

CRUISING NORTH CANTERBURY

The newly registered NZ wine region is worthy of a visit, if only to sample the world-class pinot noir.



STACKS ON
Muddy Water
barrels. Opposite:
Black Estate cellar
door and restaurant.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIELLE COLVIN PHOTOGRAPHY. OPPOSITE: PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF BLACK ESTATE.



REST EASY
A barrel at
Bellbird Spring.

two-bedroom Shearer's Cottage at Limestone Hills, mobile range becomes patchy and a sense of tranquility descends. As New Zealand's only truffière to produce four different species of truffle, owners Gareth and Camille Renowden have been at the forefront of the industry and were founding members of the **Canterbury Truffle Festival** (canterburytrufflefestival.nz). A gourmand's delight, the Canterbury Truffle Festival occurs each July and visitors have the opportunity to forage for truffles before sitting down to meals designed around these irresistible fungi and matched to local wines.

Like truffles, olives are a relatively new industry to New Zealand and although Canterbury represents only 5% of total plantings in New Zealand, it produces some of the best olive oil in the country. Stop by **Athena Olives** (+64 3 314 6774) for a tasting of some the region's top offerings. Bookend a day of wine tasting with breakfast and the best coffee in town at **Little Vintage Espresso** (facebook.com/LittleVintageEspresso/) in the village of Amberley and finish up at **Brew Moon** (brewmoon.co.nz). Head brewer Belinda Gould has swapped winemaking for brewing a selection of craft beer with wood-fired pizzas and platters of local cheeses, pickles and terrines also on offer. Alternatively, head to the farmers' market in Amberley (visithurunui.co.nz/the-region/amberley-leithfield/503-waipara-valley-farmers-market) to sample the local fare in one convenient location every Saturday morning.

Less than 10 minutes past Amberley you will find signs for **Pegasus Bay** (pegasusbay.com). Founder, Professor Ivan Donaldson was among those who saw potential for wine production in North Canterbury early on. The first vines for the family run business were planted in 1986 and today Pegasus Bay exemplifies the region's approach to food and wine. When planning a visit to the cellar door make a reservation for lunch at their highly awarded restaurant. Visitors have the option to dine inside with an open fire during colder months or as temperatures

PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON MCLEAN AND COURTESY OF BLACK ESTATE, BELL HILL, BELLBIRD SPRING AND PEGASUS BAY.

An easy 50-minute drive from Christchurch will transport you to the North Canterbury wine region and a rather extraordinary opportunity to indulge the senses. It is here that the connection between food and wine is so entwined that it is all but impossible to mention one without the other. If wine has brought the concept of *terroir* to the region, then the culinary community has embraced the idea, providing an array of gourmet treasures to match. The approximately 1,260 hectares of producing vines in North Canterbury find their place alongside olive groves, bee hives and rivers and oceans brimming with seafood, while on land there are seductive truffles.

