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Virtual Wine Tasting – 12th June 2020

New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc

background notes
and
suggestions for food pairing

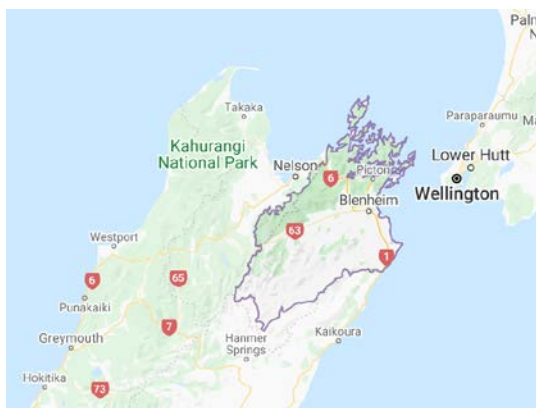
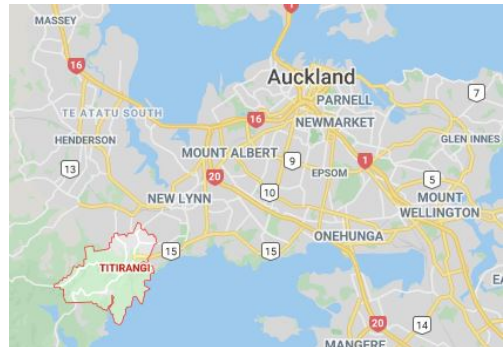
with thanks to

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and
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A bit of background

No history of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc wines is complete without understanding the importance of Marlborough and the role of Montana Wines. Montana Wines remains New Zealand's largest wine producer and is the brand under which the UK was introduced to New Zealand wine during the 1980s. The winery has been so significant throughout New Zealand's wine history that the *Montana* name is still used on domestic labelling due to its strong brand recognition.

Ivan Yukich (Jukić), a Croatian immigrant planted his first vines in 1934, in Titirangi, situated in the Waitākere Ranges west of Auckland. The first wine was sold in 1944; by 1960 ten hectares (25 acres) of vineyards were planted. Ivan's sons, Mate and Frank, had become involved and they set up the company Montana Wines in 1961. By the end of the 1960s, the company had expanded further, planting vines on land south of Auckland. In 1973, the company expanded into Gisborne and Marlborough and exported its first wines in 1980. Montana was listed on the New Zealand Stock Exchange, initially as 'Corporate Investments Limited', and then as Montana Wines.



Marlborough is located in the northeast of the South Island. The climate has a strong contrast between hot sunny days and cool nights, which extends the ripening period of the vines. This results in more intense flavour and aroma characters in the wine. The first commercial vineyards were planted around Blenheim in 1973 and Marlborough subsequently grew to become New Zealand's largest and most internationally well-known wine-producing region.

Due to this growth, particularly in the export market, the Marlborough wine region now produces three quarters of all New Zealand wine. The most important varietal is Sauvignon Blanc, which is recognised as world class; wine writers Oz Clarke and George Taber have described Marlborough's Sauvignon Blanc as the best in the world.

In 2000, Montana successfully purchased Corbans Wines, New Zealand's second largest producer at the time, to control 60% of domestic wine sales and a large majority of the country's wine exports.

Montana was then itself taken over by the British firm Allied Domecq in 2001 after eventually outbidding Lion Nathan. Four years later, in 2005, Allied Domecq was bought by Pernod Ricard.

The next two largest wineries are Villa Maria (still a family owned business after 50 years) and Nobilo (another business with Croatian roots going back 75 years). Other well-known brands: Cloudy Bay (part of LVMH), Oyster Bay & Barossa Valley (owned by Delegat), Brancott Estate (Montana/Pernod Ricard) the list goes on



The current situation

Best known internationally for Sauvignon Blanc, New Zealand also has a growing international reputation for Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Méthode Traditionelle wines. Most of the country's more than 500 winemakers are boutique small scale operations producing low volumes of niche varieties.

New Zealand has 10 major wine-producing areas. The leading wine regions include Auckland, Gisborne, Wairarapa (Martinborough) and Hawke's Bay in the North Island and Marlborough, Central Otago and Canterbury in the South Island. Marlborough and Hawke's Bay are New Zealand's two premium wine-growing regions.

Two rather different Sauvignon Blanc wines

The Brancott Winery was opened in Blenheim by Montana Wines in 1977 and produces all of its Marlborough wines (mostly Sauvignon Blanc), wine from Waipara vineyards, as well as pressing many of the grapes for Montana's sparkling wines.

Brancott Estate is the brand adopted since 2010 by Pernod Ricard for Montana Wines, which now operates as the New Zealand division of Pernod Ricard Winemakers. The name was chosen to reduce confusion in the United States market with wines from the state of Montana. The most prestigious 'Brancott Estate' label is the Letter Series, a range of Marlborough only wines. The letter originally related to the name of the vineyard when wines came from other regions (e.g. O for Ormond, Gisborne) and is currently: "B" Sauvignon Blanc, "O" Chardonnay, "P" Gewürztraminer, "T" Pinot Noir, "R" Sauvignon Gris and "F" Pinot Gris.

