



New wine regions to watch

The world produces far more wine than it consumes, but that doesn't stop people discovering completely new wine regions. Wine is now a universal interest and our universe has yet been fully explored by the viticulturally curious. Here are some of the most interesting wine regions of which I feel sure you will be hearing more.

Waitaki, New Zealand

This is the archetypal brand new wine region. As recently as 2000 the Kiwi entrepreneur Howard Paterson was flying over one of his many investments, the biggest deer farm in the southern hemisphere, when his attention was caught by some outcrops of limestone. Remembering the importance of limestone in Burgundy, and the current craze in New Zealand for Burgundy's red grape Pinot Noir, he thought it worth planting an experimental vineyard, and his partners in Waitaki Valley Estates, as the development company has grandly christened, were particularly encouraged by the fact that this valley on the east coast of Otago in New Zealand's South Island has a much milder climate than the fashionable Otago wine region where frost has been a serious commercial handicap.

About 12 hectares (30 acres) of vines were duly planted in the coolest part of the likelihood to test the quality of the grapes and check that they would actually ripen and then escape frost. These vines appeared to flourish and their first commercial crop in 2004 was shared between five of the first investors. The high profile Craggy Range based in the South Island vinified Pinot Noir and a delicious Pinot Gris way up in Hawkes Bay. John Fife made his winery in Marlborough in the far north of the South Island to make his gentle Pinot Noir. Grant Taylor of Valli made his long-term Waitaki Pinot Noir grapes in his own Central Otago winery while a Lake Hayes Waitaki Sauvignon Blanc was made at Amisfield winery in Central Otago. Also in 'Central', the fourth batch of Pinot Noir was made into a particularly interesting wine by renowned winemaker Michelle Richardson, ex Villa Maria, for Stephen Cozens, a former investment banker and the only wine trade outsider whose label is Waitaki Whitest. He is closely involved with the financial venture of selling these parcels of vineyard land on the north (sun)-facing limestone slopes of the Doctors Creek section of Waitaki Valley.

The six pioneer wines, four 2004 Pinot Noirs plus a Pinot Gris and a Sauvignon Blanc were launched recently in London and certainly tasted pretty promising to me – although the fruit is usually particularly impressive, perhaps partly because yields are naturally low.

Vale do São Francisco, Brazil

Brazil's vines have traditionally been concentrated where wine-drinking immigrants live, in the Serra Gaúcha region of Rio Grande do Sul. But the climate is so humid it can be difficult to ripen grapes fully and it was probably only a matter of time before other regions were developed. Campanha on the border with Uruguay in the south is already a wine region, but recently planted vineyards in the arid far north of the country on the Rio São Francisco river just nine degrees south of the equator are more distinctive. Here irrigation water is useful for irrigation and the climate is so hot that the vines yield several crops a year thereby dramatically reducing production costs – though as usual with tropical viticulture it poses problems for vintage labelling.

I have tasted a Syrah/Shiraz from this region and was quite impressed. Waitrose will be the UK retailer to showcase these fruits of the desert, in the form of Rio Sol Cabernet/Syrah £4.79 from October.

Limarí, Chile

Talking of fruits of the desert, recent developments in the fast-changing winescape have moved the northern limit of Chilean viticulture 500 kilometres to encompass the Colchagua region where some really excellent wines have emerged from the Limarí Valley, just inland from the Pacific. The ocean's cooling influence extends the ripening process so as to produce wines with more subtle nuances than many of those grown inland much further south. There here was Viña Francisco de Aguirre, for long known best for its pisco, Chile's native spirit. Its wines showed such promise that the firm has been acquired by Chile's biggest wine producer of its most innovative wine producers Concha y Toro. Other producers include Tambores and Tabalí whose reserve Chardonnay 2003 was stunning value when Asda offered it at £4.99.

The Valle de Malleco in the far south of Chile's wine country has also made a fine Cabernet Sauvignon, Sol de Sol, under the auspices of the French-owned Viña Aquitania wine operation on the outskirts of Santiago.

Santa Rita Hills, California

Strictly speaking this is a new name rather than an entirely new wine region. The Santa Rita Hills in southern California, is already just as famous for its vines as for Michael J. Gorman's Neverland Ranch, but for decades was two different zones with one name. In 2001 the cooler, more ocean-influenced half earned its own name, the Santa Rita Hills and has since established its own identity. Routinely shrouded by foggy incursions from the Pacific Ocean, in Limarí, the vineyards are cool enough to yield truly subtle Pinot Noir and remarkable Syrah. Leading producers include Babcock, Brewer-Clifton, Melville and Sanford.

Queensland, Australia

The state with the fastest-growing wine industry in Australia (and therefore the only one with a Minister for Wine) is one whose wines have rarely been exported, but demand from tourists has so far been almost enough to sustain Queensland's 150 wine producers. The range of different regions, including the original high-altitude inland Granite Belt, (

wines have already performed creditably in Australia's all-important wine shows.

The Upper Agly Valley, Southern France

Here in Roussillon is another region which is not exactly new. The schistous slopes villages as Maury and St-Paul-de-Fenouillet have been planted with vines, typically several hues for strong, sweet wines, for generations. But it is only relatively recent area's potential as a producer of terroir-driven dry reds and whites has become glaringly obvious. I have written before here about this wild and highly distinctive part of south but since my first article ([Maury/Fenouilledes – a brand new dry French red](#)), it has lost its right to a special name. The wines were once easy to recognize as Vins de Pays des Côtes de Roussillon Villages but now they have to be sold either as Vins de Pays des Côtes de Roussillon Villages, names that apply to wines from a much wider area. Please look out for include Gauby, Matassa, [Le Roc des Anges](#) and [Le Soula](#). The full-bodied scented dry whites are in a way even more distinctive than the rich, chewy reds.

Philadelphia, South Africa

Several new or rediscovered wine regions have emerged in South Africa in the last few years. Southern Cape encompassing the decidedly cool Elim near Cape Agulhas is an obvious one and the likes of Land's End and Quoin Rock have shown it is clearly capable of making fine Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah. Among newer candidates, Bamboes Bay on the western Groenekloof due north of Cape Town have also won attention for their Sauvignons but the most exciting will be Philadelphia in Tygerberg between Stellenbosch and the west. At a start it has a highly memorable name but it has also already established itself as a quality Bordeaux grape varieties, much of its produce used for blending but available in undiluted form from Havana Hills and Capaia, a well-funded winery owned by German importer Baron von Essen with Stephan von Neipperg of St-Emilion as consultant and is attempting to fill the shoes of the late Hungarian winemaker Tibor Gal.

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