

FROM THE CELLAR... SILENI WINERY

YOU HAVE TO VISIT OUR WINERY BECAUSE...

“We make a lot of Pinot Noir,
which is as good as anything
from Central Otago.”

Dale, Cellar Door
Professional, Sileni Winery



Entering Sileni Winery (top) and views from the cellar door (middle and bottom)

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

March 21, 2019

The first thing we noticed when we drove onto the Sileni Winery grounds was the winery’s distinctive symbol, which sat perched atop the main building. For us, it felt like we had just entered a secret society or, at the very least, a place of reverence.

When we set foot in the Cellar Door, we realized Sileni Winery takes every aspect of its operations seriously, from the neatly organized retail space to the contemporary labels on its wine bottles. The overall composition, all things included, evoked a sense of intrigue...

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Sileni Winery came into existence in 1997, the brainchild of Graeme Avery, a medical entrepreneur, and Grant Edmonds, a winemaker. The winery has grown over the years and, in 2017, bottled somewhere in the neighbourhood of 700,000 cases, or a staggering 8,400,000 bottles. Put in a different light, their offerings are exported to every continent on the planet except Africa.

The Pinot Noir production alone ranges between 40,000 and 60,000 cases per year, depending on the vintage. In total, four Pinot Noirs appear on Sileni Winery’s wine list.

The winemaking team is spearheaded by Cairn Coghill and Nigel Davies. Both have international experience and, collectively, they have honed their skills in some of France’s premier wine-producing regions, including Bordeaux, Burgundy, and Alsace.

The winery’s symbol (see top right corner picture), a triangle within a circle, holds special significance for everyone at Sileni Winery. Whereas the circle represents a global outlook, the three points of the triangle represent great wine, great food, and great company—not a bad trio in our view. As we came to learn, the front of the main building looks spectacular at night.





Part of the Sileni Winery selection.

WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHY

The winemaking team at Sileni Winery endeavours to create wines that pair beautifully with food. To understand the winery is to understand this key point. In practical terms, this translates into barrel-ageing for some wines and lees contact for others. The team also strives to think outside the square, so to speak, pushing innovation and trying new approaches and blends.

“Sileni stands for great food, great wine and great company.” – Sileni Winery

ONE-ON-ONE WITH DALE, CELLAR DOOR PROFESSIONAL, SILENI WINERY

Q: What do you like most about wine?

A: I'm a horticulturist by trade, which is a vast industry. Wine's the same. No two vintages are ever the same, and there's something exciting about that. And, you never stop learning.

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

A: I really like our Viognier. It's hard to grow and it's hard to make. That's why I appreciate its beauty. It's very versatile for food pairings.

Q: What's your ultimate favourite wine and why?

A: It would have to be Corvina. It's hard to get and nobody grows it here. I've never had one I haven't liked.

Q: What's the best part of your job?

A: I get to meet a lot of interesting people from a lot of interesting places. We hosted the CEO of a major corporation a month ago, the same day we hosted an attorney of a world leader.

Q: What's the worst part of your job?

A: They're aren't a lot of downsides, but sometimes you have to be flexible with work hours, which puts some people off. Being a party animal doesn't work so well here.

Q: What's your most embarrassing wine moment?

A: Other than breaking glasses in front of people? (Laughs.) I used to work in a conference centre as a second job. One New Year's Eve, I was carrying two small glasses of Port when I stubbed my foot on the carpet and the two glasses went flying. Fortunately, they missed my customers, but it was embarrassing.

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

A: We make great Pinot Noir here. And the prices are reasonable, too.

THE TASTING...

We arrived at Sileni Winery first thing on an overcast March day. Lucky for us, the tasting offered plenty of colour, both literally and figuratively. And Dale, our eager host, treated us to some great Kiwi hospitality. We

began with the 2013 Circle Semillon (price: \$25 NZD) and ended with the 2015 Ruber, a blend made from Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Syrah (price: \$35 NZD).

In between, we tasted the:

- 2016 Cape Sauvignon Blanc (price: \$25 NZD)
- 2016 Alba, a white blend comprised of Chardonnay, Muscat, Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, and Viognier (price: \$33 NZD)
- 2017 Ridge Pinot Noir Rosé (price: \$35 NZD)
- 2015 Peak Syrah (price: \$33 NZD)



*Our excellent host, Dale,
doing his thing.*

In the end, the 2016 Alba white blend earned our top vote. Although a somewhat atypical blend, especially for Hawke's Bay, the winemaking team hit it out of the park with this one. We enjoyed peach, passion fruit, white flowers, almonds, and minerals in the nose of this pale gold beauty. In the mouth, this full-bodied blend had high acidity, and it served up wet stone, ripe tangerines, honey, pink grapefruit rind, and dry oak (if that makes sense). The combination of grapes makes this a highly versatile wine in terms of food pairings. Saying that, we could see it shining with seafood, cream-based pasta sauces, and our house favourite, risotto with either tomatoes and green onions or with smoked ham and peas.

We were equally impressed with the 2017 Ridge Rosé, which also earned top marks. Medium salmon in colour, this Rosé offered a fresh bouquet of strawberries, rhubarb, and watermelon in the nose. On the palate, we'd describe it as full-bodied, highly acidic, and smooth in terms of mouthfeel. Concentrated flavours included pink grapefruit, tangerine rind, minerals, and white pepper, and we had some biscuit undertones, presumably from the lees contact. This award-winning Rosé would pair beautifully with soft cheeses, charcuterie, and Mediterranean fair.

FINAL NOTES

If we felt intrigued at the start of our visit, we left Sileni Winery feeling impressed on a number of levels, not to mention highly satisfied with our terrific tasting (thanks, Dale!) The winery, one of New Zealand's biggest producers, offers a splendid line-up, with something to tease and please every palate.

Contact Sileni Winery

2016 Maraekakaho Road, R.D.1
Hastings 4171, New Zealand
cellar@sileni.co.nz
+64 6 879 4830
<https://www.sileni.co.nz>

Contact Us

Emilie Ryan 

36 Rialto Way
Ottawa, Ontario, K1T 4B3, Canada
emilie@emilieryan.com
+1 613.791.1247
www.emilieryan.com