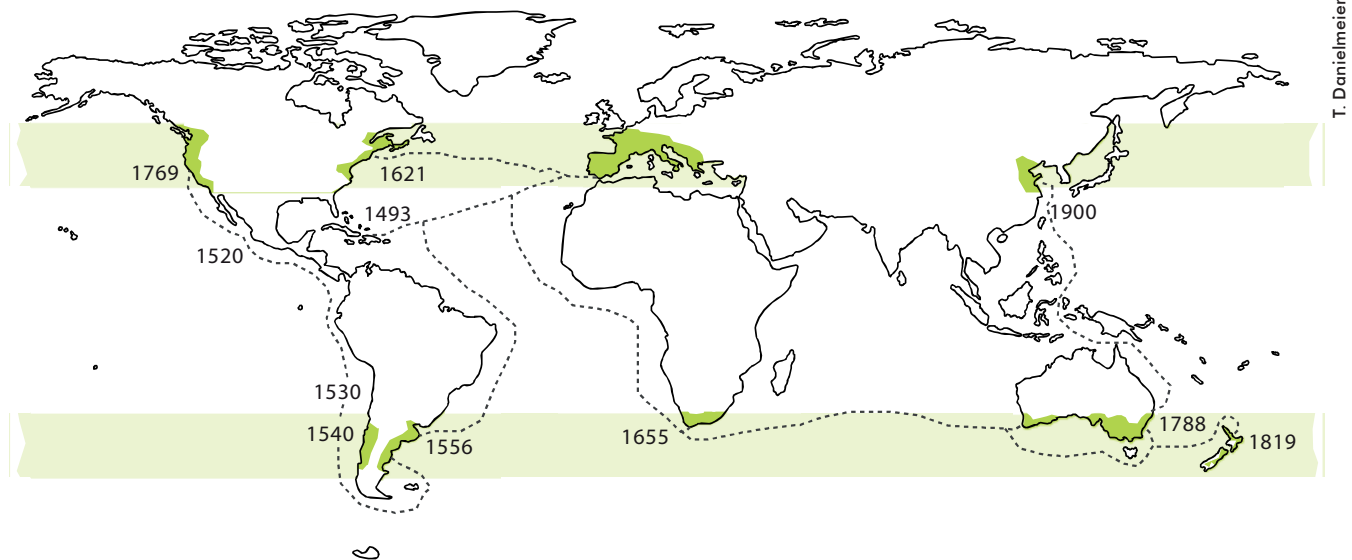


# The Winescape of New Zealand

Tobias Danielmeier

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, in the time of exploration and conquerors, wine making found its way into the New World countries.

The discovery that, in both the Northern and Southern hemispheres, wine grapes best grow between the 30th and the 50th latitude lead to the quick dispersion of viticulture.



Dispersion of viticulture around the world

As the New Zealand example shows, the cultivation of wine seemed particularly desirable as it was regarded as a cultural asset in the new claimed regions. A new era in not only the history of wine but also our colonial history had begun. At the time, the production of wine in the Old World countries was in the hand of the monasteries.

The monks had a strong attachment to their lands and accumulated an immense local knowledge about soils and climate (Wilson, 1998). This continuity resulted in the ever increasing quality of not only the grapes but also the methods of production and equipment.

Till today, wine in the Old World countries is named after its region which is still obvious in the names of European wines such as Bordeaux, Chablis or Burgundy. In the New World countries the majority of wines are named after their grape variety.

## First wine growing efforts in New Zealand

The first to import wine stocks into New Zealand was the Church Missionary

Society missionary Samuel Marsden in 1819. Not only did he lobby for New Zealand to become christianised, he also planted 100 different grape varieties in Kerikeri on the North Island. Today, almost two hundred years later, some of the varieties Marsden introduced form the backbone of the New Zealand wine industry, notably Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and Gewurztraminer.

A few years later, in 1832, James Busby was appointed to the position of the first Official British Resident of New Zealand. Aside from drafting the Declaration of Independence of New Zealand, he also lived up to his strong background in viticulture and winemaking. Busby was deeply convinced that wine would contribute significantly to the development of the new society and its sophistication and he felt it was instrumental in creating this young nation (Stewart 2007).

