

Bannock Brae Estate Wines

Crawford Brown: Well, hi; Crawford Brown, Bannock Brae Estate here, and this time I'd like to chat about our Pinot Noir wines, of which you can see in front of me. There are three.

Interestingly, this one is definitely a Pinot Noir. It's a 100% Pinot Noir Rose, produced by the saignée process, whereby we actually bleed off some of our juice before it's had a chance to pick up too much color from the skins; then it's fermented separately to give quite a remarkable Rose. It's called our Goldfields Cathy's Rose, Cathy, who is the other half of the partnership; she is the much better-looking one and indeed my wife.

Now, people better able to talk about Rose than I am have described this as being particularly full in flavor and, unlike many Roses, has a very distinctive mid-palate; in other words, it has some oomph to it, and that's probably due to the fact that it's purpose-built.

Great for picnic drinking, drinking at the beach, drinking in the riverside, slightly chilled picnic lunch. It is a light wine; and flavor and character, strawberries seem to be the word that meets most people's lips when they try it, or even strawberries and cream. It has no pretensions to long life, and it is a drink-now wine. But we're very pleased with the way it's turned out, even though this particular vintage is the first one we've ever produced.

And now, I'd like to talk about our two Pinot Noir table wines. Like many growers here and elsewhere, we have a two-tier label system. Our top-tier wine is this one; it's known as Bannock Brae Estate Barrel Selection. And this wine is our second-tier label, the Goldfields Pinot Noir.

So, how are they different? Well, let me put it this way. The Barrel Selection means pretty much exactly what it says. By that, I mean that a couple of months before bottling, around December-January, the winemaker himself, we actually sample every individual barrel in the winery; it's a tough job, but somebody has to do it. At the end of that exercise, we inevitably find that there have been a number of barrels that have jumped out of us and said, "Look, I'm the best of the best, the crème de la crème." They've got some very noticeable attributes, which places them above the rest of the barrels.

So we earmark them and blend them, and those barrels are entitled to wear this label, the Barrel Selection. So by definition, everything else goes under this label. But the reality is that there's often not a great real difference, and generally we find these are both gold medal-winning wines. In fact, our Goldfields Pinot Noir at the moment, 2006, is wearing two gold medals, including the In New Zealand Wine Awards, and this one is also wearing a gold medal, the New Zealand International Wine Show. So they are both stunning wines. But most people, on tasting both of them, consider that this one is more of this one; so, a little more complex, a little more full-bodied. Actually, a slightly richer color is really the only difference.

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This means by which we determine our top-tier wine has some difficulties for us, because obviously we can't budget each year what percentage of wine will go under this label. The accountants don't like that, but we're not here to please the accountants; we're here to make stunning wine.

In this particular year, 2006, 17% of the wine was entitled to wear this label. The previous year, 2005, it was 30% of the wine. And the year before that, 2004, it was 0%. 2004 was not a good year for us, because we were very badly hit by frost; so we didn't produce this label at all.

One of the characteristics of Bannockburn wines in particular, and ours included, is the sumptuous, velvety texture of the wine, silky tannins which we're able to get here because, as I said earlier, we're able to fully ripen our grapes and not worry about overshooting the sugar levels.

So once the wine is poured into the glass and we're rolling it around out miles, we're appreciating some beautiful, soft tannins, which is greatly appreciated by people who come here and taste our wine. As well as that, there's a greater amazing mixture of flavors. Pinot Noir is, of course, a complex wine, delicate but complex, and we can certainly get an amazing assortment of different fruits and flavors in our wine, including herbs and spices. Black cherries and dark fruit is often quoted. But you know, I think it tastes like grapes, as well, and we often forget that. Why shouldn't wine taste of grapes? And our wine certainly does that.

Great depth of flavor, very full mid-palate and a lingering and very, very pleasant aftertaste. I think if you were to try either of these wines, you would be very impressed indeed, and I certainly hope that you do get the opportunity to try them. They're too good to pass by.

We'll catch you later.