

Touring the Region's Wineries

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By Neil Hodgson

Sari, my partner, and I organise a fundraising dinner each year for the Suter Art Gallery and, for my sins, she auctions me off to the highest bidder; that is, she sells my services as a tour guide.

Arranging tours of wineries is not something I normally do – this is the only one I do each year as there are commercial operators out there who do a fine job catering for tour groups.

Each year I make sure the tour has a particular focus and this year it was aromatic-style wines. First stop was **Te Mania Wines** and **Richmond Plains**, where David Holmes introduced us to a white wine made from red grapes (Richmond Plains Blanc de Noir made from pinot noir fruit) and talked about organic production.

I thought 10am might be a bit early to be tasting wines, but not for this heroic bunch. They approached the task with gusto as David led them through a tasting of finished wines and tank samples. The tank samples proved just how good the last harvest was, with all the wines bursting with clean, pure varietal flavours.

It was back in the van at 11am and off to **Blackenbrook Wines** at Tasman, where co-owner and winemaker Daniel Schwarzenbach showed us around, talked about how he makes wine and let my bunch of wine lovers taste some

of his product, comparing finished wines with new-season tank samples. The group were astounded at Daniel's passion and dedication to quality in everything he does. For me, Blackenbrook's 2007 reserve gewurztraminer was the best match with the still-warm home-baked bread Ursula Schwarzenbach produced for us.

Next up was **Neudorf Vineyards** for lunch and a wine tasting and chat with Tim and Judy Finn. Tim is widely regarded as one of the country's premier winemakers and has an affinity with the environment that contributes so much to the flavours and textures delivered in every bottle of Neudorf wine. For this group the chance to sit down over lunch and chat with him about his winemaking philosophy, the continual search for new techniques, technologies and research to help improve his product, was a unique opportunity.

By 3pm we were heading to **Seifried Estate** to meet Chris Seifried. Chris not only talked with passion and a deep understanding of the things that make Seifried Estate the success it is, but he couldn't resist pouring "just one more" tank or barrel sample. Learning about the almost extreme lengths they go to in making Sweet Agnes Riesling in an ice wine style showed us how even a large winery puts huge effort into creating something very special.