

MENTELLE NOTES

THE NEWSLETTER OF CLOUDY BAY AND CAPE MENTELLE

Let's Twist Again...

Wine writer Philip White takes a look at closure – of the wine kind.

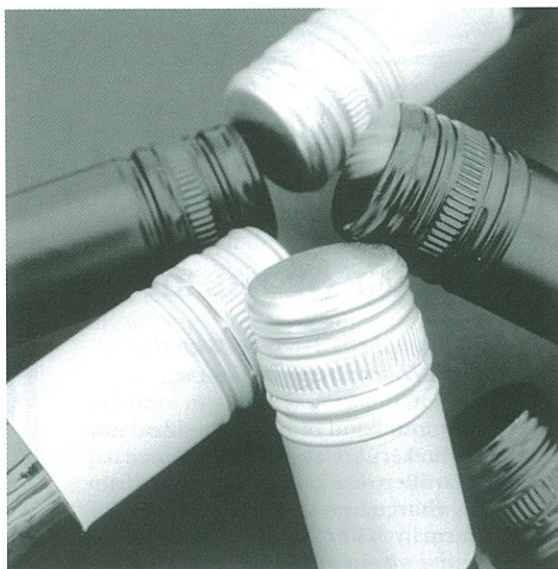
A salesman walks into a bar. 'Mate', he says, 'check this out. It's a new way of storing wine. You get no bacterial spoilage, and hardly any oxidation. You can even open it and reseal it, and your booze'll stay fresh for years!'

The publican begrudgingly asks to see a sample, and the salesman plonks a shiny glass bottle on the bar. The publican's incredulous. 'You gotta be joking!', he snorts. 'That'll never take off. Wine drinkers will never abandon the romance of the goat skin.'

Aussies and Kiwis pride themselves on the clean reliability of their wines – we have made a major export item of the strength of our modern, sanitary, stainless manufactory. In fact, our wine is so preciously, squeakily clean, that we recast bottles in a furnace rather than refill them. All pretty and pristine; heaven in the spring. Then we bash a lump of bark from a tree in Portugal down the throat of that disinfected purity to seal in all the sanctified cleanliness.

While wine marketers bay about the romance of this rougher than usual handling, increasingly, winemakers admit to doing it because cork is porous, spongy and soft, changing shape naturally to fill the irregularities of the bottle's gullet.

But this porosity resembles a multi-storey resort for microscopic varmints, a luxury microbiological zoo. Maybe this should be expected of a compound whose main role is to keep the bull excreta off the timber of the *Quercus suber*. Iberian cork cutters must know about it, because they use bleach to whiten the stuff. But even the bleach gives rise to further contaminants, like the perfectly named trichloranisole, which smells like a Pamplona rat's lavatory.



Seeking Stelvin..?

Pic: Kevin Judd

As a teenage kid, I watched Coca-Cola follow the drugs manufacturers, who had decided that as a sealant, cork was INFERIOR. While none of us really cared much about the medicine bottles, we sure as hell noticed Coke when they swapped the cork liner for white plastic.

To keep us addicted, they printed grainy images of footballers beneath the new seals, so we'd dig the plastic out and collect the crown caps. Sales increased. Then they went further: they replaced the crown seal with a screw cap. Sales increased again.

—
‘Every bottle with a cork in it is corky to some degree – it has to be.’
 —

Even the sardine industry eventually realised that more people would eat sardines if they didn't have to carry a special spanner around, just to get in the tin.

Winemakers? Jeez, we don't expect Rhodes scholars, but you've gotta marvel at the lengths they reach in their pathological avoidance of admitting that corks spoil wine, and that most people don't carry corkscrews everywhere they go.

They'll even over-oak everything with American *Quercus alba*, which helps to mask the twang of its dodgy European cousin.

Just as arcane is the wine industry's insistence that consumers love the romance of the cork so much that they'll forgo a bottle with dinner unless it has one jammed down its pretty sterile neck. Who do they think we are?

It's the romance of the bullion collector, stacking gold bars away for the future, knowing full well that one in ten is lead covered with gold paint.

And that's about the numbers in my cynical book. Cork suppliers moan that folk like me exaggerate the incidence of cork taint and failure, but in my regular day-to-day, week-to-week tastings – and I draw around 5000 corks a year – standard rates of cork spoilage of commercial bottled wine runs between 8% and 12%. If I include simple bottle variation, from oxidation or other cork-associated causes, my figure heads north to 20% or more. Every bottle with a cork in it is corky to some degree – it has to be.

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NEW
RELEASES

SUMMER SAUVIGNONS

Summer is around the corner when thoughts turn to the beach and languid lunches, lazy days when you head off to the family bach or the coast to satisfy that craving that besets all New Zealanders come December – the summer seaside holiday.

So, wherever you end up on a deck chair with your chilly bin be sure to pack (along with the beach ball and towel) a case of your favourite Cloudy Bay wine – the perfect accompaniment to summer!

Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2001

'Imagine a salsa of tomato, quince and passionfruit, freshly chopped basil leaves and a sprinkling of lemongrass. Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2001 is vibrantly fresh and has all the hallmarks of a classic Marlborough sauvignon blanc – a tangy, concentrated, mouth-filling wine.'

LOST YEAR

The alert bubbly drinker may have noticed the absence of *Pelorus Vintage 1997*. There is a simple explanation. It was not up to the company's in-house standards.

Over the years Pelorus has earned international critical acclaim and has to live up to its reputation and your expectations of quality. Regrettably the 1997 was a disappointment and will not be released, but rest assured the 1998 is well worth waiting for!

BILL'S DINNERS

Ex-president Bill Clinton ate lemon myrtle crusted barramundi and a contemporary bush tucker version of surf and turf (beef and yabbies) when he was recently in Sydney for a charity fundraiser. But MN spies say he prefers plainer fare, the sort of food expat Kiwi chef and butler, Richard Cox, served Bill in Aspen.

Richard, who previously ran restaurants in Auckland, now works for one of America's richest families. When Bill popped in for dinner (with his 13 bodyguards) Cox prepared courgette and chicken soup, Caesar salad with turkey bacon, Colorado fillet steak and pecan cheesecake.

But what did the patriotic Kiwi pour for Clinton's party? 'A Rodney Strong Californian red, Toasted Head Chardonnay from Oregon – and a couple of bottles of *Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc* with the soup, which I discovered at the back of a wine shop in Aspen.'

CLOUDY BAY



SAUVIGNON BLANC 2001

Cloudy Bay Te Koko 1998

'Aromas of lychee and honeyed sauvignon, with gentle smoky overtones introduce this wine. The textural palate is enhanced by nuances of ripe guava and freshly cut hay; creaminess from the malolactic fermentation, in conjunction with ripe fruit flavours, imparts an illusion of sweetness to what is essentially a dry wine. A deliciously rich alternative style of Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc.'