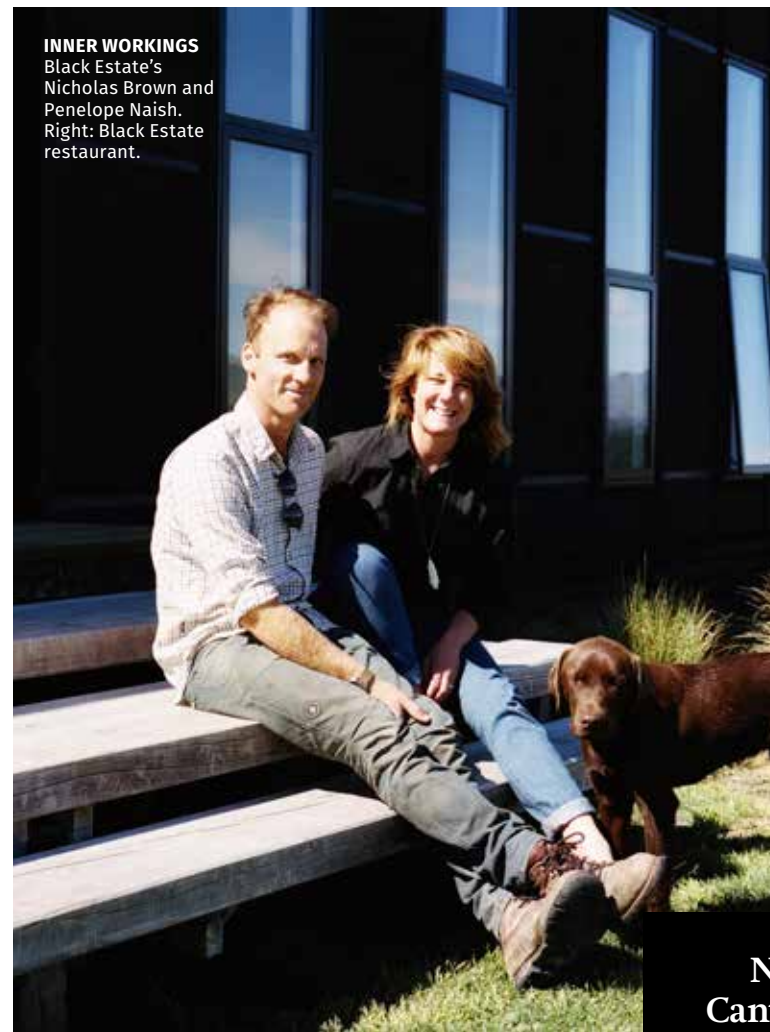
The modern wine industry of North Canterbury is centred on two subregions of the Hurunui District, Waipara and Waikari. In the 1970s experimental plantings coincided with the inauguration of wine courses at nearby Lincoln University. Daniel Schuster and Dr David Jackson were among those who played pivotal roles in developing local knowledge and expertise. The region first entered domestic consciousness as a serious contender in 1983 when the 1982 St Helena Pinot Noir made by Schuster won a gold medal at the Air New Zealand Wine Competition. Immigration further boosted the ranks of pioneers in the region, including Theo and Alex Giesen from Germany, who would later be joined by their younger brother Marcel who today co-owns the cult winery Bell Hill with Sherwyn Veldhuizen.

In the Maori language *wai* can be used to reference water, which goes a long way to explaining the high number

of New Zealand place names using this prefix, such as the North Island regions of Wairarapa and Waiheke. Producers in the Waipara and Waikari regions on the South Island are hoping to address any potential confusion by rebranding the region. A step towards this was the registration of North Canterbury in the Geographical Indication Register, which came into force last year. Although Waipara and Waikari were also registered as subregions, the expectation is that by using the name North Canterbury confusion with other regions will be reduced and international recognition of the region's location will increase.

A serendipitous coincidence of geography provides an enviably long growing season for vines in North Canterbury. The magnificent Southern Alps provide shelter from wet westerlies while to the east, the Tivotdale Hills and Mt Cass offer protection from cool Pacific Ocean breezes and through the valley blows a warm north-westerly wind. Root systems are buried deep within clay, limestone and alluvial soils with some vines now in their third decade. Pinot noir from Waipara often captures the classic red fruit, floral and forest floor notes that instantly transport one to the ancestral home of this thin-skinned grape. Whites are textural, generously weighted and deliciously enticing with aroma and flavour.

As if providing proof of the collaborative signature of the region, **Limestone Hills** (limestonehills.co.nz) produces pinot noir and syrah alongside an astonishing selection of truffle species. Driving along the winding road towards the luxury



INNER WORKINGS
Black Estate's
Nicholas Brown and
Penelope Naish.
Right: Black Estate
restaurant.

North
Canterbury
sits among the
very special
places in the
world to visit.



TIME IN THE SUN
Pegasus Bay. Right:
Sherwyn Veldhuizen
and Marcel Giesen
from Bell Hill.





rise, to sit outside surrounded by the extensive gardens that were established by Ivan’s wife Christine, when the winery was founded. A comprehensive tasting is offered at the cellar door including an impressive number of riesling styles, ranging from the dry Bel Canto Riesling through to the deliciously sweet Encore Riesling. A love of opera has resulted in many concerts being hosted in the winery grounds as well as each wine in the Reserve series having an operatic inspired name.