## Romeo Bragato's 'Prospects of Viticulture in New Zealand'

In the late 1860s the phylloxera epidemic destroyed between 65% and 90%

of the vines in European winegrowing regions. Phylloxera is a type of mildew that is highly detrimental to grape plants and is believed to having been introduced to Europe in the 1860s, possibly on imported North American vines.

New Zealand's first Department of Agriculture, established in 1894, and the then Premier Richard Seddon appointed the Austrian-Hungarian oenologist Romeo Bragato to identify regions that are suitable for viticulture. Arriving in the South of the South Island, Bragato travelled to the tip of the North Island to collect the data needed. In his final report 'Prospects of Viticulture in New Zealand', the wine specialist addressed three aspects for the development of the wine industry: firstly, he identified ten major regions that are suitable for wine growing (see Map). Then, Bragato suggested the formation of district associations, and, thirdly, he recommended the import of phylloxera resistant vines for grafting (Mabbett 1997).

His report emphasised the excellence of the New Zealand maritime climate, with the sea moderating the weather,

producing cooler summers and milder winters than one would expect at similar latitudes in Europe and North America. Maritime climates also tend to demonstrate higher variability of temperatures. Even in summers the wine regions tend to experience cold nights, the effect is that the plants produce fruit that are nearly always high in acidity. Even though Bragato's findings proved highly relevant from today's point of view, they did not aid the immediate advancement of the wine industry in New Zealand.

### Development of the New Zealand wine industry

Three major factors prevented an early advance of the wine industry. Firstly, the economy was focused on the meat and dairy industries, which seemed to promise higher profits; winemaking in comparison was regarded as inefficient. Secondly, the legislation encouraged prohibition and temperance.

In 1918 a petition with more than 240.000 signatures was presented to the Parliament, demanding an end to the manufacturing and sale of alcohol. Finally, this legislative restriction reflected a wider absence of a cultural appreciation of wine. There was religious advocacy of temperance, and these people would not hear of drinking alcohol, let alone in public. Other New Zealand immigrants preferred beer and spirits to wine since they were not used to consuming and appreciating wine.

Up until the end of the 1960s, the official rejection of alcohol in public was also expressed through another New Zealand institution, the 'six o'clock swill'. Before that time, pubs were open for only one hour after the end of the working day and closed on Sundays.

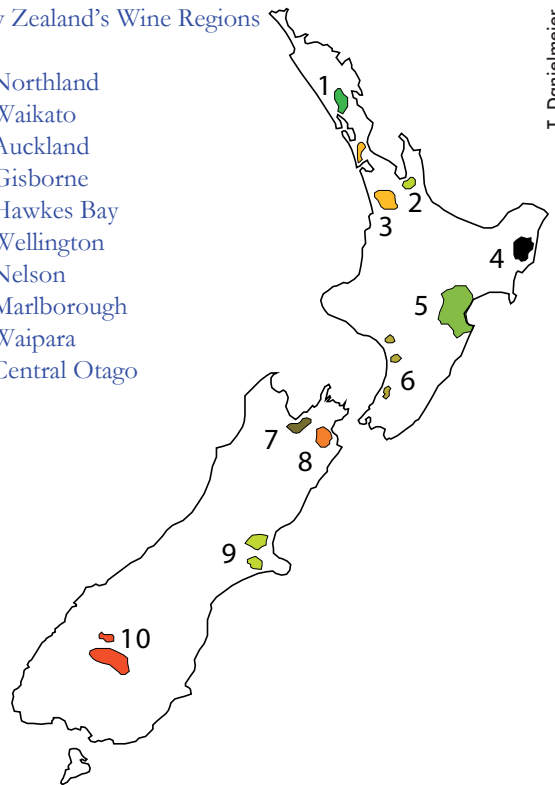
Hence, many people tended to drink spirits or beer. This 'binge drinking' habit still reflects today in the drinking behaviour of many New Zealanders.

The Sale of Liquor Act (1989) had another profound effect on New Zealanders' attitudes to wine. The introduction of BYO (Bring Your Own) licences for restaurants that allows people to bring their own bottle of wine to a restaurant and only pay a small corkage fee was part of the same legislative reform. This amendment had an astonishing, profound and more positive effect on New Zealanders' cultural approach to wine.

On these accounts, there was hardly any wine industry in New Zealand until the 1970s. This changed in 1973, when Britain entered the European Economic Community, which required the termination of existing trade terms for New Zealand meat and dairy products.