CHARGE OF THE RIGHT BRIGADE

Bob Campbell MW reports on the latest NZ screw cap initiatives.

A virtuous band of brave New Zealand winemakers are about to challenge the artillery fire of public opinion as they charge into the valley of financial insecurity. They leave behind them a massive group of potential reinforcements. The sideline sitters will enter the same valley if the advance party survives but will call them 'stupid bastards' and adopt smug expressions if they perish.

Just when you thought 'closure' was a politically correct term meaning 'end of story' we begin a long and potentially bitter crusade to replace corks with screw caps. Forget civil war, this is Stelvin war.

Twenty-five Kiwi winemakers have banded together to form a group that they call 'The Screw Cap Initiative'. Many (but not all) of their number will use screw caps instead of corks for the first time on at least a percentage of their production this year.

Winemakers are divided on the issue. In fact, they are neatly divided into the following three camps:

NOTE: *Cloudy Bay wines are bottled with high quality corks.*

Stelvin screw caps are to be trialled in future.

LET'S TWIST AGAIN cont.

A diligent sommelier recently asked me to check two pallets of wine for a banquet – around a dozen cases of each of the wines he planned to serve. Some products – generally, the most respected ones – showed barely a shred of variation or spoilage from bottle to bottle. But some were at least 30% skewiff. The variation in one chardonnay bottling made it look like 140 differently indifferent wines.

Even if you accept the figures of the cork suppliers, and their major paid ambassadors, like the great Len Evans, who publicly ridicule my claims, you're still looking at a spoilage rate that no other packaged food supplier would tolerate. Romance? Romance?

I'll give you romance. Obviously aware of the exquisite quality of the white wines of Cloudy Bay, and the earthy nature of the bark of the lowly *Quercus suber*, David Hohnen is considering joining the march to clean, reliable screw caps. Over one of which I should hope to soon stare, bewitched, into his eyes.

Now, Len Evans walks into a bar... Only joking.

Philip White pulls cork and twists tops regularly for his column in Adelaide's Advertiser.



'Our greatest test lies ahead. This castle is occupied by elderly German corkscrew makers.'

Leaders:

Those impetuous, crazy guys who are 'giving it a go.'

Followers:

A more conservative element that likes the idea but needs to do a bit more research before taking the plunge.

Conscientious objectors:

The cowardly custards and general spoil-sports who know that screw caps are better than corks but put their fear of a market backlash against the need to give their customers a better glass of wine.

Never in the history of wine have so many owed so much to so few.

Writer's Drop

By Morris Gleitzman

An eminent, old, respected, greying author with a big, oblong, painted, walled house in the high, leafy, curved, steep hills once gave me some important, unforgettable, useful, verbal advice about how I could become a wealthy, famous, awarded, successful writer.

'Never,' he said, 'use adjectives.'

I stared at him. 'Never?' I said.

'Not even short, crisp, vivid, apt, jazzy, cogent, nice ones?'

The literary legend shook his head, and, to emphasise his point, knocked me off his garden wall with a Nobel Prize statuette. A statuette that I was tempted, once I regained consciousness, to describe as shiny, hard, well-aimed and uncalled-for.

But I didn't because I was determined to benefit from his advice. As I queued in casualty I dreamed of literary greatness and vowed never again to use an adjective. Even though I sensed this might cause a few problems in my career as a wine writer.

At my next tasting, things quickly became difficult. My fellow scribes' notebooks were soon bulging with adjectives. Leafy, juicy, lip-smacking, firm, mellow, nutty, ripe, biscuity, austere, grassy, aromatic, refreshing, oily, vibrant, intense, peppery, vanillin, herbaceous, corked. And that was just the first wine.

I took refuge in the next best thing. But adverbs just don't work as well with wine writing. I got as far as 'the Margaret River cabernet slipped mintily, oakily and blackberrily over my palate, which was responding plum-puddingly,' and gave up.

I was left with nouns. Cherry. Butterscotch. Lanolin. Pepper. Raisins. Dust. Lime. Nutmeg. Olive. Licorice.

A week later the editor rang, furious. Several readers had thought my piece was a recipe and were in bed with gastric.

Things got worse. The editor made me write a letter of apology to the readers.

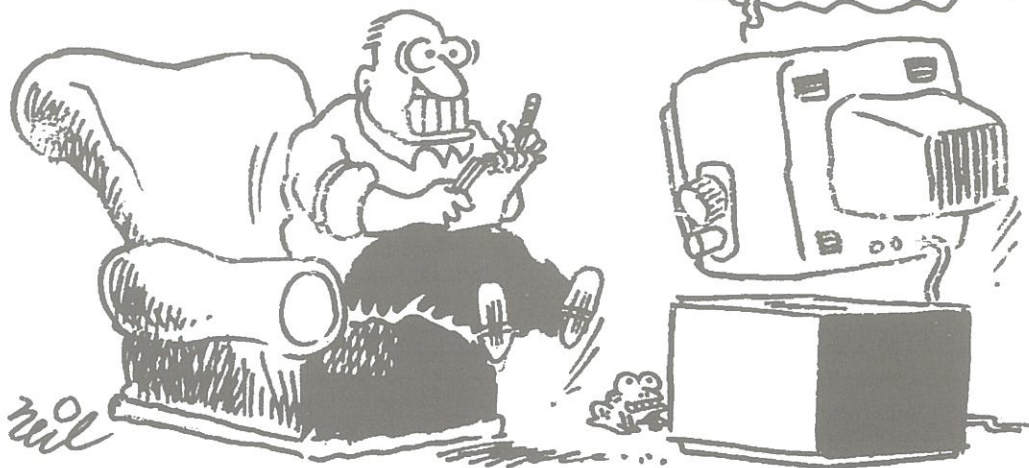
'Please accept my apologies,' I wrote. 'No,' thundered the editor. 'Sound as though you mean it. Use adjectives. Sincere. Abject. Whimpering, if you can spell it.' I explained to him how great writers didn't use adjectives. As he fired me he demonstrated how editors do. Mostly ones that begin with f.

Confused and in crisis, I went to see the person who had first steered me towards the literary life. Mrs Bentley, my high-school English teacher.

She has retired now and is living in a wisteria-covered cottage. At the front door she blinked up at me. I introduced myself. 'No need,' she said. 'I recognized the bad posture.'

We sat at her kitchen table. I admired her lace tablecloth and crocheted toaster-cover, and gave her

WHERE WINE WRITERS DO THEIR RESEARCH



the bottle of traminer riesling I'd carefully selected for her. 'It's not too dry,' I said, 'and it's only 8.5% alcohol so I hope it won't upset your tummy.'