After Pegasus Bay visit with Guy Porter of **Bellbird Spring** (bellbirdspring.co.nz). Visits are by appointment only, but it is well worth getting in touch and if Guy’s schedule permits he will happily set up a range of wines to taste with you. The wines of Bellbird Spring are thought-provoking and as each wine is tasted the mind instantly fills with a myriad dishes they would pair with. Speaking with Porter it is clear that he takes time to consider the final product – how will it taste, how will it function, does it begin or end a meal, what would the ideal food matches be – the fragrant and textural 2015 Pinot Gris epitomises these ideals.

A quick drive will take you to the **Greystone** cellar door (greystonewines.co.nz), also home to **Muddy Water** (muddywater.co.nz). Here winemaker Dom Maxwell, winner of the inaugural *Gourmet*

Traveller WINE New Zealand Winemaker of the Year in 2018, has crafted some outstanding wines. Maxwell has been with Greystone since the early days when vines were planted on the undulating slopes of the Tivotdale Hills. The Omihi Limestone and Awapuni Clay soils combined with Maxwell’s skill in the winery create a trademark elegance and refinement of structure found across all of the wines. Typical of the region, the portfolio has a healthy representation of aromatic white wines, including a barrel-fermented sauvignon blanc, riesling, chardonnay, pinot gris and gewürztraminer, in addition to multiple expressions of pinot noir.

The Greystone Vineyard Ferment Pinot Noir is a wonderfully literal exploration of environmental influence on wine, which started in 2013. The goal is to explore the concept of site each year and to produce a wine with as few cultivated influences as possible. A connection between the vineyard and the winery is established by bringing together the respective teams as they dig the fermentation vat into the ground between the rows of vines. The yeasts existing in that particular location ferment the juice and often add a savoury character to an elegant wine of red berries and cherries, roses and spice.



To truly experience the wonder of New Zealand book a stay at the glass walled eco-cabin called the **Greystone PurePod** (purepods.com/location/greystone/). Remotely located, this private oasis offers views stretching out across the Waipara Valley towards the Southern Alps. Sit on the deck watching the sun go down and enjoy a hamper of local food and wine. Then head to bed, lie back and look up through the glass ceiling at the night sky, a carpet of black velvet strewn with the Milky Way and infinite stars.

A short distance from Greystone is **Black Estate** (blackestate.co.nz). Easily spotted from the road, the cellar door and restaurant of blackwood and concrete are a distinctive sight. Darkly coloured with floor-to-ceiling windows, the building provides a twist on the simple barn structure and a vivid contrast to the vineyard green. Enter through the tasting room to the restaurant and find a seat inside or outside on the terrace where you can choose from a regularly updated menu featuring local produce. Black Estate produces wine from three different vineyards, including the Netherwood Vineyard, which was planted in 1986 by Daniel Schuster and Russell Black. Rarely irrigated, the ungrafted vines at this site provide fruit for a supple pinot noir of florals and spice. In addition to pinot noir, Black Estate produces riesling and chardonnay.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF GREYSTONE.



FRUITS OF LABOUR
Dom Maxwell.

To explore the other major subregion of North Canterbury drive to Waikari to visit **Bell Hill Vineyard** (bellhill.co.nz), so named for the small bell-shaped hill upon which it sits. It is here that tiny quantities of highly sought-after wines are produced. Visits are by appointment and only when schedules permit. Marcel Giesen and Sherwyn Veldhuizen together with a very small team, manage the vineyard with painstaking care and attention. Planted in 1997 the chardonnay and pinot noir produced here is done so with an eye to the future. They are intensely flavoured, tightly coiled wines of crystalline structure that allude to greater complexity in years to come.

A few minutes in the car will take you to **Pyramid Valley Vineyards** (pyramidvalley.co.nz), the other key producer in the area. After purchasing the property in 2000, owners Mike and Claudia Weersing have managed the site using biodynamic principles. The clay and limestone soils of the vineyard play a vital role in producing excellent chardonnay and pinot noir. Visitors are hosted in a refurbished 1920s carriage stable, which provides a relaxed and informal setting to taste the wines. Appointments are available during November to March and must be booked in advance.

