



Central Otago

The majesty of landscape that surrounds you when you step off a plane at Queenstown airport is a showstopper. My wife and I were excited to come back to this region for another wine adventure – the purpose of the visit was to experience first-hand the vineyards and stories of Locharburn and Misha's Vineyard.

By Cameron Douglas MS

Central Otago comprises four distinct wine sub-regions: Gibbston, Clyde and Alexandra (as one), Wanaka, and The Cromwell Basin.

We were spending our time this trip in the Cromwell Basin.

Chris and Jenny Hill established the Locharburn brand in 2004 when a dream they shared of owning a vineyard came to fruition. Countless hours of hard work in the vineyard, winery and the office have paid off with a range of finely crafted wines – including mineral-laden sauvignon blanc, riesling and pinot gris, and complex terroir-driven pinots noir. The range also includes rosé and chardonnay.

The standouts for me were the Sauvignon Blanc '10 with its vibrant bouquet of sweet hay, light tropical fruits and backbone of citrus and mineral suggestions. The palate expands the fruit flavours to include pear, apple and golden kiwi-fruit then light herbs and a little spice from oak.

Riesling has a big future in Central Otago, and the 2010 from Locharburn is a great example, with sweet and juicy high acid and high-toned fruits and an amazing line of quartz minerality. Grapefruit pith on the finish completes a very food-friendly wine.

I was treated to a vertical tasting of pinots noir from the 2005 to a barrel sample of the 2010. If you have some of the '07 in stock hold on to it – this is a great wine and a wonderful example of the vintage, region and wine-making prowess of Carol Bunn; an essential pinot noir with an all-senses capturing bouquet of dark cherry fruits, brown baking spice oak and a kishmish note adds complexity. The palate is equally enticing adding mealy tannins, a fine balance between the fruit and oak and a long rewarding finish.

The '09 Pinot Noir looks to be equally as good as the '07 if not better and a sound



investment for those who wish to cellar wines for a few years before release on a wine list.

The Misha's Vineyard story began many miles away in Singapore where Misha and husband Andy lived and worked. They too, had wanted to find a dream-come-true vineyard and searched for many months until they found a stunning piece of land, part of the Bendigo Station, close to the shores of Lake Dunstan. With endorsement from Dr. Richard Smart (The Flying Vine Doctor) plans were made to plant the first vines. It wasn't just a case of dig a hole and plant grapes though – this is tough land and has required many years of preparation. It now hosts sauvignon blanc, riesling, gewurztraminer, pinot gris and pinot noir viticulture.

One of my favourite spots in the vineyard is where a single row of just eight vines are planted, each with a Chinese gold coin underneath, as a symbol of returning the 'old gold' to the land in recognition of the new gold (pinot noir). The view from this spot is particularly breathtaking.

Ultimately the wines must speak for themselves and with Ollie Masters at the helm there are already a bunch of noteworthy examples:

The Sauvignon Blanc '10 has a soft and gentle bouquet with a hint of barrel and reminds me of the Eastern reaches of the Loire Valley. The palate is full-throttle with high acidity yet balanced with soft, sweet fruits, and quartz soil notes intertwined with a hint of oak: a great addition to any wine list.

The Dress Circle Pinot Gris '10 displays Asian pear, white-fleshed fruits and apple skin bouquet. It's just off dry with a little residual sugar (12 grams) – the gingery, brown skin pear and juicy white flesh fruit flavours are delicious. A whisper of white pepper and persimmon on the finish and hint of oiliness in the texture adds to an already tasty wine.

My favourite of the white wine range is the Gewurztraminer '10: dense and structured, pink rose petals and quartz terroir voice: A solid core of fruit, weight and oiliness add to the already flavourful palate – a

'Metrosexual' wine.

There is no doubt winemaker Ollie Masters knows pinot noir and how temperamental it can be, yet the 'High Note' '08 with its soft fruits, elusive Burgundian side and fine tannins add up to a very fine wine indeed. The Verismo '08 is a barrel selection pinot noir with smoky, toasty darker cherry fruit aromas and flavours; firm youthful tannins suggest a wine still jostling for position with dense and bold structure and other complex elements. I expect this to be a five-star wine in about two years – it will outlive many from the same vintage.

The '09 High Note Pinot Noir is packed with red fruits, dried herbs, terroir flavours and non-invasive oak; young, vibrant and authoritative.

We finished our visit with a morning at the Clyde Food & Wine Festival – a chance to catch up with some wine friends, and a further reinforcement that Central Otago is developing diversity and quality in its winemaking and artisan foods. ■