'It won't upset my tummy,' she said, tipping it down the sink. 'Just my palate.' She opened a 1986 Coonawarra Cabernet Shiraz and asked me how my writing career was going.

I explained about not using adjectives and how I'd crossed out all the ones in my thesaurus and how it was causing me some problems, particularly finishing the first draft of my Pulitzer Prize acceptance speech.

Mrs Bentley swirled a mouthful of wine thoughtfully round her dentures and looked at me like I was something green growing on the bottom of a cork.

'Adjectives,' she said, 'are the colours of the language. And the aromas. And the flavours. Only a pretentious, constipated, misguided, addled-brained, feeble-witted nincompoop would try and write without adjectives.'

I stared at her. 'But...' I said.

'The Margaret River cabernet slipped mintily, oakily and blackberrily over my palate...'

'Didn't you learn anything in my class?' she sighed. 'God knows I tried to set you a good example. All those adjectives I used in your school reports. Dim. Slow. Preoccupied. Dreamy. Didn't any of it rub off?' She sighed again. 'Probably not. You never were exactly quick.'

The only reason I pushed you into writing was so you wouldn't have to operate dangerous machinery.'

This was too much to take in. 'But...' I croaked.

'But's a conjunction,' said Mrs Bentley wearily. 'If you want juice in your writing, and spunk and verve and life, use adjectives.' She held up her glass. 'Why do you think wine writers use so many of the buggers? Because they're writing about the juice of life.'

Suddenly I understood what she meant. 'You're right,' I yelled. 'Adjectives are good. Adjectives are fine. Adjectives are noble. And nobody knows how to use them better than wine writers.' I stood up, fired by a new, even more exciting thought. 'Wine writers,' I yelled, 'should all write novels.'

Mrs Bentley was looking doubtful, but my imagination was ablaze. 'Think how much better *Pride and Prejudice* would be,' I said, 'if Jane Austen had been a wine writer.'

Suddenly we were back in year ten English and I was quoting like I'd never been able to at the time.

'It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single, austere, mellow, mature, dense, firm, lingering man in possession of a good, balanced, well-structured, temperature-controlled fortune must be in want of a complex, ripe, aromatic, vibrant, intense, juicy wife.'

Mrs Bentley was looking ill. 'I think I may have made a mistake,' she said, 'steering you towards the literary life.' She patted my arm. 'But it's not too late, dear. My brother runs a firewood business and he's looking for a chain-saw operator.'

Morris Gleitzman is a regular MN contributor. His latest book Adults Only (Penguin) is full of adjectives - for kids. He's thinking the next book should be a wine writer's thesaurus.

Senior Status

Australian wine marketers are increasingly focusing on maturity as a strategy to build the calibre of their brands. But does vine age really make a difference? Melbourne writer, Paddy Kendler, tackles some ageist theories.

Increasing reference to wines made from 'old vines' on wine labels and in media releases must have caught the eagle eye of Prince Hohnen and stirred his various juices. Certainly, enough for him to draw his voice across the Nullabor Plain and request a survey of 'the old vines thing.'

Why do I get the tough ones? Even James Halliday could have dictated a piece off the top of his head over the phone in 15 minutes.

That's OK, I've taken the gig and here's what I've found.

Yes, there does seem to be some hype out in the market about wines allegedly made from 'old vines.' Wine marketers obviously believe that there is a cachet associated with such products and there appear to be some who are playing fast and loose with the definition of 'old.'

I've found it hard to pin down any widespread abuse of the term, if only because winemakers are not agreed on a definition of 'old'. As well, a representative sample of vigneron, while acknowledging that there may be promotional advantages in pushing the 'old' barrow, put more emphasis on the yield and maturity of vines as factors in quality, rather than sheer age.

Alister Purbrick of Tahbilk, whose extensive vineyards include a patch of shiraz dating back to the 1860s suggests a vine is 'old' at 50 and 'ancient' at 100. Tahbilk sometimes produces a red from these gnarled old battlers and releases it under a special label. It is a heritage expression rather than a commercial product. If Alister was only motivated by financial consideration he would have ripped them out long ago. They are not profitable bearers!

He believes that a vine produces its best fruit 'when it is naturally devigorating.' That is, it has peaked as a plant, and that generally occurs between 40 and 50.

But it is not simply a matter of counting the years. Alister stresses that some old vine clones don't produce grapes as good as those from 'newer' clones off younger vines.

The plot thickens with the feedback from Charlie Melton in the Barossa. While a long-time respecter of old vines, Charlie is equally concerned with restricting yield, whatever the age.

Charlie concurs with Alister that a vine could be termed 'old' after 40 and that it progressively declines after that. I know what he means!

But then, he says, 'If I had to make a choice, 1.5 tons per acre off five-year-old vines would beat 2.5 tons per acre off very old vines (all else being equal). Whether 1.5 tons of younger vines would equal 1.5 tons of old vines in quality, is an unprovable hypothesis at the moment.'

Thanks Charlie! After that I'll just judge a wine as it presents in the glass and bugger how old its vine origins.

Down the Lyndoch end of the Barossa, Rick Burge was happy to contribute. He estimates that at age 45, a vine could be considered 'genuinely old.' Prior to that, a vine from 15 to 45 could be termed 'mature.' Rick only uses the term 'old' on his Burge family labels when they deserve it. 'My old vines Grenache comes from vines planted in the 1920s,' he expostulates.

Rick doesn't make a big old fuss about his Draycott Shiraz, which comes from vines aged about 40. The 1998 earned 99/100 points from the esteemed (or dreaded) American taster Robert Parker.

Thanks Rick and Charlie and Alister and others for helping me reach these conclusions.

There are a few dodgy characters exploiting the aura of 'old' vines, in some cases unjustified, but it is not a widespread abuse.

Grapevines probably reach peak performance in quality and quantity at around 15 and hold their form until about 50.

