



# MISHA'S THEATRE OF TASTE

In a far away place, a New Zealand vineyard is making cool climate wines that sing.

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CENTRAL OTAGO in New Zealand's south is a land of timeless beauty and gold. The gold rush is history, but a new gold is taking root in the arid, beautiful landscape of extraordinary contrast – craggy, barren mountains and gorges juxtapose against glassy lakes and rolling green farmlands and vineyards.

Bringing a small taste of this terrain to Malaysia is Misha's Vineyard, one of Central Otago's wineries that is right now getting a lot of attention on the world stage. It has been named as one of the Top 20 producers in New Zealand by the UK's *Decanter* magazine, and its Limelight Riesling was named as one of the Top 100 wines of the world at the London International Wine Fair 2011.

Situated in old mining land worked by Chinese immigrants from Canton in the late 1800s, Misha's Vineyard started out in 2004, when the first vines were planted. Two-thirds of the vineyard is planted in Pinot Noir and the rest, the aromatic white varieties including Pinot Gris, Gewurztraminer, Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc. Considering that their first commercial harvest was in 2008, Misha's Vineyard has done phenomenally well in just three short years.

Its quick rise up the wine charts is due in part to the business and marketing savvy of owners Andy and Misha Wilkinson, who worked in the corpo-

rate sector – she in marketing and he in sales and operations of global companies – before starting a new chapter to pursue their love of wines.

Their search for a perfect site to start their vineyard led them to the Bendigo sub-region of Central Otago (home of Shrek, the famous hermit sheep) where Andy has many family ties. They settled on a piece of land that vineyard consultant Dr Richard Smart, of the Flying Vine Doctor fame, described as “one of the best sites I had seen in Central Otago.”

Then they hired the best viticulturist, best vineyard manager and the best winemaker available in New Zealand to produce the wines.

Winemaker Oliver (Olly) Masters has the reputation of being one of New Zealand's best winemakers, and three times winner of Champion Pinot Noir at the International Wine and Spirit Competition in London.

While Olly likes wines that are dry and austere, and have a lot of structure and tannins, he is, however, known for his “considerate” winemaking style, which allows the vineyard and fruit to speak for themselves. With Misha's Vineyard, the goal is to produce elegant cool climate wines that match “the more subtle and exotic food flavours of the world” – this mission must have something to do with the fact that Misha and

## THE CENTRAL OTAGO REGION

The Central Otago region is the world's most southerly wine producing region and New Zealand's highest wine growing area with a continental climate that is very harsh and dry, with just 16mm of annual rain. Vineyards here are typically small, with low yields. The main grape varietal planted in Central Otago is Pinot Noir (80 percent), with the rest made up by Pinot Gris (9 percent), Chardonnay and Riesling (8 percent). The region represents only 3.3 percent of the country's total grape harvest, yet its Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris command the country's highest price per tonne of grapes.

Andy have lived in Asia for a long time.

“Being a young vineyard, we don't have the heritage, but our vineyard has a genuine point of difference in the climate, and the soil where we are is very special and producing wine that is very special,” says Olly during the launch of Misha's Vineyard at the Millesime restaurant in Kuala Lumpur.

“The site is not too hot but gets a lot of light, so the flavours are quite



Facing page: The spectacular land that is Misha's Vineyard. 1. Misha with winemaker Ollie Masters. 2. The High Note Pinot Noir with Max Chin's venison, oxtail and cepe ravioli. 3. The Limelight Riesling with kataifi-wrapped goat cheese. 4. The Gallery Gewurztraminer with foie gras and sherryed apple.

ripe, but the structure is one of cooler-climate, and this gives it an interesting mix. We use old barrels in the fermentation, which results in the wine losing some fruit characters, but it gains more texture," explains Olly.

"The luxury of being a small producer is that we can produce something a bit different where people can taste the quality in the bottle; wine doesn't have to be simple and approachable – it can be different and more challenging," he says.

Contrary to the general believe that New Zealand wines are made for immediate drinking, Olly says the white wines from Central Otago will age well because of the acid characters that keep it fresh – a result of the colder climate and shorter season. And you can cellar Sauvignon Blanc wines for a couple of years if they are not overly green and have some structure and ripeness. According to Olly, Sauvignon Blancs age better now than in the past. However, since their first vintage was only brought out in 2008, "we don't have the experience to say more."

While he is happy with the wines that they are producing now – in particular a couple of the Rieslings – he says the best is yet to come. "The wines we make in the future will be better. When the vineyard will be older, in five to ten years' time, the fruit will change," he says. Because he likes structure in his wine, older vines are better, but for those who

like fruit-driven wines, the wines they are producing now are perfect.

Olly is confident their Pinot Noir can age for five to six years, and even up to 10 years. "It will get more savoury in character as it ages," he says.

#### The High Note Pinot Noir

A Pinot should be delicate, according to Olly. "To get more structure and tannin into the wine, we crop low, and don't allow too much fruit on the vine – we drop a lot of the fruit on the ground – and during the processing, we crush more. In the wine, you still get the impression of fruit – the sweet cherries and plums that you would expect from a Pinot Noir. What we try to do is to extend the length and flavours so there is more tannin and dryness in the wine, rather than being just a simple red wine," says Olly.

"We call it High Note because it's the pinnacle of what we create," adds Misha. The name comes from her theatrical background – her mom was an opera singer.

#### Dress Circle Pinot Gris 2009

The Pinot Gris is called Dress Circle, where the best seats of the theatre are, as the spot is where Pinot Gris is grown on Misha's Vineyard. The wine has a nose of pink grapefruit, pineapple and pear, and a hint of spice. While Italian Pinot Grigio is a dry table wine that is refreshing but does not have a lot of

fruit, Central Otago's Pinot Gris is richer and heavier, with a soft structure that goes with a lot of food.

#### Starlet Sauvignon Blanc 2009

Like a young star, it is fresh and fruity, and best enjoyed young. Has a lifted nose of passion fruit, lime and lemongrass, and good concentration on the palate.

#### The Gallery Gewurztraminer 2010

Gewurztraminer is an unusual, little-grown grape and New Zealand has the second largest area planted after Alsace in France. Central Otago Gewurztraminer has more acid and ripe fruit, giving the rich, textural wine freshness and brightness, and the acid keeps it interesting and light as well. The pink grapes are gently squeezed, resulting in a pale straw colour. With its rich, intense, rose petals, lychee and peach nose, it is a piece of art to Misha. "People keep coming back for this," says Olly.

#### Limelight Riesling 2010

Interesting medium-dry wine with aromas of crushed lime, flint and five-spice, lifted by a mineral nose, its ripe citrus sweetness balanced by the coolness of white flowers. "When you taste it, you will understand why it's called 'limelight'," says Misha. ☐

Misha's Vineyard is available in selected restaurants and hotels. Distributed in Malaysia by Finlux Sdn Bhd, Tel: 03-7729 4733, Email: finlux@pd.jaring.my