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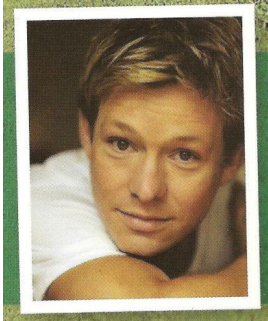
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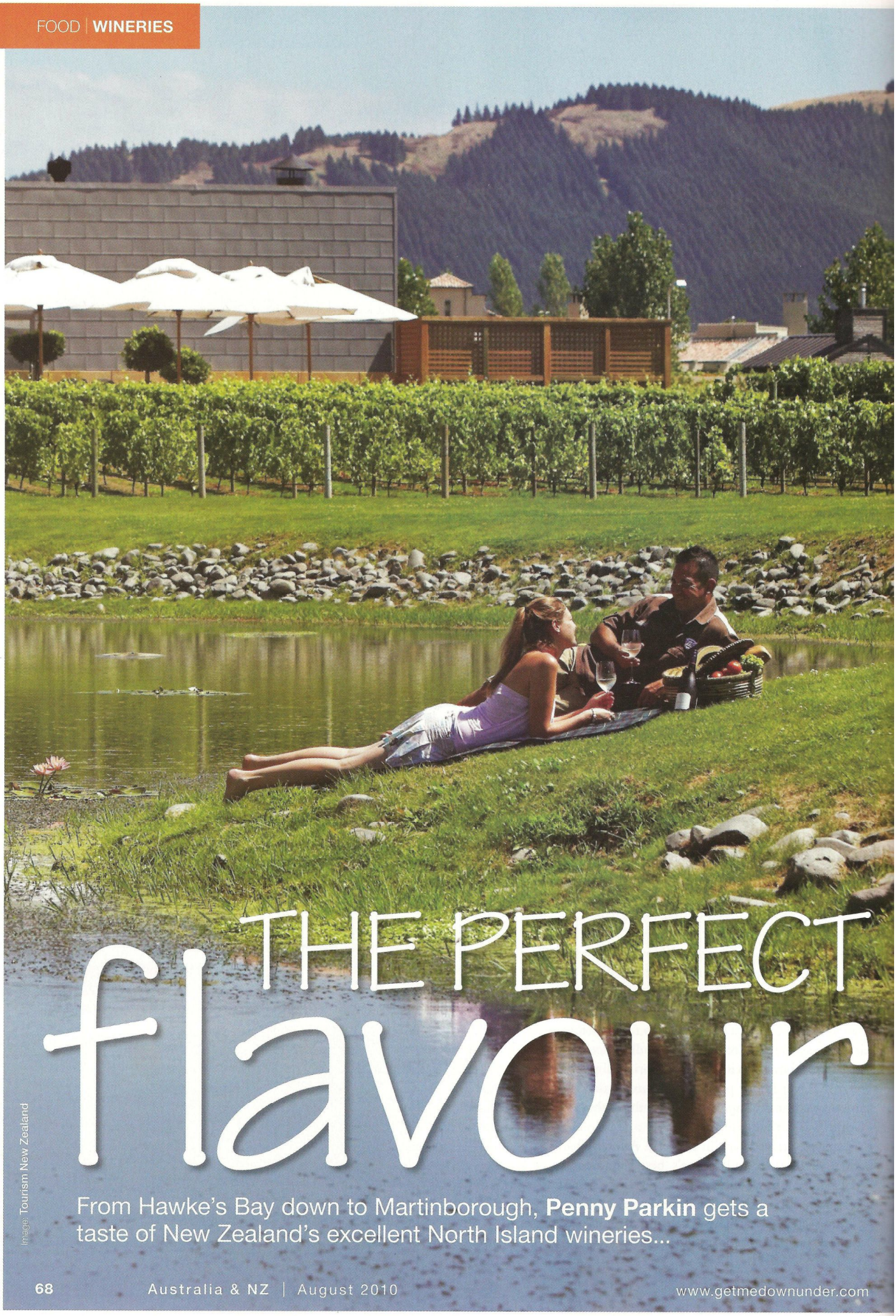
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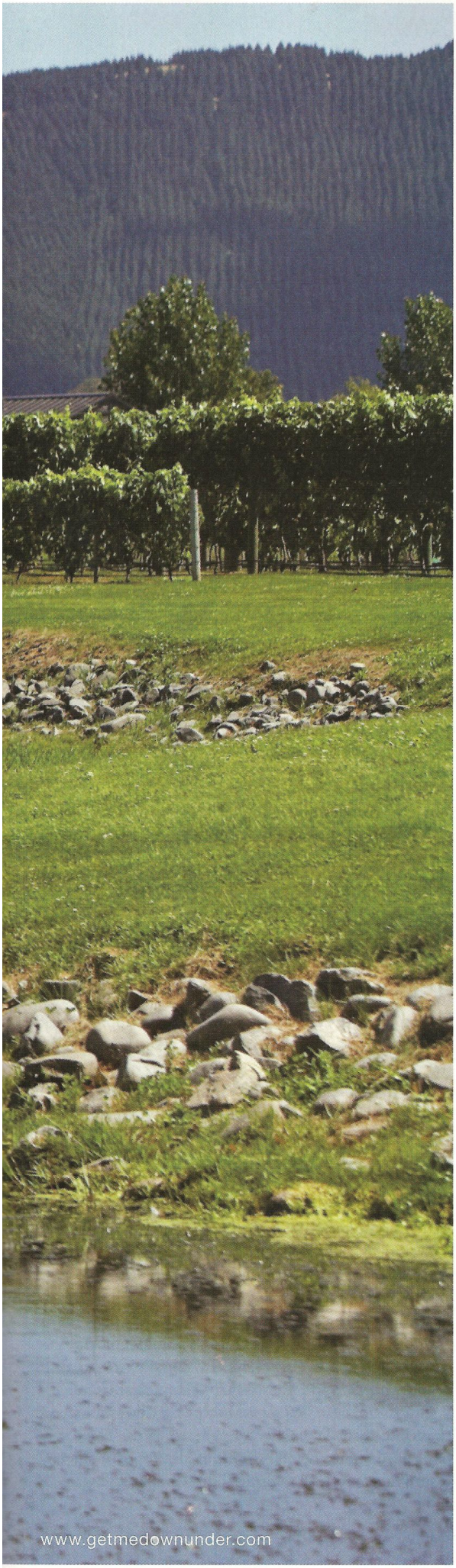
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THE PERFECT flavour

