

WINETALK

352

WINE CONNOISSEURS CLUB OF HAMILTON

October 2020

Coming Functions

Oct 11	Hunters Wines
Nov 8	Bushmere Estate (TBC)
Dec ?	Xmas Function
Jan ?	New Year BBQ
Feb 14	

WINETALK OCTOBER 2020

As the days are now longer and warmer it is the time between Winter and Summer wine drinking and after tasting some delicious Merlots recently - Vilagrad 2018 Cabernet Merlot and an Askerne 2018 Merlot Cabernet Franc - did a bit of research

into the famous grape. That is before we slip into more whites for the summer

MERLOT - THE LITTLE BLACKBIRD

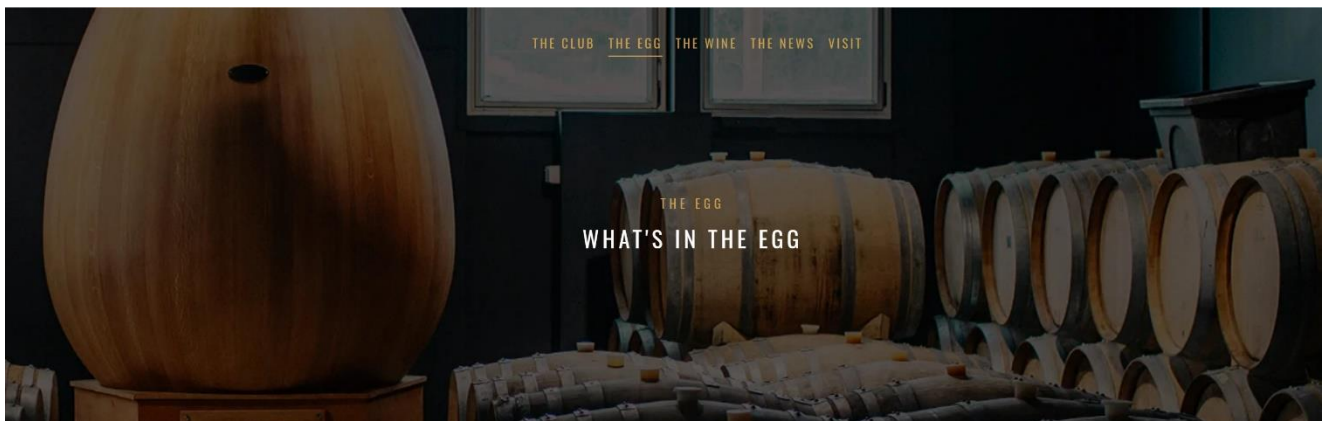
Merlot is a dark blue coloured French wine grape variety, that is used both as a blending grape and for varietal wines. The name Merlot means The Little Blackbird, named because of the local Medoc blackbird who liked eating the ripe grapes on the vine. It was first noted by a local Bordeaux official in the 18th century who labelled it as 'one of the area's best.' Remarks from records in the 19th century in Bordeaux noted the Merlot grape as 'very blendable and excellent'.

Known for being soft, ripe and elegant, Merlots are easy drinking reds that go well with food as well as on their own. It has the unique ability to add softness and luscious fruit flavours to a wine when combined with Cabernet Sauvignon. Merlot is now grown around the world and is one of the most popular and accessible of the red wines.



Club members, Jenny Rae and Peter Templeton, avid Merlot drinkers, sent in a report on their recent visit to Napier:

'A recent week in Napier involved plentiful wine tasting - of course. One highlight was a visit to The Urban Winery, down by the Napier fishing boat wharf. Located in the old National Tobacco Company Art Deco building, the winery features spectacular egg-shaped concrete and French Oak fermentation. These intriguing



wine-making vessels produce extraordinary wines and never-before seen styles of Hawkes Bay Chardonnay.

The winery is the home of Tony Bish who makes the range of Chardonnays and also sells wines from other wineries, craft beers and New Zealand Gins. Tony has been winemaking for 20 years and is dedicated to the King of the Whites, Chardonnay, demonstrated in his skillfully crafted unique wines. His Urban Winery has a wine bar, cellar tasting and delicious platters and food. While devouring a generous platter, we tasted several wines and one that we particularly enjoyed was the Zaria Hawkes Bay Merlot 2018. This Merlot is produced with grapes from the family vineyard, Lesley's Vineyard, and is hand crafted by Bryce Edmonds, the creative and driving force behind the Zaria brand. A rich, dark plum coloured red, it has the aroma of berries. Very smooth on the palate, the after taste is interesting and just as the label states, is of liquorice and coffee. Also, I thought I detected a hint of pepper. This Merlot was great with our platter of cheeses, olives and salamis and at home, with red meat.'



VILLA MARIA - THE TASTING ROOM

Villa Maria's Auckland winery near Auckland Airport is an oasis of calm in an intensive industrial setting. The site, spanning the base of an extinct volcano, is planted in Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, Verdelho and Albarino with groves of exotic and native trees. The vines and trees create a parkland around the winery in a beautiful tranquil setting.

When Covid first struck and visitor numbers dropped, the restaurant and cellar door was closed. It was time to re-think the way that these were managed said Villa Maria National Brand Manager Dida Hernandez. "We had been so busy at the restaurant that there was no time to engage with the customers, with the restaurant and cellar door both in a large room but operating differently and separately."



