

NEW ZEALAND

Small But Beautiful

NEW ZEALAND'S WAIHEKE ISLAND

story and photos by Allison Levine

Thirty-five minutes by ferry from downtown Auckland is New Zealand's "Island of Wine"—Waiheke Island. With only 535 planted acres and 30 growers, Waiheke is one of the world's most exclusive wine regions, producing top-tier Bordeaux blends and Syrahs, as well as white wines such as Chardonnay, Viognier and Pinot Gris. To get an idea of how exclusive, consider this: New Zealand produces less than 1% of the world's exported wines, and Waiheke Island contributes less than 1% of this production.

While a maritime climate is not unique to Waiheke Island, the features that set it apart from other wine-producing regions in New Zealand are its enviable situation and its ancient soil structure. In addition to a warm, dry climate, similar to that of Bordeaux, almost the entire island is built on 145- to 158-million-year-old rock from the Jurassic period, covered over by thin layers of soil and clay.

For tasting notes on current—and very impressive—Waiheke Island wines, see the Blue Reviews featurette on p. 71.

Another area just 35 minutes north of Auckland is Waiwera Thermal Spa Resort, where Waiwera water originates. This family-friendly retreat consists of natural thermal pools sheltered by the native bush and hills of the Waiwera valley.



Allison Levine with Stonyridge owner Steven White, who began Stonyridge in 1981-82 as the second winery on the island (today there are 30). With a passion for French wines, he believed that Waiheke Island, with its maritime climate, was an ideal place to grow grapes.



Neill Culley moved to Waiheke after making wine at Babich. With a vision to produce elegant, complex wines, Neill planted vines at Cable Bay Vineyards in 1998, producing his first wine in 2002, opening the restaurant and wine bar in 2007.



Inspired by Steven White, Obsidian owner Lindsay Spilman bought land in 1996 and produced his first wine in 1997. With winemaker Mike Wood, who joined Obsidian in 2005, they love Waiheke Island for its remoteness yet proximity to Auckland. Obsidian is currently seeking a U.S. importer.



Sean Spratt left San Francisco to join his parents Ann and Mike Spratt when they moved to Waiheke Island in 1999-2000. Producing 2000 cases per year, Destiny Bay is the first fully-certified sustainable winery and vineyard on Waiheke Island.



The “Other” New Zealand: Waiheke Island

IF YOU THINK NEW ZEALAND ONLY PRODUCES Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, see page 28 for our introduction to New Zealand’s Waiheke Island, where Bordeaux blends, along with Syrahs and Malbecs, are the rule. After visiting Waiheke several years ago, I became convinced that this small spot is producing some of New Zealand’s—and the world’s—best reds. Here are my notes on a few recent releases. —A.D.B.

90 Cable Bay Vineyards 2008 Syrah (\$36) Rich blackberry nose; silky and tangy with excellent structure; juicy and bright with pure fruit and lively spice; long and nervy, lush and ripe. 🍷

88 Cable Bay Vineyards 2005 Five Hills (\$27) Smooth, dense and herbal with earth, spice and plum; ripe and brightly structured; long and balanced. 64% Merlot, 18% Malbec, 11% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Cab Franc.

MARTIN SCOTT WINES LIMITED

98 Destiny Bay 2007 Magna Praemia (\$275) Rich plum, cassis and spiced nose; velvety, luscious and ripe with concentration and incredible intense fruit with notes of spice, vanilla and chocolate all riding on a core of pure and well-integrated acidity that brings it all into balance; stunning and super long. 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Merlot, 5% Cab Franc, 5% Malbec, 2% Petit Verdot.

90 Destiny Bay 2007 Destinae (\$75) Silky and ripe with complex aromas; smooth and lush with plum, blueberry and notes of earth, spice and oak; supple and complex, long and seamless. 34% Cabernet Sauvignon, 21% Cab Franc, 33% Merlot, 12% Malbec.

93 Destiny Bay 2007 Mystae (\$115) Rich plum and chocolate nose; velvety and dense with plum, blackberry, spice and sweet vanilla oak all in perfect balance; tangy acidity is nicely integrated and completes and ennobles the wine; complex, long and impressive. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 26% Merlot, 11% Cab Franc, 6% Malbec, 2% Petit Verdot.

DESTINY BAY WINE IMPORTS



94 Stonyridge 2008 LaRose (\$173) Dense, ripe plum nose; silky and bright with smooth, black raspberry and juicy acidity; generous, balanced and layered with well-integrated oak; pure and elegant, long and stylish.

92 Stonyridge 2008 Pilgrim (\$67) Dark and rich with a lovely blackberry nose; smooth and dense with tangy berry fruit and lush texture; supple and nicely structured with notes of spice and minerals.

92 Stonyridge 2008 Malbec, Luna Negra (\$67) Spiced plum nose; juicy and bright with racy acidity underpinning ripe plum and black raspberry fruit; edgy, clean and pure with balance and intensity; long and stylish.

GOLDEN STATE WINE COMPANY