

Entertainment: Food & Wine

Prime time for Pacific Prime Wines



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Local wine importer Eric Platt saw a hole in the American wine consumer's palate: value-oriented wines in the \$15 to \$30 range that offer great fruit, structure and balance, while being readily available in local wine shops. After spending several years working for a prominent importer, Platt decided to return his focus to his roots. He joined a consortium of five New Zealand winemakers who banded together to share resources in order to get the word out that New Zealand has more to offer the American market than lamb.

The joint venture is called Pacific Prime Wines and it is definitely ready for prime time. PPW has six shareholders -- the five wineries and the management team, of which Platt is a member. The wineries include Seifried, in Nelson; Carrick, in Central Otago; Maimai Vineyards, in Hawkes Bay; and Lake Chalice and Forrest Wines, both in Marlborough.

While Platt's title is vice president, director of sales, he seems to be involved in every aspect of marketing, including meeting with his distributors, presenting the wines directly to retailers and restaurants, hosting consumer tastings -- both in wine shops and for wine clubs -- and, of course, telling the PPW story to the media. As a result of the latter, I recently found myself at the Embassy of New Zealand on a beautiful spring day to meet with representatives from each winery who were in town to share their wares.

Thanks to the dramatic diversity in climate and soil composition found

throughout both the southern and northern islands, New Zealand is blessed with a diverse number of growing regions. The country initially made its mark in the wine world with crisp sauvignon blanc wines. However, regional differences allow the winemakers to experiment with both traditional and non-traditional varietals, leading to some delicious values. There were many wonderful wines on display. Here are a few of the delightful choices available in our area. Retail prices are approximate.

One of the best ways I have found to start almost any occasion is with bubbles, like the subtly fun fizz found in the **nonvintage Lake Chalice Cracklin' Sauvie Sauvignon Blanc (\$19)** from Marlborough. The classic sauvignon blanc flavors of tropical fruit, passion fruit and grapefruit are carried over the palate by just a slight spritz of carbonation. The notes of citrus on the finish are accentuated by the bright, refreshing acidity.
QPR 8.5

What happens when a molecular biologist and physician get married and then start a winery together? Magic, that's what. Like the magic of the **2011 Forrest "Doctors" Riesling (\$17)** from the Marlborough region. Wonderful aromas of white peach, rose petal and apricot on the fragrant bouquet bound out of the glass. The pretty structure supports beautifully integrated flavors of nectarine, citrus, melon and stone fruit as they dance across the palate. The just-off-dry finish adds just a touch of sweetness on the long, luscious finish.
QPR 9

The 2010 Carrick "Bannockburn" Pinot Noir (\$45) from Central Otago is a perfect example of what New Zealand winemakers are doing with this delicate red wine varietal. The attractive nose of ripe cherries and cinnamon has a perfumelike quality. The silky flavors of red plums, sweet cherries and dark strawberries are round and generous in the mouth. The balance between fruit and acidity provides an elegant finish, featuring notes of cocoa and spice on the back of the tongue.
QPR 9

The Maori word for duck blind is "Maimai" (pronounced my-my), but don't be blind to the terrific value found in a bottle of **2009 Maimai Syrah (\$13)** from Hawke's Bay. The brooding nose is full of rich aromas of black cherry, blackberry, roasted coffee and cinnamon. The palate

displays dense flavors of dark cassis, blackberry jam and boysenberry fruit with hints of vanilla and toasty oak on the lush, refined finish.

QPR 10

A delightful way to end a meal is with the **2011 Seifried "Sweet Agnes" Riesling (\$23/375ml bottle)** from Nelson. This fun dessert wine features intense flavors of dried apricot, honeysuckle, orange blossoms and candied ginger that are rich and concentrated on the palate. The abundant acidity keeps the wine fresh and the flavors in balance and the finish long and clean.

QPR 9.5

Note:

QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value