

# FROM THE CELLAR... CHURCH ROAD

## YOU HAVE TO VISIT OUR WINERY BECAUSE...

“You’ll have an authentic Kiwi experience, and you’ll taste some exceptional wines.”

Mitch Hyndman, Cellar Door Host, Church Road



*The Church Road grounds (top), the main building (middle), and cellar door, literally (bottom)*

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

March 21, 2019

When we started planning our trip to Hawke’s Bay, we kept reading and hearing great things about Church Road. This came from a variety of sources, including wine books and people in the wine industry. This caught our attention, and it convinced us to visit so we could experience first-hand what all the hype was about.

Situated a short distance from Napier, everything about the winery exudes passion and tradition. The immaculate grounds, the imposing Cellar Door building, and the eye-catching retail area and restaurant all created a most favourable first impression, which further whet our appetite for a tasting.

## THE LAY OF THE LAND

Church Road lays claim to being one of the pioneering wineries in Hawke’s Bay. In fact, many people credit the estate with putting this fantastic region on the map, an impressive feat to say the least.

Late winemaker, Tom McDonald, devoted much of his life to producing world-class wines on the revered Church Road grounds. The current winemaking team, headed by Christ Scott, carries on this tradition.

True to Church Road’s vision, the winery aims to produce exceptional Bordeaux-style reds. In some respects, this sets the estate apart from other wineries in the region—although several other producers make spectacular red blends. Of note, in the 1990s, Church Road joined forces with winemakers from Domaine Cordier in France, a highly-regarded producer.

Church Road produces in the neighbourhood of 1,000,000 bottles per year, a fairly large production in New Zealand. Over 20 offerings, a combination of reds, whites, rosés, and sparkling wines, are available for purchase at the Cellar Door.



The estate produces wine under four labels: Church Road, McDonald Series, Grand Reserve, and Tom. The Church Road wines are made from grapes grown in Hawke's Bay. The McDonald Series, named after Tom McDonald, offers increased complexity and texture. Interestingly, this line includes a Tempranillo and a lesser-known, but highly-acclaimed, Marzemino. The latter, a late-ripening, dark-skinned varietal hails from the outstanding Trentino-Alto Adige region in Northern Italy.



*Decorative barrels in Church Road's Cellar Door.*

The Grand Reserve wines are only made in great vintages and, when combined with low-cropping and hand-harvesting, have superb depth, complexity, and flavour profiles. Finally, the wines produced under the revered Tom label offer the very best of what Church Road has to offer. Of outstanding character and quality, they aim to compete with premium wines from around the globe.

## **WINEMAKING PHILOSOPHY**

At Church Road, the winemaking team strives to make the best possible wine using traditional winemaking techniques. They manipulate their wines as little as possible and rely on what each year offers in terms of growing conditions. The estate has a reputation for producing high-quality, Bordeaux-style red wines, a great source of pride. It also strives to produce a range of wines, with the very best offering exceptional quality, character, and complexity.

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*“We’re hands-on at the winery, and we get to help people have the best experience possible.” – Mitch Hyndman, Cellar Door Host, Church Road*

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## **ONE-ON-ONE WITH MITCH HYNDMAN, CELLAR DOOR HOST, CHURCH ROAD**

### **Q: What do you like most about wine?**

A: It's all about experiences. You have to know what you're getting into, such as what wine drinks now, what wine pairs well with food, and what wine cellars.

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

A: Either the Grand Reserve Chardonnay or the Tom Chardonnay, depending on the setting.

### **Q: What is your ultimate favourite wine and why?**

A: The Grand Reserve Chardonnay 2010. Quite intriguing. Hawke's Bay is a special place for wine.

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

A: The people and delivering passion and experiences. I also like the education side. Some people are new to wine, whereas others are experts.



*Some of the Church Road offerings.*

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

A: If anything, we're a busy spot. Sometimes, depending on the season, that can be a challenge.

**Q: What is your most embarrassing wine moment?**

A: When I was studying hospitality, I had a fear of pouring wine on someone. And, I've done that.

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

A: We only moved here four years ago. A lot of people still think we're in our old Cellar Door location. We also produce a Tempranillo and a Grand Reserve Sauvignon Blanc.

## THE TASTING...

We had the opportunity to taste some of Church Road's offerings as part of a group, which proved to be a great way to meet some lovely people touring around the Hawke's Bay region. Our hostess, Denise, shared some notes on each wine and graciously answered our questions about the estate. She also made a stellar suggestion in terms of the wine we wound up pairing with our amazing lunch (thanks Denise!).



*Our amiable Cellar Door host, Mitch Hyndman.*

Our tasting started with the 2015 Church Road Blanc de Blanc (a sparkling wine made from Chardonnay grapes; price: \$40 NZD) and ended with the 2015 Church Road Grand Reserve Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon (86% Merlot, 14% Cabernet Sauvignon; price: \$45 NZD).

In between, we tasted the:

- 2018 Church Road Hawke's Bay Rosé (a combination of Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Malbec; price: \$20 NZD)
- 2018 Church Road Hawke's Bay Sauvignon Blanc (price: \$20 NZD)
- 2017 Church Road McDonald Series Chardonnay (price: \$25 NZD)
- 2018 Church Road Hawke's Bay Pinot Gris (price: \$20 NZD)
- 2016 Church Road McDonald Series Merlot (price: \$25 NZD)
- 2016 Church Road McDonald Series Cabernet Sauvignon (price: \$25 NZD)

We enjoyed all the offerings, especially, the 2018 Hawke's Bay Pinot Gris and the 2015 Grand Reserve Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon blend. Saying that, the 2017 Church Road Hawke's Bay Syrah, which was not part of our original tasting, earned top marks.

Deep ruby in colour, this balanced, integrated red offered dark plums, violets, black pepper, savoury spice, and lightly-grilled beef in the nose. On the palate, this complex Syrah had a medium body, with medium acidity and soft tannins. In terms of the flavour profile, we tasted sour black plums, sour dark cherries, tobacco, fennel, violets, earth, and graphite. The finish, a long, contemplative end, left us with more graphite and violets. We savoured this wine during lunch in the Church Road restaurant, which, incidentally, consisted of one of the best meals we enjoyed during our time in New Zealand. It paired beautifully with roasted lamb, as well as with roasted spiced pumpkin and blue cheese ravioli. At \$20 NZD, this Syrah represents tremendous value for the money!

## FINAL NOTES

Our visit to Church Road proved memorable for all the right reasons. Not only did we taste some exceptional wines, including reds, whites, a rosé, and a bubbly, we enjoyed one of the best meals during our time in New Zealand, which speaks volumes about the estate's restaurant. To boot, we were on the receiving end of outstanding hospitality, something that never grows old.

### Contact Church Road

150 Church Road, Taradale, Napier 4112, New Zealand

[thecellardoor@churchroad.co.nz](mailto:thecellardoor@churchroad.co.nz)

+64 6 873 7126

<https://www.church-road.co.nz>

### Contact Us

*Emilie Ryan* 

36 Rialto Way

Ottawa, Ontario, K1T 4B3, Canada

[emilie@emilieryan.com](mailto:emilie@emilieryan.com)

+1 613.791.1247

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