Brancott Estate Letter Series 'B' Sauvignon Blanc is a pungent and complex wine displaying intense pink grapefruit, white nectarine, passionfruit and guava characters on the nose. The richly-textured palate features grapefruit and tropical characters with an underlying grassy character and minerality, all bound by a crisp acidity that leads to a lingering finish.



Jules Taylor Wines is a prime example of New Zealand's growing number of specialist wineries. Jules and her husband George started the business in 2001 as a moonlighting project producing just 200 cases (whilst both holding down other jobs including Jules being senior winemaker for one of the major wineries in the area!). They decided to go solo in 2006. Since then, Jules has been elected New Zealand's Master of Wine. They produce Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Grüner Veltliner and Rosé.

Jules has a special range of wines – OTQ (On The Quiet). Her idea for the wine started with a perfect parcel of Sauvignon Blanc grapes, hidden at the back of the cellar in an old barrel, and kept "OTQ" from the rest of the world (including George) until the very last moment. Selected bunches of fruit from the Meadowbank Vineyard are hand harvested and whole cluster pressed into old oak barrels for wild fermentation and maturation. The resultant wine is a special, very limited showcase of the versatility of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc.

The wine is pale green-gold in colour with attractive aromas of pineapple and guava, combined with citrus and lemongrass which overlay delicate nut and spice notes. Revealing the softer side of its Sauvignon Blanc heritage on the palate, this wine offers a delicious combination of mandarin and guava, beautifully laced with notes of brazil nut and honey from the wild ferment. The wine finishes with lingering lemon notes.

Some Food Pairing Notes

The classic response to the question of what goes with New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is, broadly, fish and seafood. But those who do not eat, or like, fish need not miss out on this delicious wine. It can be drunk alone, although food brings out the best in it; for example it will partner very well with light chicken dishes.

As the notes on the two above mention, New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs have distinct citrus and other fruit flavours and aromas. Which fruits predominate will depend on your wine, with the more everyday wines tending more towards citrus, or gooseberry, and the 'better', that is, more expensive, wines having more evidence of a complexity of tropical fruits. This influences the food that you might choose.

Perhaps start with a well-chilled, lemony glass with an avocado dip, then move on to oaky smoked salmon and granary bread or fried whitebait with lemon wedges. For a 'main', think about simply pan-fried fish of most types, buttered spinach and fresh English peas. A classic fish pie would also match. The traditional summer luncheon dish of cold poached salmon, garnished with cucumber slices and mayonnaise also suits. Turning away from fish, try pan-fried or grilled halloumi cheese with a scattering of capers, mint and lime juice. Alternatively, a light chicken dish, perhaps poached breast with white wine and tarragon, or with a cream-based sauce.

The more complex wines do not have the same citrusy quality and are richer and more honeyed. As an alternative nibble, hummus might well go. Fish pie, particularly if you add a little cream and white wine to the sauce, will rise to this as will fish more usually associated with the Southern Hemisphere than our Atlantic varieties. Pan-fried Tilapia fillets perhaps, or swordfish with a mango salsa to bring out the fruit elements? Or try a creamy spring risotto with young freshly-podded broad beans and peas. An 'Arabian' roast chicken, with almonds, honey and glacé cherries appeals too.

So, the possibilities are many and varied but for the tasting, perhaps just settle down with some dips or smoked salmon and then enjoy the rest of the bottle with your Friday fish dinner.

WINE TASTING – THE BLICK GUIDE

The method favoured by generations of *Master of Wine* students (those aficionados chasing the industry's most prestigious title) goes by a five-letter acronym: "The BLICK". This is a shorthand way to describe the five qualities that separate the pleasantly *ordinaire* from the *prestigieuse*.

B

Pour yourself a glass of wine and look for **Balance**, specifically the balance between ripe fruit and freshness. Too much fruit and the wine will be sickly; too much acidity and the wine will be sour. Now think of a score. In the *Master of Wine* exams this is one, two or three ticks, three ticks meaning a perfectly balanced beauty.

L

After Balance consider the wine's **Length**. Experts feel that the longer a wine lasts pleasantly on your palate the better it is. Three ticks mean 15 seconds or more!

I

Next you should look for **Intensity**. Not big, spicy and expansive like a madras curry (one tick) but focused, detailed and precise like a fine tuna sushi (three ticks). For example, if you can taste strawberries (even if you loath strawberries) rate the wine on the intensiveness of the strawberries.

C

Now consider the **Complexity**. Does the wine smell of one thing or of several? If you can find more than four smells, then give the wine three ticks.

K

Finally its **Keepability**. All great wines will reward patience, so add to your score one tick for *drink on release* to three ticks for *will last a lifetime*. Young red wines with high tannins will keep well. With white wine, however, you should look for some weight and a slight sweetness to aid Keepability.

With the BLICK system you can separate your ephemeral barbeque wines from the great. You can also enjoy becoming one of the world's wine hacks. If asked to pronounce on a (red) wine, just fall back on the BLICK system: "*Well*" you say, "*it's a well-balanced wine, good length with attractive fruit intensity and complex character. It'll probably keep well too*". For a white, this might be: "*Vibrant balance of fruit, pleasant length, delightful intensity, yet not too complex*."