



Wine

BY MICHAEL COOPER

Island of wine

Wine has been produced on Waiheke Island for the past 30 years. The volumes are usually small and the prices high. Are they worth it?



Do Waiheke wines, generally made in tiny volumes, justify their high prices? Sixteen of the island's producers, including almost all the heavyweights, exhibited their wares at a recent tasting in downtown Auckland, including early releases from the exceptional 2008 vintage on the island.

Of the over 80 wines on display, the syrahs and cabernet/merlot blends stood out, backed up by a few outstanding, widely underrated chardonnays. A few wineries were clearly off the pace, but most had some distinguished wines in their range. Here (in alphabetical order) are my top-rated wines from each producer:

Awaroa Waiheke Island Syrah 2008 ★★★★★

From an organic farm east of Onetangi, in the island's centre, this is a strikingly bold, densely coloured red with lush plum/spice flavours, showing lovely complexity and concentration. September release. \$35

Cable Bay Waiheke Island Chardonnay 2007 ★★★★★

Blended from six sites around the island, this is an instantly appealing wine with vibrant, sweet-fruit flavours to the fore, a delicate seasoning of toasty oak, and excellent depth and harmony. The best yet. \$34

Destiny Bay Destinae 2006 ★★★★★

From a site on the island's south side, this is a classy blend of cabernet sauvignon (46%) with merlot, cabernet franc and malbec. Fragrant and dark, with a strong surge of ripe, berryish, spicy flavour, it is firm, complex and youthful, with loads of personality. \$75

Goldwater Goldie 2005 ★★★★★

A top vintage of this classic (formerly Goldwater Cabernet Sauvignon & Merlot). Dark, with an enticing fragrance, it is plump and sweet-fruited, with generous blackcurrant, plum and spice flavours. An opulent wine, it should be long-lived. \$55

Harvest Man Syrah 2007 ★★★★★

From the Hay Paddock, a small but serious new producer, this "earlier-drinking" style is finely textured, with very ripe, savoury, supple and harmonious flavours. It's already delicious. \$37.50

Isola Estate Cabernet/Merlot 2008 ★★★★★

Grown at Onetangi, this very fresh, youthful red is dark, with concentrated berry/plum flavours. Drink 2011+. \$37

Jurassic Ridge Cabernet Franc 2007 ★★★★★

From Church Bay – near Matiatia wharf – this is a buoyantly fruity red with raspberry, plum and spice flavours, showing excellent ripeness and complexity. Drink now or cellar. \$29

Kennedy Point Merlot 2005 ★★★★★

Drinking well now, this dark Putiki Bay red is fragrant, with delicious blackcurrant, plum and spice flavours, ripe, rounded and rich. \$32

Man O'War Dreadnought Syrah 2007 ★★★★★

From John Spencer's vineyard at the north-east end of the island, this is a sophisticated red, fragrant, spicy and slightly leathery, with substantial body and deep, complex flavours of plums and black pepper. Built to last. \$45

Miro Vineyard Summer Aphrodisiac NV ★★★★★

"Pour yourself a stiff one," invites the label on this Bordeaux-style blend. Priced right, it offers decent depth of berryish, spicy flavours, slightly leafy and fresh. \$18

Mudbrick Vineyard Shepherds Point Merlot 2006 ★★★★★

Grown at Onetangi, this is a spicy, leathery, savoury red, with a firm backbone of tannin. Fragrant, dark and concentrated, it shows excellent power through the palate. \$50

Passage Rock Waiheke Island Syrah 2008 ★★★★★

Bold, bright colour, with rich, highly

concentrated plum and black pepper flavours, firm and very youthful. Ripe, sweet-fruit flavours, with a solid underlay of tannin and good complexity. Priced attractively at \$35.

Pilgrim 2007 ★★★★★

From Stonyridge, this youthful, Rhone-style blend of syrah, grenache and mourvedre is boldly coloured, with deliciously deep, vibrant flavours of blackcurrants, plums, spices and liquorice. \$85

Poderi Crisci Merlot 2006 ★★★★★

Easy-drinking, medium-bodied red with decent depth of plum, spice and herb flavours, showing some savoury, leathery maturity. \$26

Te Motu Cabernet/Merlot 2005 ★★★★★

A top vintage of this label (markedly superior to the 2004, also released recently), with loads of brambly, spicy, nutty flavour, showing good complexity, and a welcoming fragrance. Drink now or cellar. \$89

Note:

In my June 20 column on affordable pinot noirs, two wines rated with five stars (Neudorf Tom's Block 2007 and Walnut Block Marlborough 2007) were incorrectly shown with four stars.

Wine of the week

Weeping Sands Waiheke Island Montepulciano 2008 ★★★★★

Powerful, authoritative red from Obsidian, based on a classic variety of central Italy. Dense and complex, with bold, ripe flavours of plums and spices and firm tannins. Buy now and drink over the next decade. \$34