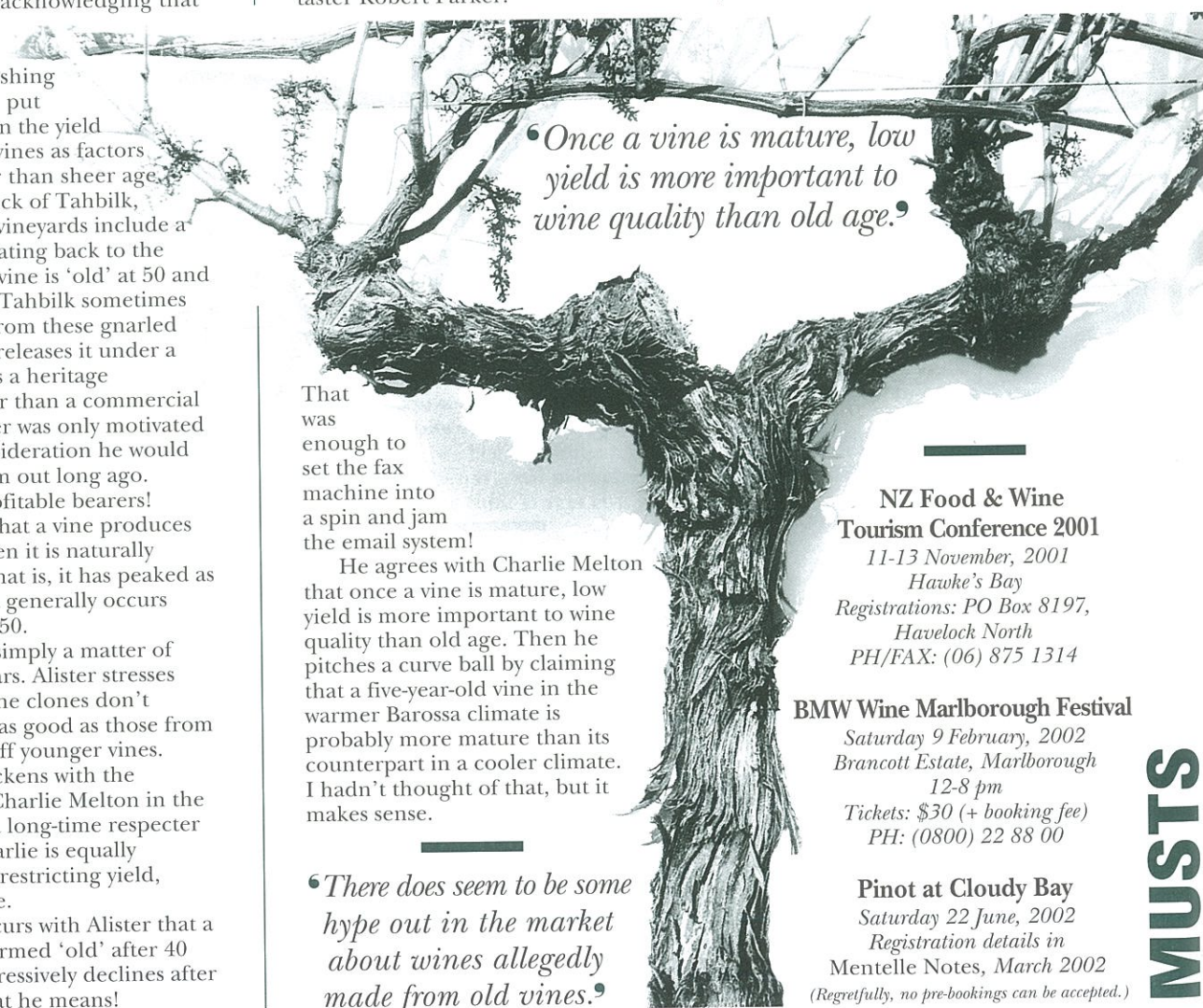
'Old' vines may have romantic connotations and a quality cachet and image but do not necessarily make a better wine than younger ones.

Restricting yield has more impact on quality, all other things being equal, when making wine from mature and even from younger vines.

Winegrowing for a quick quantity return produces crap stuff!

That's it for now Prince Hohnen. No correspondence will be entered into.

Paddy Kendler writes for the Melbourne Herald Sun and knows that age comes before beauty. Cape Mentelle's oldest vines are cabernet sauvignon and date back to 1971.



'Once a vine is mature, low yield is more important to wine quality than old age.'

That was enough to set the fax machine into a spin and jam the email system!

He agrees with Charlie Melton that once a vine is mature, low yield is more important to wine quality than old age. Then he pitches a curve ball by claiming that a five-year-old vine in the warmer Barossa climate is probably more mature than its counterpart in a cooler climate. I hadn't thought of that, but it makes sense.

'There does seem to be some hype out in the market about wines allegedly made from old vines.'

NZ Food & Wine Tourism Conference 2001

11-13 November, 2001

Hawke's Bay

Registrations: PO Box 8197,

Havelock North

PH/FAX: (06) 875 1314

BMW Wine Marlborough Festival

Saturday 9 February, 2002

Brancott Estate, Marlborough

12-8 pm

Tickets: \$30 (+ booking fee)

PH: (0800) 22 88 00

Pinot at Cloudy Bay

Saturday 22 June, 2002

Registration details in

Mentelle Notes, March 2002

(Regretfully, no pre-bookings can be accepted.)

Drinking Under the Stars

Rita Erlich turns astrologer for MN's first vinous horoscope.

Aries

Those born under the sign of Aries (March 22-April 20) are competitive, assertive, and dynamic, which sounds like the kind of person every winery needs as a marketing manager. But they can also be bossy and arrogant, and lack follow-through. Better re-advertise the position. They are matched by something young, red, and a bit too tannic. An Aussie Jimmy Watson Trophy winner will do the trick.



Taurus

Taurus (April 21-May 21) is a virtuous sign. Practical, dependable, thrifty, conservative. Not easy to budge, in other words. Find something reliably good, and stick with it. Taureans will appreciate its stability, their livelier friends admire it as a wine. A McWilliam's Elizabeth Semillon is perfect. Or a Jacob's Creek Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon.

Gemini

Choose bubbles for those born under the sign of Gemini (May 22-June 22). They're likely to be clever, quick-witted, friendly and communicative. Some of them show a tendency to restlessness and superficiality. What represents them best is the new way of selling champagne – Pommery's POP, or the Piper Heidsieck splits. Good enough to capture their interest, not serious enough to bore them.

Cancer

For those born under Cancer (June 23-July 23), the choice can be difficult. They're a moody lot. They're reserved, sensitive, easily offended. They usually hang on to things – grudges, possessions – which means they're likely to have very good cellars. But getting anything out of the cellar might be the challenge. (Have a beer, mate.) Their matching wine is a pinot noir. Always difficult to manage, often rewarding. Try Dry River, Fromm, and anything affordable from Burgundy.

Leo

Those born under the sign of Leo (July 24-August 23) are loyal and generous. They're the kings of the jungle, and they know it. So long as everyone else does too, they will drop the attention-seeking and egotistical behaviour. They are wonderfully hospitable, and their tendency to be

status-conscious usually works in favour of their guests. They have no interest in a single bottle. A case, at least. And something worthy – *Cape Mentelle Cabernet Sauvignon* will do very nicely. Or a double magnum of Chateau Pichon Longueville – preferably the 1990.

