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Wine Ways

“Setting out from Asia, our home for many years, we wanted to find the best place in the world to grow cool climate grapes and most particularly Pinot Noir—the ‘holy grail’ of grapes and also the most difficult to grow,” says Misha Wilkinson of her impetus for starting her own winery in New Zealand seven years ago.

After 18 months, and much walking over potential vineyard land, Wilkinson and her husband, Andy, found themselves standing on the dramatic lakefront terraces of Bendigo Station, a high country sheep station in the Central Otago region of New Zealand, where some of the world’s finest Merino wool is grown. The couple knew instantly that this was the site for Misha’s Vineyards.

Wilkinson says, “We soon learned that other explorers had been on this land before. Back in the late 1800s many Chinese immigrants joined the gold rush in Central Otago as they had in California, Australia and elsewhere. The neatly stacked gold tailings in the gullies are the remnants of their alluvial mining and the crumbling remains of stone miners’ cottages are evidence of a tough existence on this land.

“Most of these Chinese prospectors came from the countryside of Canton in southern China—some 10,000 kilometres away. And like all pioneering history, the story of how they endured the harsh conditions of this rugged landscape to find their fortunes in the most southern goldfields of the world, is a remarkable story of adversity and adaptation. We hoped this land, steeped in gold-mining history, would once again produce riches—the ‘new gold’ from the land.”

Recently named one of the “Top 20 producers in New Zealand” by *Decanter Magazine*, Misha’s Vineyard was borne out of Misha’s and Andy’s desire to fulfill their passion for wine and their dream of producing top quality wines suited to Asian as well as Western foods. They have a very talented winemaker, Olly Masters (formerly of the iconic Ata Rangi in Martinborough), who has already won the winery a few awards and accolades. The couple were, until recently, residing in Singapore, and frequently travel around the world promoting her wonderful wines.

Misha’s Vineyard is, indeed, located on one of the most spectacular sites in New Zealand. Situated at the edge of Lake Dunstan, the 57-hectare estate is in the Bendigo sub-region of Central Otago—the Pinot Noir capital of New Zealand. With a strong belief that the best wines are made in the vineyard, the Wilkinsons set out with a ‘no compromise’ philosophy to produce premium New Zealand wines to suit a defined and discerning market.

Misha’s Vineyard’s first commercial vintage was in 2008 and currently has 26 hectares of vineyard established comprising Pinot Noir and a range of aromatic white varieties including Pinot Gris, Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Sauvignon Blanc. With two-thirds of



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the vineyard planted in Pinot Noir vines, eight clones were selected (all grafted on disease-resistant American rootstock), in order to blend and select for the ultimate in consistency and quality and to produce a complexity of flavours representing the best of New Zealand Pinot Noir.

Incidentally, with a long-term obsession for cows, Wilkinson knew the decision to get into the wine business was the right one when she realised her passion was also the acronym for Central Otago Wine.

As a personal touch, the names of each of Wilkinson’s wines refer back to her theatrical upbringing, like ‘The Starlet’ Sauvignon Blanc which has been selected as one of the wines to be served at the Paddock Club for the 2011 Singapore Grand Prix.

Wilkinson’s mother was a doyenne of a theatre group and much of her early life was spent at the side of the stage. So much so that she also started her career in the theatre, although on the other side of the footlights in marketing roles at the Sydney Opera House then later the Royal Opera House in London’s Covent Garden.

Since those early days, Wilkinson has worked primarily in the Information Technology sector with many years based in Singapore where she has established the marketing function across Asia Pacific for a variety of companies including Intel and Dell Computer.

She has also taken on roles promoting various aspects of New Zealand including leading the marketing team at Auckland City whilst living in New Zealand, and more recently with consulting assignments to various government agencies to promote New Zealand products across the Southeast Asia region. Wilkinson says, “Although not a ‘Kiwi’ by birth, I became one by ‘acquisition’ as I married one! And since I’m a confirmed All Blacks supporter, the locals have overlooked my Australian heritage.” **WD**

MISHA’S VINEYARDS
www.mishasvineyard.com