

FROM THE CELLAR... CLOS HENRI VINEYARD



YOU HAVE TO VISIT OUR WINERY BECAUSE...

“We’re a great marriage between New Zealand and France. You’ll discover a beautiful combination of flavours and aromas.” Meline Guinebert, Cellar Door Host, Clos Henri Vineyard

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

March 13, 2019

The drive onto the Clos Henri Vineyard grounds had a divine feel of sorts, and not only because of the majestic setting. The cellar door, the re-located “Sainte Solange” chapel, gave the estate a quaint yet anachronistic feel, but in a most alluring way.

Everything about Clos Henri suggests great care and thought has gone into creating and maintaining the French-inspired winery. This included the vines, the building, and the fabulous staff running the estate.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The Clos Henri Vineyard owners, the Bourgeois family, have been making wine for 10 generations. Originally from Sancerre, a wine region (or appellation) in France known for Sauvignon Blanc, the family purchased the current property, a former goat pasture, in 2000.

As the story goes, they searched the planet in an attempt to locate the optimal terroir on which to grow Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir grapes. Their extensive quest ended in Marlborough, which speaks volumes about how much the family esteems the hallowed grounds.

The first vines took root in 2001, whereas the first vintage came into fruition about two years later. At present, the estate produces approximately 27,700 cases from 42 planted hectares. Production is limited to Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, which in some respects sets Clos Henri apart from other wineries in the region.

Interestingly, the soil composition varies across the property, which allows for different expressions of the same varietal. Whereas some plots consist of river stone, others consist of clay.

The estate produces Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc under three labels: Petit Clos, Bel Echo, and the flagship line, Clos Henri.



A pristine Clos Henri vineyard (top), en route to the parking area (middle), and the chapel/cellar door (bottom).

Whereas Petit Clos wines are produced from grapes grown in three soil types, the Bel Echo and Clos Henri wines are produced from grapes grown in one or two soil types, depending on the varietal. For example, the Clos Henri Sauvignon Blanc grapes are grown in Greywacke River Stone soil.

WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHY



What you can expect in terms of terroir.

At Clos Henri, the winemaking team strives to produce world-class Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir that showcase the best of the incredible terroir. One could certainly consider this an “old world” style produced in a “new world” setting, a combination that results in textural and elegant wines. Production consists of organic and biodynamic practices, which highlight the estate’s commitment to the environment and, more broadly, to nature. High density planting (about 6,000 plants per hectare) serves to improve the fruit’s concentration and to encourage deeper root growth and hence exposure to minerals, all of which translate into the wines.

“It’s all about the terroir.” – Léa Romero, Cellar Door Host, Clos Henri Vineyard

ONE-ON-ONE WITH LÉA ROMERO, CELLAR DOOR HOST, CLOS HENRI VINEYARD

Q: What do you like most about wine?

A: The history surrounding the winemaking process, including the winemaker and the terroir. This makes it more than just about wine.

Q: Of all the wines you produce, which one is your favourite and why?

A: The Chapel Block sparkling wine. A Blanc de Noir in New Zealand is pretty rare.

Q: What is your ultimate favourite wine and why?

A: It would have to be a Chateau Lapelletrie, a Saint-Émilion Grand Cru, made from 100% Merlot, an amazing expression of terroir. And, it’s only 18 Euros.

Q: What’s the best part of your job?

A: Doing what I’m doing now. I like interacting with our guests and sharing the history of Clos Henri. I also enjoy learning from other people.



A wine tasting with a smile!

Q: What’s the worst part of your job?

A: Administrative work, especially checking inventory.

Q: What is your most embarrassing wine moment?

A: While opening a bottle of sparkling wine for some visitors, it sprayed right in my face.

Q: Tell us one thing about you or your winery nobody else knows.

A: At Clos Henri, we’re biodynamic, so we follow the lunar calendar.

THE TASTING...

We had the pleasure of tasting almost all of Clos Henri's wines on a gorgeous, mid-March day. Our gracious and thoughtful host, Léa, spoke with passion and gusto, making our time at Clos Henri memorable for all the right reasons.



The Clos Henri lineup.

In terms of the actual offerings, we began with the 2017 Bel Echo Sauvignon Blanc (price: \$26 NZD) and ended with the 2014 Clos Henri "Patience" Late Harvest Sauvignon Blanc (price: \$41 NZD).

In between, we tasted the:

- 2016 Clos Henri Sauvignon Blanc (price: \$33 NZD)
- 2016 Bel Echo Pinot Noir (price: \$33 NZD)
- 2014 Clos Henri Pinot Noir (price: \$44 NZD)

Given that we enjoy the kinds of wines Clos Henri produces, picking a favourite was going to prove challenging. In the end, we settled on the 2015 Clos Henri Pinot Noir. This medium ruby beauty, which spends time in 25% new French oak, offered red cherries, black cherries, violets, black pepper, allspice, and vanilla in the nose. In fact, the sweet, aromatic bouquet reminded us of happy times on Christmas morning. We'd describe this exquisitely balanced Pinot Noir as light-medium in body, with medium-high acidity, medium drying tannins, and a smooth mouth-feel. In terms of flavours, we enjoyed dark plums, blueberries, and blackberries, as well as wet wood, black currant leaf, and earth on the palate. The medium-long finish offered up more dark fruit and earthy notes. As we came to learn, one could easily cellar this Pinot Noir for up to 8 years.

FINAL NOTES

If you're looking for a quaint, engaging atmosphere with a reverent undertone, make it a point to visit Clos Henri. The organic, biodynamic wines offer the best of what France and New Zealand have to offer, especially when it comes to Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. As a bonus, the friendly, thoughtful staff definitely knows how to take care of its guests. *Un gros merci à tous. Nous avons déjà hâte de revenir!*

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