Virgo

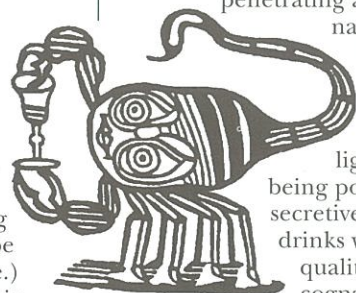
Virgos (August 24-September 23) are precise and methodical, and usually quite obsessive about it. To their credit, they are discriminating and industrious, and only tiresome if they lack a sense of humour. Virgos should be given something that requires patience, skill, discrimination. Give them champagne. The finer it is, the more appreciative they will be. Krug, Charles Heidsieck, or a bottle-aged vintage Pol Roger will keep them happy.

Libra

The virtues of those born under the sign of Libra (September 24-October 23) are often overshadowed by their disadvantages. They are diplomatic, weigh things up constantly, wanting balance and harmony. Very admirable, but they often have trouble making decisions. They're a bit fickle, easily deterred by any disturbance and terrible around a restaurant table because they just can't make a choice. Make it easy: pick out a good rosé – Taltarni or a Spanish Gran Feudo Rosado.

Scorpio

Scorpios (October 24-November 22) are powerful. They are intense, passionate, mysterious, and have a great ability to enjoy the finer things in life. They usually have a gaze of penetrating awareness, and a nasty tendency to strike if threatened. In short, they're not to be taken lightly. Scorpios, being powerful and secretive, understand drinks with the same qualities. Go for cognac, and don't muck about. Suggested: Martell XO, Hine XO, Remy Martin Extra.



Sagittarius

Sagittarians (November 23-December 22) are great travellers, and are usually in search of new horizons. At their best they are versatile, generous, and broad-minded. At worst, they show a tendency to be pushy, they are blunt to the point of tactlessness, and talkative. A bad Sagittarian is very tiresome. Their vinous soulmate is shiraz.

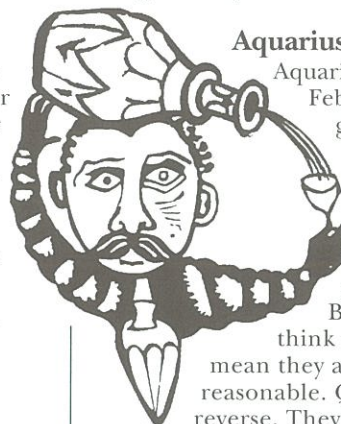
It's as versatile as they are, and in an over-ripe South Australian year, can be as much of a headache. Try Jaboulet La Chapelle, or a Coonawarra shiraz.

Capricorn

Capricorns (December 21-January 19) have lots of virtues, and can be very dull. They're ambitious, hard-working, practical, cautious, and expect to be rewarded for their efforts. A Capricorn would make a useful book-keeper in a winery, or a good vineyard manager. This is not one of the humorous signs, but occasionally they behave according to their name – capriciously. For the most part they like traditional things and the tried-and-true. Offer them something similar. A blended whisky is good – try Chivas Regal.

Aquarius

Aquarians (January 20-February 19) are good fun and often difficult. They're inventive and independent, and have very good minds. But their ability to think well does not mean they are always reasonable. Quite the reverse. They're quite likely to show up as unconventional, and often temperamental. They like to drink something with character, but nothing too tannic. Merlot suits them very well.



Pisces

Those born under the sign of Pisces (February 20-March 21) are compassionate, and often emotional and artistic. They're often a bit vague because they daydream. That's the good side. They are also likely to be impractical, with a tendency to procrastinate, and a habit of talking too much. Don't leave it up to a Piscean to choose a drink, or you could die of thirst. Pick out something brisk and focused: a sauvignon blanc is ideal. Goes with fish, too. Try Cloudy Bay, Seresin, Shaw and Smith.



Melbourne writer Rita Erlich is a Scorpio and when she's not drinking cognac she'd like to be drinking DRC or any other top pinot.

Cheese Please

UK based cheese expert Juliet Harbutt slices her way into wine and cheese matching.

It is an accepted fact that wine can vary from vine to vine, but the very idea that cheese can vary in flavour and texture from day-to-day, let alone season-to-season is perceived, at best, as a cheese lover's whimsical fantasy.

What's more, we are bombarded with information about grapes, grape growers, oak chips and malolactic fermentation, while wine's non-alcoholic cousin rarely merits mention. Worse, cheese is perceived as a time bomb for arteries, a training ground for dangerous pathogens or a commodity to grate, grill or get fat on.

Most recipes imply it must be cooked to be worthy of your attention. Nobody sells wine based on what you can cook with it. You drink it and if there is any left you look for a chicken, fish or slow-moving oyster to pour it over. Well, the same approach should be used for cheese.

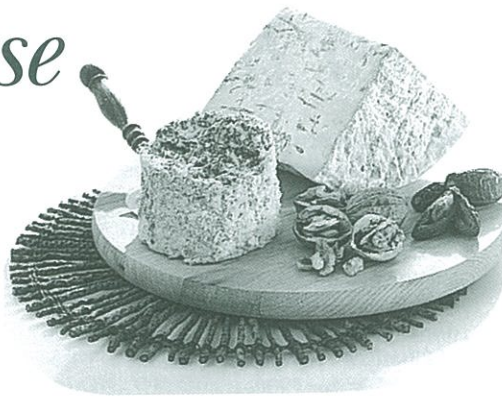
So let's look at some pure unadulterated, wonderful cheeses and play matchmaker.

Strange chemistry occurs when matching wines with food. Asparagus with Beaujolais evokes overtones of skunk, while champagne with smoked salmon, far from enhancing each other's greatness, behave like spoilt brats. Champagne, unless it's pink, steals the sweetness and delicate feel of salmon while the salmon provokes a smarmy edge. Both emerge without charm or elegance. But pair sophisticated bubbles with bangers and mash and be ready for a surprise.

Marriage between cheese and wine can be exceptionally unpredictable. When the complex ethers and esters, acids and fats meet, like any blind date, hidden flaws may be revealed, subtle characteristics released or rough edges smoothed away. New and unique sensations of taste and texture may be created, or the personalities of each annihilated. Some of the best combinations occur with traditional, long-standing friendships.

Roquefort & Sauternes

The sweet, luscious fruit of sauternes cuts through the moist, salty tang of Roquefort emphasising its spicy, herbaceous character, highlighting the burnt caramel sweetness of the ewes' milk. Sauterne is far too outspoken with less salty, more creamy blues that prefer a sweet riesling, or Monbazillac. Don't restrict sticky wines to blue cheese, they enhance spicy, aromatic washed rind cheeses too.



'Cheese is probably the friendliest of foods. It endears itself to everything and never tires of showing off to great advantage. Naturally some nationalities choose one type of companion and some another, but you very seldom find clashes of temperament in passing.'

