

# The Hidden Treasure of the

# South Island

IN NEW ZEALAND, IT'S NORTH CANTERBURY'S TIME TO SHINE



**The Mt. Beautiful lineup awaits at the winery's tasting room in Cheviot. Mt. Beautiful founder David Teece's holdings include three farms, where sheep and cows are raised for wool, lamb, and beef exports.**

Scanning the wine list at your favorite restaurant, you're likely not surprised to see a Sauvignon Blanc from Marlborough: After all, the grape has become almost synonymous with the region on the global market. Your mouth begins to water as you envision the wine's abundant acidity and prominent citrus notes—but then you notice another wine from New Zealand, this time from North Canterbury. “Where the heck is North Canterbury?” you ask.

Good question! To answer it, let's start with a quick overview of New Zealand and its subregions. The country extends 1,000 miles from subtropical Northland (36° S) to Central Otago (46° S). More than 700 wine producers are spread across the North and South Islands, spanning ten regions and more than 30 diverse subregions—yet according to the

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MT. BEAUTIFUL



New Zealand Winegrowers association, they produce less than 1% of the world's annual total. Regardless, for the past three years, New Zealand has defended its position as the third most valuable importer of wine to the United States, per Nielsen. This is significant considering the U.S. is the largest wine-consuming nation in the world.

Just under 90,000 acres are planted to vine in New Zealand, with Marlborough commanding almost two thirds of them. Over half of all vines planted are Sauvignon Blanc, followed by Pinot Noir and aromatic varieties such as Pinot Gris and Riesling. The rest is a mix of Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and other less common varieties.

for their Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and aromatic grapes like Riesling and Pinot Gris. Elevation varies from sea level on Waipara's valley floor to more than 300 feet in the foothills of the Southern Alps. Soils are diverse, including alluvial gravel, limestone clay, and silt loam. And though there are variations, the region generally enjoys a maritime climate, with long, warm, sunny days and cool nights that allow the grapes to ripen slowly, developing bright acidity and good fruit balance along the way.

The greatest concentration of wineries in North Canterbury is about an hour's drive north of Christchurch in the Waipara Valley. The rest are scattered throughout the other subregions—with the exception of

making facility purpose-built to provide ultimate control over the winemaking process from vine to glass. Fruit can be hand-harvested at its optimal time and block fermentations can be kept separate, resulting in greater flexibility for developing final blends.

Later that year, the winery opened a tasting room inside the Two Rivers Café, which Teece went on to purchase in 2017. Now visitors can enjoy artfully prepared dishes featuring local produce, cheeses, and meats alongside Mt. Beautiful's portfolio of 100% estate-grown wines. The winery also operates three farms that produce wool for the Smartwool market, beef for export to Japan, and lamb for export to the U.K.

All in all, this ambitious player has



**North Canterbury is a region to watch, with producers like Mt. Beautiful leading the way.**

Now back to the question at hand: Where is North Canterbury? Bordered by the dramatic Southern Alps to the west and the expansive Pacific Ocean to the east, this South Island region starts north of Christchurch and stretches 112 miles to Kaikoura. It has 3,500 acres planted to vine and accounts for 3% of New Zealand's total wine production. Based on these numbers, you can guess that most of North Canterbury's 60 or so wineries are very small operations. Some control as few as 2 acres of vineyard, although the average is around 100 acres.

Subregions in North Canterbury presently include Waipara Valley (which encompasses Omihi and Glasnevin Gravels), Waikari, and Banks Peninsula/Canterbury Plains. A wide range of varieties are planted here, but these areas are most celebrated

Mt. Beautiful, located an additional 45 minutes' drive north along Route 1 in the township of Cheviot.

This pioneering winery came onto the scene in 2003, when owner David Teece, a New Zealand native, purchased three parcels of contiguous farmland following an intensive two-year search by a certified geologist for South Island locales best suited to grape growing. Teece planted 180 acres of primarily Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc on the undulating hillsides, with lesser amounts of Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, and Riesling. Ranging from 90 feet to 300 feet in elevation, his holdings are located seven miles from the Pacific Ocean, where they're protected by their namesake, Mt. Beautiful, from cold, harsh easterly winds.

In 2015, Mt. Beautiful constructed a state-of-the-art, 650-ton-capacity wine-

brought an otherwise quiet farming community onto the world stage with the diversity of its exceptional products—and it's not stopping there. Future developments will include ecotourism opportunities that tie into Mt. Beautiful's six-bedroom luxury guest house overlooking Manuka Bay. Think vineyard and winery tours via ex-military Landrover 101s, 4x4 tours to the top of Mt. Beautiful, vineyard weddings, and corporate retreats—all making for a stop that belongs on the itinerary of everyone passing between Blenheim and Christchurch.

As more retailers, beverage directors, and consumers learn about all that North Canterbury has to offer, you should see expect to see a greater selection from the region on the wine lists and the shelves of restaurants and bottle shops near you. ■■