### New Zealand's Wine Regions

- 1 Northland
- 2 Waikato
- 3 Auckland
- 4 Gisborne
- 5 Hawkes Bay
- 6 Wellington
- 7 Nelson
- 8 Marlborough
- 9 Waipara
- 10 Central Otago



T. Danielmeier

In the following years, a remarkable re-organisation of the agricultural economy took place. Before this restructuring was fully implemented, diversification away from traditional products to commodities with potentially higher economic returns was explored. Wine was now seen as an appropriate replacement for previously predominant products in some regions.

Another reason for an increasing demand is the fact that, due to advanced passenger aircrafts and starting from the late 1960s, air travel suddenly becomes affordable for many. This changed the travel patterns of New Zealanders dramatically. Travelling, living, and working abroad, predominantly in Europe, became desirable for New Zealanders and during their OE (Overseas Experience), Kiwis experienced the wine cultures of Europe - and the domestic wine industry experienced a surprising new demand.

### The structure of the New Zealand wine industry

The production of wine in New Zealand involves multiple methods. Certainly, one can find the traditional set-up of a family-owned vineyard and the corresponding estate. Where grapes are grown on the owner's section of land and the winemaker employs his or her own facili-



'New World meets Old World': contemporary wine cellar and traditional oak barrels at the Peregrine Winery, Gibbston Valley, Otago.

ties to refine the juice. In contrast to this more conventional model is the concept of contract growing. Here, a number of well-known quality wine producers use solely contract fruit (bought fruit) while their own vine grapes matured into production. Some producers use contract fruit to supplement the range of varieties they market, even using fruit from other geographical regions.

By doing so, winemakers can match or blend the wine to the preferences of the consumers. This is quite different from the European cooperative model, where the fruits are grown on one vineyard, but the winemaking is practised in centralised production facilities. Contract growing is a typical example of the use of indigenous agricultural methods that predate the New Zealand wine industry.

### Innovation and Tradition

Probably the most radical innovation that the New World countries exported back into the traditional wine making countries was the equipment used in winemaking. The conversion of stainless steel equipment, originally used in the dairy industry, is one example of the adaptation of New Zealand industry standards. When the New Zealand wine industry set off in the 1970s, winemakers worldwide trusted the natural antibiotic properties of alcohol.

The sterile technology that was utilised in the dairy industry promised to be the answer to a new, hygienic method in the production of wine. The early wines that employed the new technology were lauded for the intensity and purity of the fruit in the wine (Beverland 2001). While stainless steel does not increase the intensity of the fruit taste, it allows for the dispersion of the originalities of the grapes. The success story of the stainless steel technology in the winemaking process gained recognition not only nationally, but also globally.

Another example for progressive thinking in the industry is the -highly disputed- screw cap. While between five and seven per cent of all wine bottles with a



The Peregrine Winery, Gibbston Valley, Otago, combines the wine cellar experience with event architecture.

All Photos by Tobias Danielmeier

traditional cork turn bad, the industry searched for new solutions. Screw caps allow for a taint-free wine and a consistent aging can be ensured. Skinner (2005) notes that no other country has taken advantage of the positive features of a screw cap as well as the New Zealand wine industry. By now, many European wineries have also turned to using screw caps in order to benefit from the aforementioned advantages and it is safe to suggest that more will follow that example.

### Where to from here?

Even though New Zealand's contribution to world wine production is only about 2%, the number of wineries as well as size of the area under cultivation is rising. While this will certainly make New Zealand wines more available outside of New Zealand, it will also increase the competition between wineries in the country; especially since a large proportion of New Zealand wine is still consumed in the country.

Very recently, some New Zealand wineries have followed the path that some Old World wineries have chosen and have employed quality architecture as a brand strategy. Together with the competitive production methods that

have become an important selling and marketing point, there is certainly much innovation to expect from wine 'down under'.

However, what works for the wineries and innovative production methods certainly also holds true for the product: Let the quality decide - and here and there New Zealand can positively be counted on for some very pleasant surprises.

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**Tobias Danielmeier [tobias.danielmeier@design.otago.ac.nz], Master of Arts [in Architecture], promoviert am Department of Design Studies an der University of Otago, Dunedin, Neuseeland als Stipendiat der Hochschule.**

**Er beschäftigt sich mit der Rolle von Identität bei der architektonischen Gestaltung von Weingütern.**