JAMES BEARD

Münster & Gerwürztraminer

Münster, created by the Trappist monks in Alsace, is a meaty, pungent, punchy washed rind cheese that demands the company of the spicy, aromatic wines from the same region. Similar Belgian and French styles find harmony with the wines of Alsace or the more down-to-earth style of cider or hoppy beers.

Chevre & Sauvignon Blanc

Goats' cheese and sauvignon blanc are perfect partners – a match that revolves around the fresh acidity and grassy aromatic, herbaceous character of the wine, almost a mirror image of typical French zesty, fresh goats' cheese. The fruity acidity encourages the cheese to open up and some matches can produce a marvellous ice-cream feel in the mouth. Aged cheeses demand more spicy, forthright wines like rosé or fruity Loire reds.

Stilton & Port

Firstly, let's get one thing straight – port is a generic name for a host of wonderful and extraordinary fortified wines from Portugal. So, to say stilton goes with port under-values both these great magical products. Personally, unless the port is a smooth, elegant vintage I would prefer a sweet riesling with my blue cheese, otherwise it becomes a contest of giants that will end in tears.

Cheddar & Cabernet Sauvignon

Cabernet sauvignon's tannins make it a less than charming partner. What a cabernet really, really wants is not a strong, powerful cheese but a dense, creamy, full-bodied, hard cheese like medium cheddar, Double Gloucester.

The tannin cuts through the butterfat allowing the wine's hidden character to emerge, capturing the heart of the cheese that softens the sharp edges of the wine. Strong hard cheeses like vintage cheddar can also handle the intense sweetness of fortified wines.

and Pinot Noir

However, if forced to choose just one wine to go with cheese it would be pinot noir. With its gentle elegance, subtle character and minty breath it will take all but the most acerbic cheese in its embrace. The lower levels of tannin and pigment in pinot makes it less aggressive, while its sweet fruitiness speaks softly of raspberries, cherries and violets.

Even hard goat cheeses with their almondy, aromatic character embrace the gentleness of pinot, while the burnt caramel sweetness and nutty finish of a ewes' milk hard cheese or blue with the occasional hint of soggy sweaters, seem to bring out the best in it.

Keeping tabs on the best matches can be daunting. So here is a brief summary:

- ☉ The whiter and brighter the cheese, the lighter and crisper the wine.
- ☉ The darker and harder the cheese, the richer and darker the wine.
- ☉ Blues need sweetness to soften their edges.
- ☉ Outspoken washed rind cheeses need a little spice to offset their exuberance.

Juliet Harbutt is an unabashed pinot fan, a member of the Guilde des Fromagers, and lives in Oxfordshire.

SAUVIGNON SETS SAIL



It's a pity the competitors couldn't charter Cloudy Bay, the pride and joy of Lynn and Veronica Dukes of London, a six-berth catamaran which is moored in Portsmouth Harbour, England.

Not content just to load Marlborough's much-awaited cargo of 2001 Sauvignon Blanc into containers for the world's sauvignon drinkers, the region's winemakers decided this year to take a leaf from the Beaujolais producers' book, and raced their bottles (padlocked in wooden boxes) across Cook Strait to Wellington under sail. Fair winds delivered the new sauvignons to a thirsty throng of waiting media and trade. And the verdict? Another ripper vintage packed with zip and zing that's bound to keep Marlborough in the sauvignon spotlight.

Sipping the Sacred

John Lundon reports on an uplifting experience.

Pinot at Cloudy Bay is fast becoming one of the events on the annual wine calendar. I am predicting that in future years getting tickets to it will be on a par with getting entry into a rugby test match. Unless you know someone who knows someone, you won't have a show. You'll have more luck finding hen's teeth.

It's rumoured that the first act of some parents on the arrival of their first child is to write to Cloudy Bay and request that two tickets be set aside for the new born baby 18 years ahead. This tells you something about man's – and woman's for that matter – great love affair with pinot.

I can't recall any other grape variety attracting such devotion and admiration. I know I tried to create this mystique with Müller Thurgau. I can recall when as an MT grower (yes, I've finally come clean, I confess...) I endeavoured to mount a similar event to the pinot happening.

I hit on what I thought to be a snappy little title 'Müller Thurgau at Dog Point Road - How to maximize your tonnages and your dollars'. It was an abject failure. Of the ten that turned up three were grape growers, two were harvesting contractors and the rest were drinkers. Needless to say, notwithstanding the numbers, we all went home in a very happy state. But it was obvious that Müller Thurgau was always going to be the bridesmaid. There was no enthusiasm for a repeat.

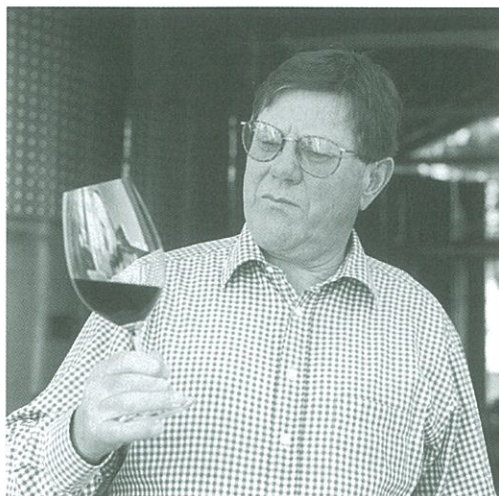
Pinot at Cloudy Bay had an entirely different atmosphere. Immediately I entered the hallowed portals of the winery I could tell by the look on the faces of those registering that I was among a group of devout pilgrims. It wasn't quite Lourdes or St Peters but it was about as close as you could get without the crutches and rosary beads.

They had come, believers and non-believers alike, to taste and to go away with palates titillated, teased and cleansed. The buzz of muted conversation ceased abruptly as the two high priests of Cloudy Bay Pinot, Judd and Healy (J & H - that sounds like a whisky) led the faithful and the unfaithful into the cool inky, oaky, dim, dark cathedral that was the barrel hall.

And it was there that we stood shoulder-to-shoulder for prayerful tasting. Closely following the pinot tasters' liturgy. Swirl, sniff, taste. But what a penance to have to disgorge Charnes-Chambertin into a bucket. Sinful.

In fact, all of the wines tasted were such a class that most of them failed to meet my expectation.

World Pinot was represented. Five Frenchmen, five Australians and



the same number of New Zealanders, a lone South African and four from the United States.

I glanced up from my sniffing to look down at the long line of tasters squeezed in between the barrels. They all had that look which affirmed for me that indeed I was among a band of ardent believers. Most of them bore facial characteristics all pinot devotees acquire after a time.

'They all had that look which affirmed for me that indeed I was among a band of ardent believers.'

