



At Blackenbrook Vineyard the Wines speak for themselves

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Working with nature, rather than against it, is one of the key principles of this thriving family-run operation, where grapes are nurtured from the soil right through to the bottle.

Established 10 years ago, the 20 hectare vineyard produces eight grape varieties ranging from Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Gris, through to the heady flavours of Montepulciano and Muscat.

Situated halfway between Nelson and the Abel Tasman National Park, the region's balanced climate and Moutere clay soil is proving to be a winning combination.

A family affair

Daniel and Ursula Schwarzenbach, both from Switzerland, moved to the top of the South Island in 1998 and searched for almost two years before purchasing their block on the scenic Coastal Highway.

Nearly a decade later, and there are two, albeit small, new additions to the team – son Thomas, seven, and daughter Isabelle, three. Both play an active part in helping out.

Maintaining a hands-on, personalised approach sets Blackenbrook apart from the larger, commercialised brands. “We make all of our decisions and therefore have total control over the quality,” says Ursula, who focuses on the marketing side of the business.

Not all of the land is currently under vine, leaving room to expand production according to market demand. The aim however, is to remain reasonably small and in control.

The couple still take pride in putting their own stamp on every single bottle of wine they produce.

Sustainability

The gravity-fed winery is a direct reflection of what the Schwarzenbach’s strive for at Blackenbrook – to have minimal interference with nature, ultimately resulting in “pure and genuine” wines.

Nestled into the hillside in the middle of the vineyard, the winery is therefore extremely well insulated making cooling and heating more efficient.

The need to cold-stabilise before bottling means the process is purposefully done in July. The winter temperatures mean less energy is required to achieve optimal results, therefore lowering power consumption.

The couple have also set up a system whereby all winery waste water is recycled and used to irrigate paddocks.

In the vineyard, they no longer use any weed spray after designing a special under-vine mowing implement for the tractor. “As a direct result vine balance and the diversity of plants and insects throughout the vineyard have increased. We also use organic seaweed fertiliser in our bid to work with rather than against nature,” Ursula says.

Blackenbrook has recently achieved full accreditation from Sustainable Winegrowing New Zealand.

Technology

Working with state of the art machinery allows for a more efficient and controlled production process, and one that ensures optimum quality.

The couple have imported a lot of their equipment from Europe, and emphasise the importance of innovation.

“It is important for us to have good equipment. For example each of our tanks is linked to a computer-controlled cooling system that allows us to monitor and adjust the temperature of each one. This is particularly important during fermentation.”

Gentleness is a key aspect in the winery, a philosophy achieved through the minimal use of mechanical transfers. Whenever possible gravity is employed, seen in the way the grapes are lifted up to the press by a forklift with a rotating head rather than by an orga. The juice then naturally drains from the press to the settling tanks and is moved only three more times before it reaches the bottle.

Quality prevails

All the fruit is carefully hand picked and selected, and the winemaking process is extremely gentle.

“We don’t over-press and we don’t do extra pumping. By simplifying our processes we have minimal bitterness pick up and as a consequence we don’t have to fine,” says Ursula.

“It means our wines don’t have the classic fining agents added such as fish, milk or egg, and reach your glass as a very natural, vegan friendly product with minimal additives.”

A host of accolades and awards is testament to the couple’s hard work and quality of their product. The Blackenbrook 2007 Sauvignon Blanc in particular has come up trumps, being named Best Sauvignon Blanc of the Show at the prestigious Bragato Wine Awards and the New Zealand International Wine

Show, and taking the overall trophy from the 2009 Bartho Eksteen Sauvignon Blanc Celebration in South Africa.

Blackenbrook wines are mainly sold in restaurants, fine wine shops and through the thriving mailing list.

Whilst already exporting into Switzerland, the Netherlands, Singapore and Australia, they have just landed their first order from Japan and are working hard on establishing a strong presence in this market.

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