

NEW ZEALAND THRILLS EVERY SENSE

IT WAS MY VERY FIRST TRIP TO NEW ZEALAND. IMAGES OF *WHALE RIDER* AND *LORD OF THE RINGS* DANCED IN MY HEAD.

The non-stop Air New Zealand flight to Auckland didn't disappoint with its inspired cuisine, sensational award-winning wines and impeccable concierge service.

The local ingredients were a revelation from superb local extra virgin olive oil, amazingly flavourful honey, extraordinary cheddar, delicious tender lamb and the freshest of seafood.

Especially endearing was Air New Zealand's use of Ola and Marie Hoglund's colourful art glass dishes. The Hoglund studio (a.k.a. Korurangi Café & Wine Bar) is located near Nelson, New Zealand's must-see arts capital. The dishes proved so popular that passengers insisted on taking them home as souvenirs. Now, you'll have to buy them at their studio. Remember to enjoy a sublime glass of Riesling at the nearby Neudorf winery.

SUPERB CHOICES

My final destination was Wellington, New Zealand's picturesque capital on the southern seaside tip of the North Island. It's home to the world-famous ultra-modern Te Papa Museum and its amazing collection of traditional Maori *taonga* (treasures).

Wellington is also where wine lovers from around the world congregate every three years at the international Pinot Noir

Conference. Pinophiles are now signing up for the upcoming February 1–4, 2010 event where more than one hundred wineries will be showing their wares.

Before the conference, I slipped in a couple of vinous side trips. It's a tough decision because every part of the two-island nation produces destination wines. I first went to the home of Pinot Noir in Central Otago, located in the mountainous, most southerly reaches of South Island. The vineyards and scenery are spectacular from Queenstown to Wanaka with its heart-stopping views of Rippon vineyards that overlook the lake. Here serious wine fans can visit some of New Zealand's finest Pinot Noir producers. Of course, fine Pinot Noir comes from other regions as well, notably Martinborough (Palliser) in Wairarapa and Canterbury's Waipara (Pegasus Bay).

Of the nine regions, Marlborough is the largest with 53 per cent of New Zealand's vineyards. While it is justly famous for fine Sauvignon Blanc, a Canadian best buy happens to be red. Stoneleigh 2007 Marlborough Pinot Noir at only \$19.95 is juicy and medium to medium-light-bodied with plummy, cherry-driven flavours. It shows fine versatility and is ready to enjoy. Like most New Zealand wines, it comes with a convenient, taint-free, screw cap.

Summer weather is the perfect time to enjoy Sauvignon Blanc and it's hard to beat the iconic, albeit pricey, Cloudy Bay. For the economy-minded, let me suggest the ultra tangy, gooseberry and yellow grapefruit-driven Villa Maria 2008 Private Bin Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc at only \$15.95.

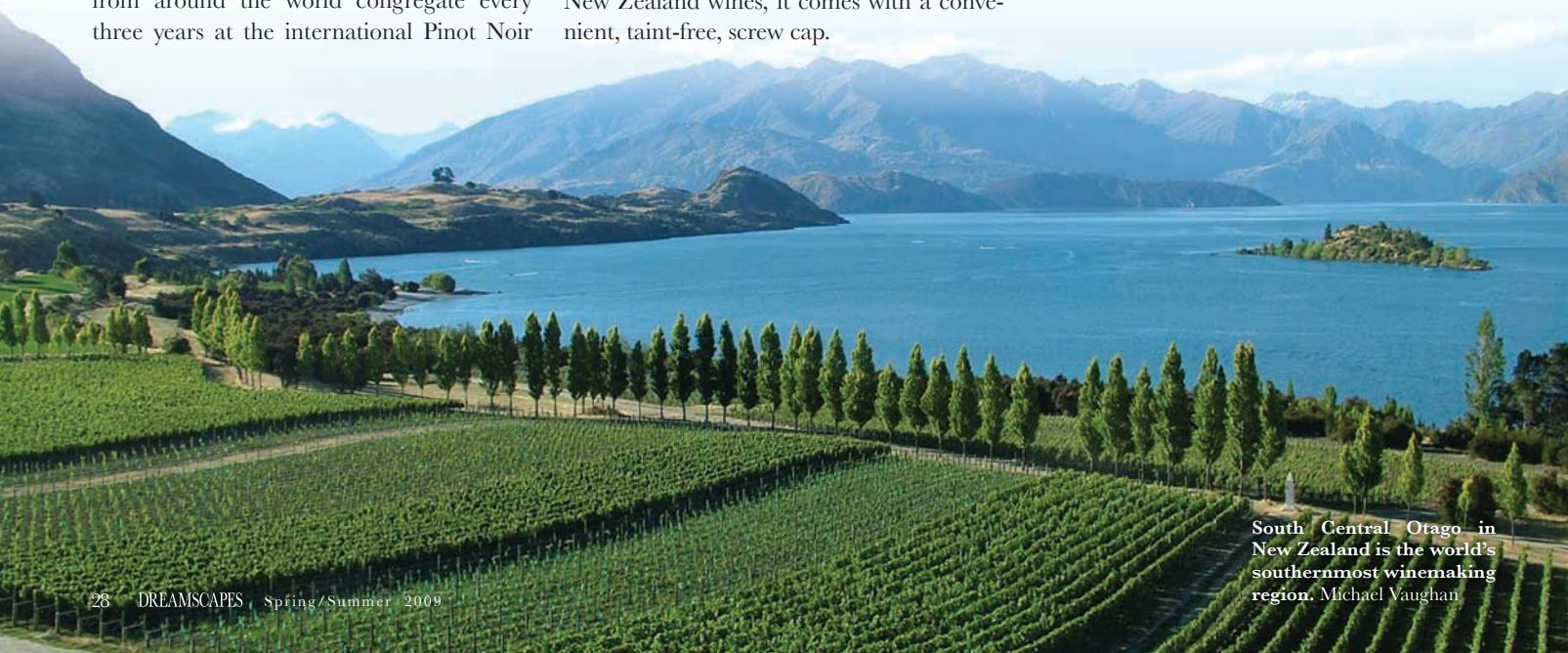
The North Island's Hawke's Bay region is New Zealand's sunniest and second largest wine area. Its fine Chardonnay (Church Road) and Bordeaux-styled world-class reds (Craggy Range) have become the norm. I am also very impressed with some great Syrah (Trinity Hill) now appearing.

Now is the perfect time to discover New Zealand wines. Upcoming New Zealand wine fairs across Canada include Montréal (May 19), Toronto (May 21), Edmonton (May 24), Calgary (May 26) and Vancouver (May 28). For details, visit nzwine-events.ca. ■

Additional recommendations/information are found at michaelvaughan.ca.

TRAVEL PLANNER

Anyone wishing to explore New Zealand should investigate the great Air New Zealand (airnewzealand.ca) promotions offering non-stop flights from Vancouver.



South Central Otago in New Zealand is the world's southernmost winemaking region. Michael Vaughan