

# 3 PINOT PRODUCERS WHO EXCELLED IN 2005

**N**ew Zealand Pinot Noir has grown quickly in prominence. Ten years ago, there were just 1,200 acres of Pinot in the country. Now there are 10,000 acres, more than all other red varieties combined. The country's finest Pinots come from three regions: Central Otago, at the south end of the South Island, which contains most of the top producers; Marlborough, on the northeastern tip of the South Island, which has more Pinot acreage than any other region; and Martinborough, at the southern end of the North Island. What follows are profiles of three vintners, one from each of these regions: Amisfield, from Central Otago; Craggy Range, from Martinborough; and Nobile, from Marlborough.



Amisfield winemaker Jeff Sinnott makes intense, concentrated Pinot Noir.

## Amisfield

• CENTRAL OTAGO •

Like many New Zealand Pinot producers, Amisfield is still in an experimental phase. First planted in 1999, the Amisfield Pinot Noir vineyards comprise 37 one-hectare zones (a hectare equals 2.47 acres), with seven different clonal selections. Amisfield winemaker Jeff Sinnott says that its challenge has been to understand the soil conditions and distinctive character of each of the parcels. "We're starting to learn what each block tastes like," says Sinnott.

The Pinot Noir has shown steady improvement. The first vintage, the Central Otago 2002, received 90 points, while the current release, the 2005 (\$35), earned 93 points. It's a delicious wine, with a suave structure and a medley of spice, mineral and dark fruit flavors. The finish is shaded by subtle oak tones, from French barrels made with three-year air-dried staves. For the 2005 vintage, Sinnott used about a quarter new barrels, an amount he doesn't plan on increasing, since he wants the new oak character to remain understated.

The property also takes in another 54 acres of Pinot Gris, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc, much of which goes to markets in the United Kingdom. Though these wines are very good, they have not supplied the intensity and concentration of Amisfield's Pinot Noir.

As much as any other region in New Zealand, Central Otago is associated with Pinot Noir. The weather shows less of a maritime pattern, with cooler nights and warmer days than areas closer to the ocean, and the best wines offer flamboyant fruit intensity.

But Sinnott also wants Amisfield to highlight balance in its winemaking and to encourage bottle development by capturing healthy tannin structure. To that end, he keeps tweaking production methods. At first, Amisfield separated the different Pinot clones, keeping the components apart until blending, about a year after harvest. Now the different clones ferment together. "It gives much better integration," Sinnott explains. "Otherwise it takes much longer for the wine to mesh. We're trying to evolve our winemaking with the increased maturity of the vines."

## Craggy Range

• MARTINBOROUGH •

Craggy Range Winery, based in Hawkes Bay, is the consummate generalist, producing a dozen bottlings from a range of different grapes that includes Pinot Gris, Riesling, Chardonnay, Syrah and the red varieties of Bordeaux. But none of these wines has so far matched the quality of the winery's Pinot Noir Martinborough Te Muna Road. The 2005 (94 points, \$35) is the highest-scoring Pinot yet produced in New Zealand, as was the 2004 (93, \$40) at the time of its release.



AMISFIELD



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