I suppose you could call it the bottle-aged look. You know it. Skin showing the tell-tale signs of preferment maceration. The look that only comes from one who has been plunged twice daily in early youth. And the subtle signs of oaking over a long period.

And then the give-away. Most pinot tasters are absolutely unrefined and non-filtered. And it's obvious when they finally speak. It's a language that only the converted and the fully professed understand. Speaking as if in tongues of forest floors and farmyards, leather pouches, cherries, coffee, plums and fruit cake.

And as we adjourned for luncheon and to sip in a more meaningful manner what we had been tasting, I heard one of the faithful exclaim, 'This was an uplifting experience. I'll die a happy man. I've already met my makers, Judd and Healy. Before I go could I have another glass of the Cloudy Bay and remember to bury me in loam over free-draining shingle.'

John Lundon is a Marlborough lawyer with a penchant for the ecclesiastical and the Burgundian.

SANTA'S SIX-PACK



Every Christmas Cloudy Bay asks Santa what he'd like in his stocking...reviving tipples for the festive season. This year he and Rudolph have selected some bubbly, two blancs and a mellow red, an ideal pack for any party. It comprises three bottles of Pelorus, the new Sauvignon Blanc and Te Koko 1998, and CM's Cab Merlot 1999, a perfect match for the turkey. A gift at just \$189.70!

MARGARET RIVER MIX

Santa also reckons you've been good enough this year, and ordered up a special mixed Margaret River case – three bottles each of three premium Cape Mentelle reds from a terrific vintage and the cleansing Semillon Sauvignon Blanc 2001. Stocks are limited so order your taste of Margaret River without delay!

TO MARKET

Visitors to Marlborough will soon be able to taste the region's best produce at the weekly Sunday Farmers' Market which starts on Sunday 9 December (9-12pm) at the A&P Showgrounds. Rain, hail or shine the local farmers will be there selling freshly harvested produce, straight from the paddock for your plate – vegies, fruit, eggs, meat and plenty more to stock the fridge and larder. Details: PH (03)577 5523



Some people are not too fussed about their drinking vessels. Food and wine writer David Burton pours a drop of refreshing Pelorus into his plastic picnic tumbler to celebrate New Zealand's first Gastronomy Symposium held in Wellington.

Far Horizons

Is there anywhere in the world beyond the limits of intrepid Mentelle Ambassadors? Probably not. In this strife-ridden world no place is safe from the advance of brave diplomats bearing their Cloudy Bay bottles.

Deciding who should be appointed the official Ambassador this issue was a monumental task, so in the end the Editor decided on a joint award – to Bruce Day and Mary Reynolds, Auckland, who travelled the Silk Route to the remote barren Qizilkum desert in Uzbekistan where they eventually shared their Pinot Noir with fellow travellers. And to Joanne Barr of Northwood, Middlesex, who called in to the Cloudy Bay winery for her bottle of Pinot, then flew to South America and back-packed along the Incan Trail to the ancient temple of Machu Picchu in the Peruvian Andes where she celebrated her engagement. Congratulations!



Mary Taylor and Bruce Reynolds tackle the Silk Route.

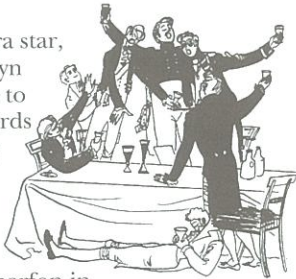
If you too wish to be part of CBV's export effort, keep your eyes peeled. Next time you're far from home and spot a bottle of Cloudy Bay or Cape Mentelle – in a teppanyaki bar in Tokyo, a trattoria in Trentino or wine shop in Sverdlovsk, buy it and take a photo. Then send it to The Editor, Mentelle Notes, PO Box 376, Blenheim. Taking a bottle with you is also highly commended and encouraged. MN will publish the best and most alluring photo and the winning Mentelle Ambassador will receive a FREE mixed case of Cloudy Bay wine. All entrants receive a CB T-shirt.



Joanne Barr gets high in the Andes.

SINGING PRAISE

International opera star, Welsh baritone Bryn Terfel, knows how to keep his vocal chords in trim – drinking good wine! His extensive 500-bottle cellar is based at home on a farm at Caernarfon in North Wales, a collection boasting favourites discovered on his operatic travels. Terfel's finds include Tignanello, various Amarones, d'Yquem, Chateau Petrus and Palmer, and that Kiwi contender, the mellifluous *Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc*.



VALE STANLEY

New Zealand wine lovers lost one of their staunchest and best supporters recently. Stanley Harris, one-time tailor, lobbyist and for countless years the lynchpin of the Federation of Wine & Food Societies, was sipping and assessing wines right up to his recent death. One of his last reviews recommended two Cape Mentelle reds to his members, wines that no doubt helped Stanley reach the admirable age of 83.

DRAWING A BLANC

Over 1200 New Zealand wines were on show at Wine New Zealand, held in Auckland recently. The largest ever event of its kind, the show attracted 140 wineries and 3000 avid tasters, all keen to make their latest discoveries. Pinot noirs, pinot gris, bubblys and blancs, great ambassadors for a thriving industry, were sniffed, sipped and spat.

Visitors to the Cloudy Bay stand were treated to the latest releases as well as two mature Pelorus vintages that suggest Marlborough sparkling wines carry their age rather well.



Kevin Judd pours a preview....

Pelorus NV

Eloquent proof that Marlborough is one of the best places in the New World for classy fizz.
WINE, UK

Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2001
'Copybook, fragrant Marlborough sauvignon blanc that is packed with energetic fruit characters and a fine textured freshness that is extremely smart. Top of the class.'
Keith Stewart, SOMNET

Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2000
'This stylish white has more pizzazz than most. Crisp in texture, ripe in flavour, with passionfruit and pear up front, picking up hints of mint, celery, lime and green chilli notes that keep breezing their way through the lively finish.'
91 points, WINE SPECTATOR

'Cloudy Bay is the greatest bargain in the world of cult wines.'
Dave Broom, CATERER & HOTELKEEPER, UK

Cloudy Bay Te Koko 1998

'Everything a Marlborough sauvignon blanc shouldn't be – aged, oaked, crafted. Creamy passionfruit, banana, toasty oak...which brings to mind Robertson's dark chunky marmalade. Brunch wine perhaps?'
MARLBOROUGH EXPRESS

Cape Mentelle Semillon Sauvignon 2000

'Full of thrilling herby green fruit with terrific zesty nettle and flowering currant – easily the best vintage of this wine I have tasted.'
Jane MacQuitty, THE TIMES, UK

Cloudy Bay Pinot Noir 1999

'This New World classic is modern pinot at its best. Unbelievable length that goes on and on.'
Craig Bancroft, WINE, UK

Cape Mentelle Shiraz 1999

'Striking and seductive...now very near the top of my list for this variety.'
Warren Barton, DOMINION

'Try this stunning wine from Western Oz... offering up sensual succulence and textural body.'

