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Pick from the vines

Napier and its surrounds boast some of the best wines in the country if not the world. Awards have been handed out on an international level enough to make a French man cry! With the qualified help of renowned New Zealand wine aficionado Richard Gregory, we've hand picked this selection to demonstrate the superb diversity the region has to offer.

editorial judi hopkinson / pictures lee warren



Vidal Wines

Reserve Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon '07

Vidal, one of Hawke's Bay's oldest boutique wineries, was founded in 1905 by pioneering winemaker Anthony Joseph Vidal. From what was once a fledgling wine company, Vidal winery has grown to become a well-known producer of premium quality New Zealand wines - wines that bring out the best of some of the country's most important growing regions.

The Reserve Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon, one of Vidal's top picks, is crafted from hand harvested grapes grown in the esteemed Gimblett Gravels wine growing region. This 'stellar' red from Vidal is a big, fruited wine held together by a lovely fine-grained tannin structure. It has aromas of chocolate and blackcurrant with a beautifully long finish on the palate. This classic Hawke's Bay wine is drinking well now but with careful cellaring will continue to develop for another 10 to 15 years.

www.vidal.co.nz



Sacred Hill

Merlot Cabernet 2008

Sacred Hill Winery, in a beautiful setting amongst native trees in the Dartmoor Valley of Puketapu, has taken its name from this area which means 'sacred hill' in Maori. Established in 1986 Sacred Hill Winery is owned by the Mason family producing exceptional handmade wines under their chief winemaker, Tony Bish.

The Sacred Hill Merlot Cabernet 2008 was produced from the same vines in Gimblett's Gravels as the 'Helmsman'. It is a good blend of merlot and cabernet with the merlot giving rich, soft notes of plum and the cabernet is gutsy with a clean finish. It starts nicely with a subtle medium weight in the palate and then ends with a perfect crescendo of tannin and blackcurrant.

A rich, complex wine the Merlot Cabernet 2008 will go well with a range of cuisine and is good for cellaring for up to 5 years.

www.sacredhill.com



Kemblefield Estate Winery

The Distinction 2007 Gewurztraminer

Kemblefield Estate was set up in the early 1990s by John Kemble and Kaar Field. The chosen site at Mangatahi by Maraekakaho, west of Hastings, is ideal for its microclimate and for producing wines of distinction and merit.

Kemblefield 'The Distinction' is an estate grown range of wines that are premium for those special occasions. These wines reflect more of the winemaker's influence and have greater complexity and elegance.

The 2007 Gewurztraminer has a lovely fruity sweetness of lychees combined with hints of gingery spice. The fruit has been ripened to perfection prior to harvest that gives good weight to a full generous palate. The ripe fruit up front mellows to a dry, clean finish. This Gewurztraminer will age well over the next few years.

This wine has won Gold and Trophy medals at both the Hawke's Bay A&P Mercedes-Benz Wine Awards and the New Zealand International Wine Show, and Gold Medals at both the Royal Easter and Romeo Bragato Wine Awards.

www.kemblefield.co.nz



Mission Estate Winery

Syrah 2008

The Mission Estate Winery is New Zealand's oldest winery. It was established in 1851 by a group of French Missionaries and produces a variety of wines, including exquisite Bordeaux-style reds. Today the winery is the largest privately owned in the Hawke's Bay. The wines are noted for their remarkable structure, intensity and fine balance.

The grapes for the Hawke's Bay Syrah 2008 were sourced from Ohiti Road and Gimblett Gravels. The wine has aromatic notes of plum and ripe berries with a peppery finish. This is a vibrant wine with a beautiful crimson colour, an ideal companion for charred, rare steak or a saddle of venison. Being partially barrel-aged creates a long soft palate with a peppery finish.

This wine is tremendous value for money and particularly good with food. Serve at room temperature to get the best release in fullness of flavour.

www.missionestate.co.nz



Sacred Hill

Helmsman Cabernet Merlot 2007

The Helmsman is hand-crafted with hand-harvested grapes from Gimblett Gravels producing flagship wines of distinction for Sacred Hill Winery. Ranked 4th in London, alongside wines from the Bordeaux region in France, by some of the world's most prestigious palates and wine critics in February 2009.

This wine is made predominantly from cabernet sauvignon grapes and has cedar and vanilla oak on the nose with notes of licorice. The Helmsman unfolds in the mouth releasing the flavours and finishing with dried plums. Barrel matured in premium French oak, the wine has notes of historic hymn books. It is a confident wine which whilst having a cabernet dominance has no pretensions.

The Helmsman is assertive, a quality wine, well balanced and full of substance - well deserving of its world class status.

www.sacredhill.com



Farmgate

Syrah 2007

The Farmgate philosophy: "Farmgate wines celebrate what's made locally and the people who make it. Farmgate is a place we all know. It's at the end of the dirt road, at the beginning of a long driveway. It's the meeting point between locals who care so much about what they produce, and the opportunist who stops and tastes the best the land can deliver".

Each Farmgate wine profiles a unique Hawke's Bay food producer and in this case with the Farmgate 2007 Syrah it's Rose Gresson - The Olive Grower. This wine displays subtle, comforting character with earthy notes of the forest floor. It has real substance with a lovely palate of perfect medium weight balance. It is concentrated and textured with a lingering flavour.

The extra ripe fruit gives it a bright fresh cheerfulness. The 2007 Syrah will go really well with aged cheddar cheese but is just as good on its own. A very drinkable wine now with lots of fruit and tannins, will also cellar well for 2 - 3 years.

www.farmgatewines.co.nz



Craggy Range

Sophia 2007

Craggy Range is a family owned winery famous for tannic, muscular, powerful reds built for cellaring. The wines are 'terroir' and varietal specific, representative of the old river area in Gimblett Gravels.

In 1996, winemaker Steve Smith became a Master of Wine and is the only specialist viticulturist in the world to have this distinction. He was described by Decanter Magazine as one of the fifty most influential people in the world of wine going into the next millennium.

The Craggy Range Sophia has all the sophistication that its name suggests. It is a beautifully crafted rich bodied, velvety wine with notes of cedar, blackberries, nutmeg and subtle vanilla. This is a top notch wine that is long flavoured with strong tannins that linger on the palate.

This is a total wine drinking experience; the bouquet, the flavour and the bottle - it's the closest you'll get to a practical work of art. It's a special wine that everyone should try at some stage perhaps for that special occasion.

www.craggyrange.com



Esk Valley Estate

Merlot Cabernet Malbec 2007

The historic 75 year old Esk Valley Winery is situated at Bay View just north of Napier. With its sweeping views over the Pacific Ocean and 'The Terraces' vineyard clinging precariously to the north facing valley wall this is a must visit on your way in or out of the Bay. Winemaker Gordon Russell has established himself as one of New Zealand's winemaking identities with his passionate and enthusiastic approach to winemaking and has achieved enormous success with his wines in tastings and competitions.

The Esk Valley Merlot Cabernet Malbec is a complex wine made from quality Gimblett Gravels grapes. It has notes of chocolate, cherry and herbs. This is a very drinkable wine with rich, deep colours, soft tannins and a slightly drying, smooth finish. The malbec grape adds a luxuriant colour and fills out the wine with substance. This is yet another consistently excellent red wine from Esk Valley. An enjoyable wine drinking well now.

www.eskvalley.co.nz