

Last Stop: Central Otago



story and photos by Allison Levine

Central Otago is the world's southernmost winemaking region. Although a small area, it is quickly growing and building an international reputation for the outstanding Pinot Noir. More than 70% of grapes grown in Central Otago are Pinot Noir, along with Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Gewürztraminer. In this mountainous region, the vineyards are the highest in New Zealand.



Carrick Vineyards owner Barbara Robertson Green sits overlooking her vineyards in Bannockburn, located at the southern end of a glacial and surrounded by mountain ranges. Barbara and her husband, Steve, were among the first in the area, first planting in 1993. Today, under winemaker Jane Docherty, Carrick produces 10,000 cases (60% Pinot Noir) from 25 hectares.



Winemaker Matt Connell stands above the vineyards of **Akarua**, the largest family-owned single-vineyard site in Central Otago, with 50 hectares planted. Sir Clifford Skeggs and his family first came to Central Otago in the 1970s and planted Akarua in 1996, which is run today by son David Skeggs.



Winemaker Blair Walter has been at **Felton Road**, one of the region's most famous wineries, since the 1997 vintage. Felton Road began in 1991 and was purchased by Nigel Greening in 2000. The entire estate is certified biodynamic and today produces 12,000 cases, including four world-class Pinot Noirs: Cornish Point, Block 3, Block 5 and Calvert, as well as Chardonnay and Riesling.



Winemaker Nadine Cross sits atop the barrels at **Peregrine Winery**, which she joined in 2010. Located in the Gibbston region, just 20 minutes outside Queenstown, and with vineyards in Gibbston and Cromwell, Peregrine produces intensely flavored yet elegant wines. Begun in 1998, Peregrine is named after a native falcon and the striking winery roof looks like a bird in flight.



Valli owner-winemaker Grant Taylor established Valli in 1998. Born in Central Otago, Grant made wine in the U.S. at Pine Ridge and Domaine Napa, as well as in New Zealand at Gibbston Valley Wines, Felton Road, Peregrine, Mt. Difficulty and Carrick, among others. He also established and continues to consult for Archery Summit in Oregon. At Valli (his mother's maiden name), Grant focuses on highlighting the differences between Central Otago's three sub-regions: Bannockburn, Gibbston and Waitaki.



Begun as a joint venture of growers in 1998, **Mt. Difficulty**, a boutique winery in Bannockburn, was named after the mountain overlooking Felton Road and the southern Cromwell basin. This mountain provides shelter from cool winds and is an important part of the Bannockburn microclimate. General Manager and winemaker Matt Dicey has been with Mt. Difficulty since 1999 after returning from Oregon. Producing 50,000 cases, the winery was built in 2000, and in 2004 the grower partners sold their vineyards to Mt. Difficulty. ■■