The area has been re-designed and re-christened as The Tasting Room and will open for business on October 8th. The twenty tables have been reduced to ten and the menu restricted to small bowls and platters of carefully chosen dishes designed to match an extensive range of wines on offer. The Tasting Room will have more of a Wine Bar feel with "beautiful wines at affordable prices". Barrel tastings and winemaker-led tastings will be available by appointment. Highly trained cellar door service staff will engage with customers to offer a presentation that could be short and sweet, or lengthy and detailed depending on the customer's needs, explained Hernandez. "If everybody knew what we know about Villa Maria they would never drink anything else." she enthused. "We want visitors to enjoy our full range of wines and the winery experience and we want it to be fun."

I will get details of their tours and tastings when they open and perhaps the Club could go up for the day and enjoy the Villa Maria experience.

VINE AT VILAGRAD

VINE at Vilagrad is the new lunch cafe now open at Vilagrad Winery, Ngahinapouri. Of course we had to go and sample, so with a few friends went out for a Saturday lunch amongst the vines. The weather was superb and we sat outside overlooking the vines. What a great lunch and atmosphere with delicious food and award winning wines. The menu choices are simple - small plates (delicious warmed olives, garlic and rosemary was my particular favourite), soups, pizza with heaps of choices, (all baked by Adam Nooyen, one of the 3 Brothers in the Nooyen Family owners, in the Pizza oven built during Level 4 lockdown) and platters with cabinet sweet slices or real fruit ice-cream to follow if your tooth is sweet. It was so relaxed we stayed for a couple of hours and it was very busy and buzzing with dozens of diners. The wines were excellent. The 2019 Merlot was delicious with my Diavolo Pepperoni Pizza - Calabrese and Sopressi, Salami, Mozzarella & Parmesan. Also the Vilagrad 2018 Mt Pirongia Cabernet/ Merlot was typically dark plum with fruity flavours. There is also a wide vegetarian Pizza menu, the particular favourite was the Sauteed Prawn and Capers - marinated lime/garlic, prawns, roast red pepper, lemon and mozzarella (delicious with the excellent Vilagrad 2018 Pinot Gris, Bronze Medal award winner). The Vilagrad 2019 Pinot Gris has also recently won a Silver medal in National Wine awards. Jacob Nooyen is also very excited about his 2020 Pinot Gris with the 2020 harvest being so excellent, he said.



They have also opened a gift and wine shop to browse through and you can have a wine tasting as well. What a relaxed enjoyable afternoon and a sophisticated place to take your visitors for lunch. There is nothing like a drive into the country for lunch we all decided and some of us have already been back there! Check out their website for menus and wines. At present they are open Fridays and Saturdays for their Cafe lunches. They will probably do more days in the summer.

I have investigated what they have to offer the Wine Club: winery tours, walk through the vines, talk to the winemaker, learn the history of Vilagrad and winemaking in New Zealand and taste their wines. Cost is - \$15 per head and then for an extra \$15 they will provide platters of their fine foods afterwards. Sounds a wonderful way to spend a Saturday to me. Perhaps the Club could go out one Saturday.

WETAS HAVE A TASTE FOR THE GRAPE

They don't get drunk but Weta are definitely eating grape buds and sap in Awatere Valley in Marlborough says the latest research from Massey University biologists. The wetas have been dubbed 'Wine Wetas' and the



damage to budding grape vines in the spring is 'notorious' in some vineyards. The researchers directly observed weta eating the buds and sap during visits to Cable Bay vineyard in the eastern, seaward edge of the Awatere Valley. Dr Steve Trewick from Massey says even though it might be just one mouthful, that might account for all of the grapes that might come from that bud. "We observed

the ground weta in the Awatere Valley climbs grape vines and they forage on vine buds. They also live directly under the vines with the density high probably because of irrigation during the driest time of the year. When you move away from the irrigated vines you find very few - until you get to the Awatere native bush where weta have been long before people arrived." Growers have been wrapping grape vine trunks in plastic sleeves that prevent weta from climbing onto the vines, much like power poles are wrapped with steel bands to stop climbing possums, but they found little evidence that the plastic sleeves reduce the rate at which wine wetas climb the vine trunks and environmentally it is not desirable."

So, you learn something every day about the grape and its enemies which makes wine so interesting.

HUNTER'S WINES FROM MARLBOROUGH

Look forward to a wonderful tasting from Marlborough's Hunter's Wines. We last had Jane Hunter with their wines 10 years ago. The Wine Club had been for a tour to Marlborough and stopped for lunch at Hunter's. Judy Fitness and company had the good idea of inviting Jane to come to our club one month. The answer was YES and the next month we had a superb tasting with Jane and her winemaker presenting and telling us the Hunter's story. She said she remembers it as a time of good fun and lots of laughs!! This time we will be having the current Winemaker present their wines. I particularly asked for the World Award winning Miru Bubbly to be included which it will be, so very excited about tasting this beautiful bubbles.



Cheers,
[Gay Main](#)

Another message from GRUMPY

Please..... can you let David know by the Friday night before at the latest if you are coming to Wine Club or not as the case is. If you find you have said you are coming and life intervenes then an update is helpful but it is not the end of the world if we do not get that info

Attendance is particularly helpful for functions with visiting wineries where some like to know numbers and hence how many bottles of wine to bring, order forms to print etc. Then the club needs to know how much food to buy, how many tables to set up, number of glasses and platters etc. so please reply..... This has become more important over the last year or so where our function numbers have increased – we would hate to run out of wine !

Thank you.

Love Grumpy.



P.S. Clicking on some of the images and text will via a prompt open a new tab in your browser to take you to the original article