

Raymond Chan Wine Reviews

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Pinot Noir Masterclass – Negotiants N.Z. Roadshow Thursday 16 June 2011

The Pinot Noir Masterclass sessions conducted at the Negotiants N.Z. Roadshow are always worth attending. The focus on this country's most-planted red variety is invaluable, as there is an in-depth look at a group of wines, with a panel of attendant winemakers on hand to lead the discussion and answer questions. The Negotiants N.Z. portfolio is an exceptionally high quality one, and this masterclass provided four pairs of wine to be tasted; two pairs each from Marlborough and Central Otago, and each pairing consisting of a current 2009 vintage wine and an older one.

Questions and topics that came up from the audience for discussion included the diversity of styles from blended regional wines to individual vineyard labels, the clarity of varietal expression and the apparent divergence of pricing from the super-premium releases to those destined for more general (supermarket) markets. The one conclusion I made was that for all the issues of surplus and tight market conditions, the N.Z. industry has never had such a wealth of quality Pinot Noir wine. One only needs to look back 10-15 years to see how far we have come. Here are my impressions of the wines tasted:

First wine to be tasted was **Auntsfield Marlborough Pinot Noir 2009** (18.5+/20), ruby-red with some garnet hues, this has a bouquet with ripe dark-red fruits, showing some dried herb complexities, and very good depth. A bright fruited, well-structured wine on palate, this has an excellent core to the fruit, fresh acidity and a firmness that promises more to come. This was paired with the **Auntsfield 'Heritage' Marlborough Pinot Noir 2007** (19.0+/20), very dark hearted in colour with a dense, concentrated nose of black fruits, chocolate and spicy new oak. Wonderfully dense and immensely concentrated, this has masses of luscious black fruit flavours and powerful, spicy oak, underlined by supple, significant tannins. Out there and 'over the top' but deliciously so. The Auntsfield wines are from sites on the southern Wairau Valley hills.

The next pairing was also from Marlborough, from the Ure Valley, south of the Awatere. The **Saint Clair 'Pioneer Block 4 – Sawcut' Marlborough Pinot Noir 2009** (18.5+/20) has a light purple hued, dark ruby colour and a fragrant and fruity nose of florals intermixed with raspberry liqueur aromas. Elegant in proportion, the feature is the bright, sumptuous, juicy raspberry fruit flavours that are very primary in expression, and supple, soft tannins. The oak is very well-handled and adds to the dark berry characters. The **Saint Clair 'Pioneer Block 4 – Sawcut' Marlborough Pinot Noir 2005** (18.0-/20) has a dark, dense black-garnet colour with a powerful, concentrated nose of forest floor, mushroom and truffle aromas, very secondary in character. On palate this is a robust, dense and solid wine with black fruits, chocolate and coffee-like oak that is showing some flavour development now.

The first of the Central Otago pair were from the Wanaka region. The **Rippon 'Mature Vine' Central Otago Pinot Noir 2009** (18.0+/20) is light ruby-red in colour with purple hues. Bouquet is very restrained, and subtle with dark red berry fruits. A fine-structured wine, this has elegant, juicy red fruit flavours at the heart of the palate. Fresh acidity, supple tannins, and some complexing savoury interest complete this wine which should develop well. The **Rippon 'Mature Vine' Central Otago Pinot Noir 2003** (17.5+/20) is now showing garnet-red with orange hues to the colour, and inviting, lively, forest and game secondary aromas. On palate the componentry was obvious, with complex savoury fruit, some alcohol warmth, tannin grip and a firmness through the length. Maybe this could still handle some time to harmonise more.

The final pairing was from Bendigo near Cromwell. The **Misha's Vineyard 'The High Note' Central Otago Pinot Noir 2009** (18.5-/20) is bright ruby-red in colour with a light, elegant and fragrant bouquet and a fresh, tightly bound palate showing lush dark red berry fruits, plenty of acidity with mineral and floral notes. The long finish was a sign of promise. This was tasted alongside the **Misha's Vineyard 'The Audition' Central Otago Pinot Noir 2007** (18.5-/20), dark garnet red with orange hues and with savoury, mushroomy complexities and dried herbs on the nose along with a subtle spiciness. Still firm, but fine-grained, this has real elegance and beautiful proportion as well as proper concentration. The oak is a feature here, but is attractively so. One of the most pleasing aspects of the tasting was the performance of the older vintage wines. Admittedly they were from low yield vintages with increased concentration behind them, they had developed with interest, and certainly none were past their best. The 2009s were accessible and generally elegant, showing fresh, vibrant primary fruit. A good drinkers' vintage!

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