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WINERY | VINEYARD | FARM

Mt. Beautiful Vineyards



Two years of diligent research unearthed the plots of land that would be woven together to become Mt. Beautiful—and this patient search was well worth the effort. A world renowned business intellectual and proud New Zealand native, David Teece and his American wife, Leigh, were on a mission to find a place—yet untouched by vines and “off the radar” of the wine industry—that possessed unique characteristics unlike any other vineyard site in New Zealand. Their purpose? To pioneer an undiscovered region and in the process build a winery that could serve as an inspiring global ambassador for New Zealand’s beauty and the quality of its products.

A piece of history

What David and Leigh discovered was a hardscrabble piece of land in the South Island's North Canterbury region, located at the base of the Southern Alps, with the Seaward Kaikoura Range to the North and the Pacific Ocean seven miles to the East. It was in this very spot that William "Ready Money" Robinson bought a massive parcel, called "The Cheviot Estate," with a bag full of cash in 1856. This unusual exchange became known as the largest and most spectacular transaction of the kind ever undertaken in New Zealand. In 1893, however, the New Zealand government stepped in to divide this huge plot into smaller plots, which they sold off to encourage more small family farms in the region.

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The history of this singular location, and the desire to reconnect formerly disconnected parcels, might have been enough to inspire David and Leigh to transform the land into vineyards. But this rugged outpost, with impressive views of the snow-covered Southern Alps also promised to be a thrilling vineyard site. Embracing the adventure, David and Leigh purchased four farms between 2003-2004 and planted them to vines from 2003-2005.

Pioneers take the arrows

There were risks in putting down stakes in an untested parcel but the "knowns" were risky, too: powerful nor'westers that blow through unexpectedly (and stay for weeks at a time), scorching summers (with very little rainfall, if any) and winter frosts. It's a coarse and weather-beaten patch highlighted by deep chasms, flat spaces, slopes and hills—the kind of landscape that attracts pioneering types (now counting a globally-recognized economist among them). But the risks have paid off in spades.

Discovering 23 different soil types was just the beginning. Mt. Beautiful had other advantages: an array of diverse microclimates ideal for planting a range of varieties; the 1392-foot Mt. Beautiful, which protects vines from blasts of seaward winds; and the temperature-balancing influences of two rivers, the Waiau (North) and Hurunui (South).

The property features Phoebe soils: very deep, well-drained soils formed in glacial outwash mixed with volcanic ash and loess. In their research of every inch of the land, the team has also located a preponderance of limestone. Those looking to craft memorable Pinot Noir believe this is the holy grail of soil, known for its role in producing the great Burgundian wines.

Careful Clone Selection

The benefits of having different clones of a particular grape variety are many, ranging from flavor, color, bunch size, and berry size to tannins, phenolics, ability to grow and ripen, and susceptibility to diseases, drought, and frost.

In consideration of the diverse microclimates and soil profiles of the vineyard, the team approached clone selection carefully. Today the vineyard features almost 30 selections with six in Pinot Gris, three in Chardonnay, four in Riesling, four in Sauvignon Blanc and over 10 clonal selections in just Pinot Noir plantings.

Although Mt. Beautiful's Sauvignon Blanc is its highest production wine (approximately 15,000 cases per year), the total Sauvignon Blanc volume produced from the Canterbury winegrowing region as a whole amounts to only 2% of that produced by its more renowned Marlborough neighbor. One of Mt. Beautiful's commitments to developing North Canterbury as a respected winegrowing region is to produce wines that are distinctive from those produced in Marlborough. In doing so, they have planted a mix of clones that tend to give a definite lift to Sauvignon Blanc, with less cut grass and more tropical flavors providing a more artisan style, balanced, and elegant wine which compliments a range of foods.

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In addition to distinguishing their Sauvignon Blanc, the team at Mt. Beautiful is seizing the opportunity to create a unique flavor profile for their Pinot Noir, since there is no "New Zealand style" expectation for the variety. This also happens to be the second most heavily planted variety in the vineyard, representing 22 hectares (54.3 acres) and more than 90,000 vines. The Pinot Noir plantings feature a mix of clones specifically chosen for their flavor, with 50% of the vineyard planted in Burgundy clones. The aim of these selections is to build sound palate structure, providing a vibrant ruby-hued wine with ripe fruit, subtle tannins, great length and persistence of flavor.

Commitment to sustainability

Sustainable farming methods are a core value behind Mt. Beautiful's success; the vineyards and winery are certified-sustainable. In the vineyard, the team uses minimal input—they tread very carefully, using things like motorbikes to pull the mowers and harvesting by hand. Lush ground cover acts as host plants for parasitic wasps that naturally keep pests under control. Flowers and other plants attract beneficial insects in and around the grapevine rows. Additionally, after these helpful plants have flowered and served their purpose, their organic matter adds nutrients to the soil.

With diverse growing conditions, highly coveted soil, meticulously nurtured vineyard and a brand new winery, Mt. Beautiful has embarked on a path many winemakers could only dream of. The result? Certified-sustainable, estate-grown wines that are the expression of this wild and rugged region, with distinctively restrained aromatic and flavor profiles that let the pure terroir come through.