



Central Otago

BY CAMERON DOUGLAS MS

Bucket List Wines

The wine region of Central Otago sits on the 45th parallel near the bottom of the South Island. This southerly location means all farming and those who live there are subject to a semi-continental/continental climate. Winters can be harsh and cold, while Summers can be quite warm and very sunny. Most vineyards are at elevation, meaning well above sea-level, starting at around 120 metres. Average rainfall is low, and many vineyards require irrigation. Frost remains the biggest threat to viticulture.

From what seems like an unforgiving landscape and climate the overall quality of wine produced in this region is in fact very high. Care and attention in the vineyards and wineries speak a lot to the successes of the region.

The landscape is dramatic, with the southern alps towering above, giant shards of schist punch through the valley floor around the Gibbston Valley, Bannockburn and Bendigo; pink and white quartz, pebbles, loams and loose schist litter the landscape, and glacial activity over several millennia have carved out valleys and exposed a variety of soils.

Central Otago is perhaps best known for Pinot Noir then Riesling. Sadly, not enough Chardonnay is planted, it is an exciting variety for the region. Site and soil play a big role with sub-regional differences noticeable in the glass. Flavours of dark cherry and plum, undergrowth, schist and mineral dominate, with a distinctive

dried herb feature (Central Otago landscape has a lot of wild thyme growing).

Some of the best Riesling in New Zealand can be produced in Central Otago, with dry to off-dry expressions often of very high quality. Pinot Gris is also very successful with over 200 hectares planted. Gamay and Chenin Blanc are varieties to watch out for. Orange wine, Natural wine and Certified Bio-Gro sites are on the increase. The whole region is evolving and maturing.

Wines tasted this month reflect this sense of focus and maturity as well as highlighting the importance of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay to the region.

Wines are scored out of 100 points and are listed in no particular order. Numbers are not indicative of a ranking.

BIO:

Cameron Douglas is New Zealand's first and only Master Sommelier. He is a Senior Lecturer at AUT University in Auckland, local and international wine judge, wine commentator and wine educator as well as a speaker and presenter in New Zealand and internationally. Cameron is also an examiner with the Court of Master Sommeliers Worldwide. He writes the wine lists for a variety of establishments including Mekong Baby, Nanam Republic and Michelin-Starred New York establishment The Musket Room.



1 DOMAIN ROAD DEFIANCE CENTRAL OTAGO PINOT NOIR 2016

Direct and to-the-point bouquet of Pinot Noir with dark red berry fruits of raspberry, cherry, plum and currants, wild spices, layers of oak and toasty wood, complex and intriguing, youthful and engaging. Transitions to the palate seamlessly with flavours and textures that reflect the nose; bold youthful tannins and acidity to match. Long finish. Still very young needing a lot more cellar time. Suggested drinking window 2022 through 2032+.

Points 97
RRP \$65.00
Distributor: Domain Road
Phone: (03) 445 4244
www.domainroad.co.nz



2 MISHA'S VINEYARD THE HIGH NOTE CENTRAL OTAGO PINOT NOIR 2016

As with many of the previous vintages of The High Note, this is complex, tense, poised and youthful. The bouquet is slow to reveal its many layers - so decanting is needed if you intend to try this wine before 2022. After quite some time in glass the aromas then flavours begin to release: red apple skin with raspberry, cherry with rose and plum then wood spice with mineral. Toasty, lightly smoky oak with plenty of flavour and presence. Altogether a wine with great potential - an abundance of tannins and acidity to match, a focus and concentration of flavour and texture and a lengthy dry finish. A truly lovely wine looking to be a quiet dark cellar till at least 2022 and easily through to 2030.

Points 96
RRP \$45.00
Distributor: Negociants New Zealand
Phone: (03) 445 4456
www.mishasvineyard.com

5 DOMAIN ROAD BANNOCKBURN CENTRAL OTAGO PINOT NOIR 2016

There's no mistaking the bouquet and origin of this wine - with a savoury wild thyme and dried herb scents leading to aromas of oak, dark cherry and dried raspberry. The aromas are captivating and alluring. Lots of youthful energy. On the palate - dry, textured, tense, fruity and firm. Youthful tannins and noticeable acidity with ripe red berry fruit flavours at the core. A wine still coming into balance, yet drinking nicely now as well. Complex, youthful and lengthy. Best drinking window 2020 through 2030.

Points 94
RRP \$40.00
Distributor: Domain Road
Phone: (03) 445 4244
www.domainroad.co.nz



3 DOMAIN ROAD DEFIANCE CENTRAL OTAGO CHARDONNAY 2017

An intriguing and complex bouquet with distinctive aromas of minerality, fruit and oak. Apple and white peach, quince and grapefruit, baking spices and nutty toasty oak layers. Dry on the palate, youthful, fresh, vibrant and engaging textures. Flavours of citrus and stone fruit then nutty toasty oak layers with fine tannins. Medium+ acidity and weight. A delicious wine that captivates and shows off Chardonnay from the region. Best drinking from 2020 through 2028.

Points 96
RRP \$28.00
Distributor: Domain Road
Phone: (03) 445 4244
www.domainroad.co.nz

6 DOMAINE THOMSON SURVEYOR THOMSON CENTRAL OTAGO PINOT NOIR 2015

A fine and complex bouquet with calm yet distinctive aromas of ripe red berry fruits, layers of toasty oak and smoky wood spices. Equally complex on the palate with dark cherry, tea and brown spices, raspberry and old rose flavours. Firm yet fine youthful tannin and acidity adding tension and poise as well as charm and some elegance. Dry finish, well made and quite complex. Best window for drinking early 2020 through 2026.

Points 94
RRP \$55.00
Distributor: Domaine Thomson
Phone: (03) 445 4912
www.domainethomsonwines.com



4 DOMAIN ROAD PARADISE CENTRAL OTAGO PINOT NOIR 2015

A bouquet that begins with an immediate crescendo an impact of fruit, spice, toasty oak and savoury dried herb layers atop a basket of red fruit. Sounds a bit poetic, yet this is how the wine unfurls on the nose. Dry, textured and fruity on the palate. Youthful, vibrant tannins and prominent acidity add texture and structure alongside berry fruit flavours, barrel and spice flavours. A wine that needs more cellar time to reveal its best. Best drinking from 2022 through 2032.

Points 95
RRP \$85.00
Distributor: Domain Road
Phone: (03) 445 4244
www.domainroad.co.nz

7 AKARUA 25 STEPS CENTRAL OTAGO ROSÉ 2018

Pale onion skin hues lead to aromas of earth and soil, dried flowers and yellow cherry. Dry on the palate with a core of wild flowers, apple, pear, cherry and soil. Plenty of crisp acidity and length. A wine to consider and savour; very nice. Drink today and through 2021.

Points 93
RRP \$35.00
Distributor: Akarua
Phone (03) 445 0897
www.akarua.com