Joëlle Thomson, NZ HERALD

Cape Mentelle Cabernet Merlot Trinders Vineyard 1999

'Cape Mentelle produces smart, precise wines with charming expression of fruit and complexity. Delicious drinking now but will develop further complexity.'
Charmian Smith, OTAGO DAILY TIMES

'A very stylish, finely structured red with blackcurrant and cedar flavours.'
Recommended, WINEWISE, AUSTRALIA

'This is a serious cabernet dominant blend...Soft but powerful in its mouth-filling medley of flavours with an attractive richness of ripe fruit.'
Stanley Harris, WINE & FOOD SOCIETY

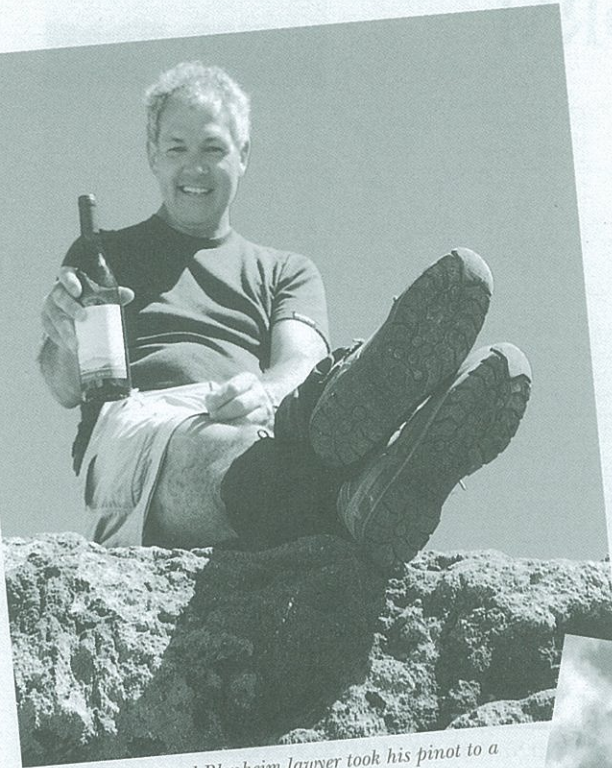
Cape Mentelle Zinfandel 1999

'Whoaaa! Back to the glory days...well, almost. Has got loads of funky feral spicy and wild berry characters, a big, robust, chewy palate and lingering warmth from the 15% alcohol.'
Max Allen, WINE PLANET

MENTELLE NOTES

is the free publication of
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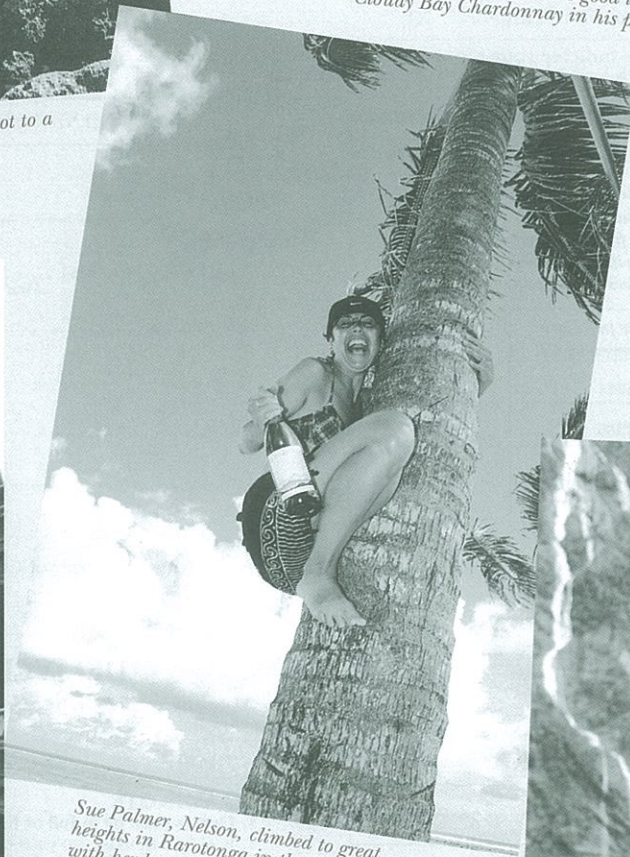
Roving Mentelle Ambassadors



David Dew, a local Blenheim lawyer took his pinot to a national peak – Mt Taranaki.



Bob Tanner, Picton, looks good in leathers and swears he had a bottle of Cloudy Bay Chardonnay in his pack at the Brass Monkey Rally.



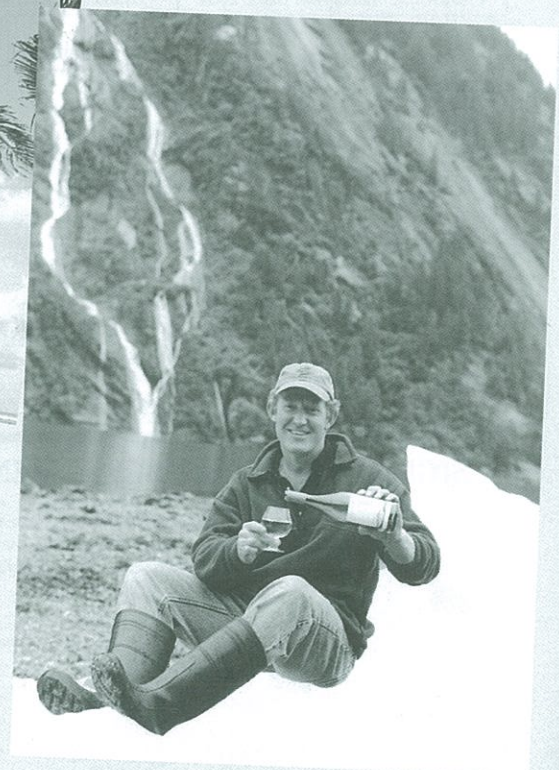
Sue Palmer, Nelson, climbed to great heights in Rarotonga in the Cook Islands with her last bottle of Sauvignon Blanc.



Brian Bodle, Masterton, dwarfed by the Colosseum in Rome but fortified by his CBV bottle.

You too can become a Mentelle Ambassador. Turn to the back page for details of this issue's winner and how to enter.

Congratulations to all these bold adventurers – worthy contenders and talented runners-up in the Mentelle Ambassador program.



Charles Kelly, also from Picton, pours a chilly bottle of Sauvignon Blanc while perched on an Alaskan iceberg.

