmark Estate Pinot Noir but is in no way a second tier. Attractive cherry fruits are enhanced by a savoury character, while fine tannins and oak give texture to the palate.



**Escarpment Pinot Noir 2008 (Martinborough, NZ), \$54**  
Larry McKenna set the style at Martinborough Vineyard more than 20 years before he moved to his new venture, Escarpment. His style is rich, deep and complex – these are pinots made for the long haul. Brooding berries interplay with a rich, warm earthiness. The palate exhibits similar flavours with a long, powerful conclusion.



**Ata Rangi Pinot Noir 2008 (Martinborough, NZ), \$84**  
Ata Rangi is all about people – Clive Paton, one of Martinborough's pioneers; Phyll Pattie, his partner and wife; Alison Paton, his sister and co-owner; and winemaker, Helen Masters. Their '08 pinot is dark and brooding with ripe plum and cherry-stone aromas. The intense palate displays firm yet supple tannins and a gamey complexity.