The impressive range of wines on offer throughout North Canterbury make this an exciting time to



head to the region. It sits among the very special places in the world to visit.

Where to Stay

If you’re looking for places to stay and can’t book into the **Greystone PurePod** (purepods.com/location/greystone/) or the **Shearer’s Cottage** (limestonehills.co.nz/shearers-cottage/) at Limestone Hills there are a number of great alternatives. **Black Estate B & B** (visithurunui.co.nz/the-region/waipara-valley/1040-black-estate-winery-b-b) is located onsite at the vineyard, guaranteeing spectacular views across the valley and up to the Southern Alps. If staying in an olive grove appeals then get in touch with **House of Ball** (houseofball.co.nz). Hosts, Lynda and

Julian Ball offer a bed and breakfast set in a boutique vineyard and olive grove. If you prefer to stay in the town of Amberley, **Dunnolly Luxury Cottage** (arra.biz/cottage/) is a stand-alone cottage tucked away among the vines and surrounded by a private garden. For the more adventurous, book one of the **Waipara Sleepers** (waiparasleepers.co.nz/home), a series of historic railway wagons that have been completely redecorated, retaining period features and set upon pieces of track in a country garden. Options include a four-berth Rail Guard wagon, the Railway Hut, a cottage and sites for campervans and tents. 1

Wines to Try

2016 Greystone Sea Star Riesling, A\$29/NZ\$28

This has flavours of white blossom, fresh grass, stone and tropical fruit. The use of bâtonnage provides creaminess, balanced by fresh acidity and a persistent chalk core leading to a very good length.

2016 Greystone Vineyard Ferment Pinot Noir, A\$75/NZ\$70

A small percentage of whole bunches gives this pinot a spicy, aromatic lift, alongside classic rose, red fruit and leaf notes. There is a pretty quality to the structure with red berries, cedar, raspberry leaf and rosehip tea on the finish.

2016 Greystone Syrah, NZ\$65 Produced in very small quantities, this is a restrained example with violets, black fruit and spicy pepper notes among finely textured tannins and juicy acidity.

2015 Bellbird Spring Block Eight Pinot Gris, NZ\$32

Dry in style with herbal, savoury and fruit notes, which make it versatile with food. The lees ageing before bottling adds attractive palate weight, which is balanced by crisp acidity.

2015 Bellbird Spring River Terrace Pinot Noir, NZ\$37

Classic pinot offering roses, red fruits and green leaves. It dances lightly across the palate with bitter cherry and almond notes. Elegant and pretty with a finely hewn frame of tannin and acidity.

2016 Black Estate Wines Damsteep Pinot Noir, A\$45/NZ\$45

The use of large barrels places the focus firmly on the fruit, showing florals, red fruit, forest floor, fresh green leaves, and a dash of white pepper spice. Fine-grained tannins and fresh acidity make this an absolute pleasure to drink.

2014 Bell Hill Chardonnay, A\$150/NZ\$120

Taut and lean as it winds around a mineral core, this is structured for longevity, the high acidity is perfectly balanced with a creamy mouthfeel. Florals, minerals and pithy citrus fruit unwind on the palate promising greater complexity.

2009 Bell Hill Pinot Noir, A\$190/NZ\$120 Powerful with exquisite structure encapsulating notes of rose petals, black tea leaves, red berries, spice and green leaves with a touch of sweet oak. Built to last, this showed very little development despite being nearly a decade old.

2012 Pegasus Bay Chardonnay, POA Elegant with bright acidity accompanying citrus, stone and green fruits and a touch of smoky gunflint. Attractive texture on the palate, it offers endless possibilities when it comes to food.

2013 Pegasus Bay Aria Late Picked Riesling, POA

Deliciously rich with apricots, peaches, ripe green pear, and a touch of honeysuckle and beeswax. The tension between brilliant acidity and unctuous sweetness sits perfectly as flavours continue to linger long after the final sip.