

sorted once more to remove any berries that show signs of damage. When I questioned this rigorous process, Kusuda told me that even if it makes just five per cent difference it will be worth the effort. Similar attention to detail is lavished on viticulture and winemaking.

Kusuda's pinot noir, syrah and (from 2009) riesling are predictably outstanding. Most of his tiny production is sold in Japan. Hard to find but well worth the effort.

**STAR WINE: 2009 Kusuda Riesling, NZ\$32.**

## Hawkes Bay

### KIDNAPPER CLIFFS

[www.kidnappercliffs.com](http://www.kidnappercliffs.com)

American former hedge-fund manager Julian Robertson owns cult Martinborough winery, Dry River and Hawkes Bay winery and restaurant Te Awa, and has established two of the country's finest golf courses and luxury lodges, Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers. That well-resourced mix recently spawned the Kidnapper Cliffs label using grapes grown at Te Awa and utilising the skills of Dry River's Neil McCallum with those of the new Te Awa winemaker Ant Mackenzie.

The range of thoughtful and polished wines includes a remarkable Bordeaux-look-alike blend of sauvignon blanc and semillon called Solan; a stylish chardonnay; the best New Zealand pinotage I have tasted, a merlot-dominant blend with cabernet franc and cabernet sauvignon; and my favourite, a powerful and yet slightly edgy syrah. All are made in modest quantities but should be widely distributed and easy to find.

**STAR WINE: 2009 Kidnapper Cliffs Syrah, NZ\$55.**

### ELEPHANT HILL

[www.elephanthill.co.nz](http://www.elephanthill.co.nz)

German businessman Roger Weiss established this winery on the historic Hawkes Bay grape-growing district of Te Awanga on the coast between Napier and Cape Kidnappers. Twenty-five hectares of vines were planted in 2003, and a 400-tonne winery, complete with restaurant, was constructed in 2009.

This ambitious project rapidly produced a number of exciting wines.

My favourites are Elephant Hill Viognier and Syrah although the entire range reflects quality-focused winemaking and viticulture and exposes the potential of a terrific vineyard site. I predict a bright future for Elephant Hill and for Te Awanga as a winemaking district.

**STAR WINE: 2009 Elephant Hill Syrah, NZ\$29.**

### BILANCIA

[www.bilancia.co.nz](http://www.bilancia.co.nz)

Life and business partners Lorraine Leheny and Warren Gibson have been making terrific wines from their Gimblett Gravels vineyard for more than a decade. Their tiny production is in danger of keeping them below the radar although lovers of New Zealand pinot gris and syrah will be aware of their presence.

I recently tasted six vintages of Bilancia Pinot Gris – they are one of this country's top producers of the variety. However, Bilancia's real claim to fame is a sophisticated and powerful syrah called La Collina. The excellent 2007 vintage of this syrah and viognier co-fermented wine deserves to be recognised as a benchmark example of the style. The wine from the following year was as good. It is the product of a great vineyard site, low-yielding vines and deeply thoughtful winemaking.

**STAR WINE: 2008 Bilancia La Collina Syrah, NZ\$80.**

## Auckland

### TE WHAU VINEYARD

[www.tewhau.co.nz](http://www.tewhau.co.nz)

I recently tasted a decade of Te Whau Chardonnay and a red blend called The Point, dating back to the first-release wines from this small Waiheke Island producer. It reinforced my view that while Te Whau and other quality-focused winemakers enjoy great reviews from their first-release wines, the best is often yet to come. Te Whau is an example of what can be achieved when a wine enthusiast and successful businessman such as Tony Forsyth makes top-quality wine by establishing a vineyard on a frighteningly steep hillside site. Te Whau is, for the moment at



least, my favourite Waiheke wine producer. **STAR WINE: 2008 Te Whau Vineyard The Point, NZ\$70.**

### MAN O' WAR

[www.manowarvineyards.co.nz](http://www.manowarvineyards.co.nz)

Man O' War owners, the Spencer Family, possess a large chunk of Waiheke Island. They have established a remarkable collection of nearly 90 small vineyard sites over their large landholding to produce a range of wine styles that are rapidly growing in stature and acclaim.

It's an extraordinary thing to see tiny pockets of vines on carefully chosen spots in the nooks and crannies of the folding coastal hills of Waiheke. Each plot is chosen for its suitability for a certain grape variety. Mind you, they don't always get it right. Sites have been replanted and abandoned when they don't deliver the predicted quality.

Man O' War was all about potential until the arrival of winemaker Duncan McTavish a couple of vintages ago. Now Man O' War is making some seriously high-quality wines on a scale that should soon be reasonably available beyond New Zealand's shores.

**STAR WINE: 2008 Man O'War Dreadnought Syrah, NZ\$46.**

### DESTINY BAY

[www.destinybaywine.com](http://www.destinybaywine.com)

After hearing rumours about this high-flying Waiheke producer, I received a couple of samples for review. Both were impressive. They are blends of the Bordeaux varieties: cabernet sauvignon, merlot, cabernet franc and malbec. The five-hectare vineyard is planted in a north-facing amphitheatre on clay soils. It was Waiheke's first fully accredited sustainable vineyard and winery. Wines are bottled on site and allowed two years' bottle-age before release. Attention to detail verges on fanaticism. I haven't tasted the Magna Praemium and I am envious of fellow wine critic Geoff Kelly, who has and who rates 18.5+ out of 20 points. I definitely intend to visit the winery this summer and hope to share more about this intriguing producer.

**STAR WINE: 2006 Destiny Bay Mystae, NZ\$115.**