From Hawke's Bay down to Martinborough, **Penny Parkin** gets a taste of New Zealand's excellent North Island wineries...

Image: Tourism New Zealand





I couldn't help feeling a tingle of anticipation as I travelled from Wellington to the less well-hyped vineyards of Martinborough in New Zealand's North Island. Although I was expecting a smaller wine growing area than Marlborough in South Island, arriving in Martinborough on a summer's afternoon it seemed like we'd driven off State Highway 53 into a different era, perhaps 1978, when a government study designated the region ideal wine growing territory, due to its warm summers and mild winters.

> Te Kairanga vineyard possesses a raw, earthy quality and quirky charm, reflected in its wines

Although Martinborough has a similar temperature range to Marlborough, it is known for delivering richer wines, with plenty of depth and breadth of flavour and we were keen to taste the difference.

Feeling like dubious outsiders in our modern rental car we headed for Martinborough's tourist information centre, picked up a map and retreated to The Square in the centre of the town to get our bearings.

MARTINBOROUGH CHARM

Martinborough's founding father, John Martin, established the town on the site of New Zealand's first sheep station and his caricature still hangs in the colonial Martinborough hotel. The streets were designed in the shape of a Union Jack as a tribute to his ancestry. With its heart based at the centre of the square, the vineyards are all easily accessible by car or bike and it's easy to visit quite a few in one day.

Te Kairanga vineyard is located at the region's easternmost point and possesses a raw, earthy quality and quirky charm, which is reflected in its wines. The pretty, rose-lined track leading to the tasting chalet was deserted, lending the operation a pathos that reflected the vineyard's pioneering history, harking back to >>

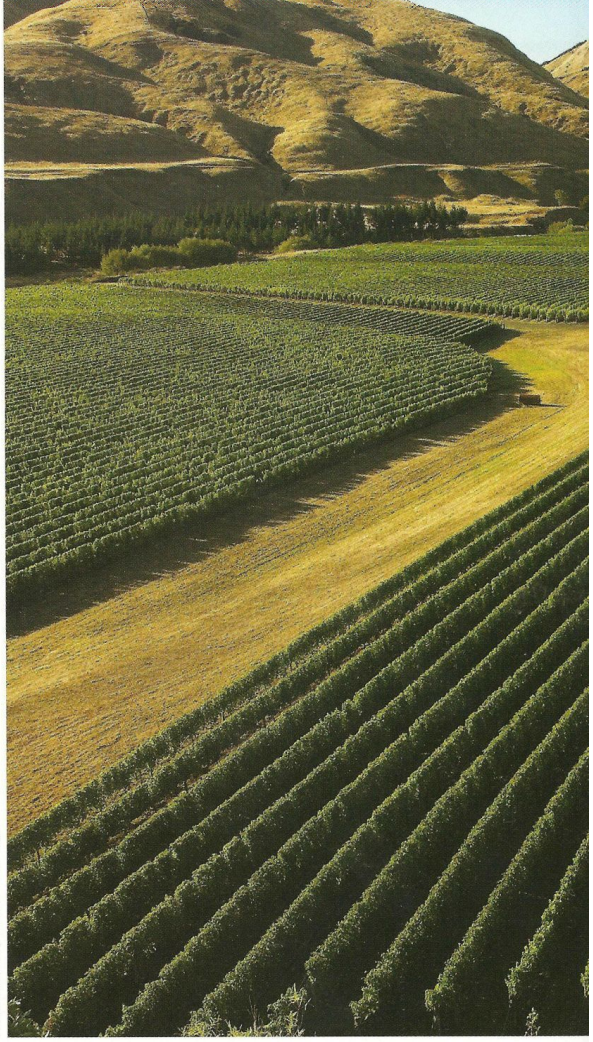
Top right Te Kairanga vineyard in Martinborough is most famous for its John Martin Reserve Pinot Noir

Left The extensive grounds at Craggy Range winery in Hawke's Bay are perfect for enjoying wine and a picnic

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Images top left, centre & top right: **Tourism New Zealand** All other images: **Penny Parkin**

the days of the 1879 run holders who first tilled the land. For a small tasting fee of NZ$5 we were allowed to sample Te Kairanga's Premium Range whites, including the crisp, fresh East Plain Riesling 2008, the citrusy Martinborough Sauvignon Blanc 2008 and my favourite, the punchy, pungent Martinborough Chardonnay 2006. However, for most, the John Martin Reserve Pinot Noir steals the show and is on a par with international benchmark Pinots.

In contrast to the quirky charms of Te Kairanga, The Martinborough Vineyard is a slicker, more civilized operation, closer to central Martinborough, which may explain the large number of bikes we discovered lined up on the grass outside.

As we approached Hawke's Bay, the landscape peeled back into a more desolate and edgier terrain

Inside, we discovered wine maker Paul Mason holding forth to separate groups of foreign visitors. The winery's tin roof reflects the seeming alchemy that goes into the wines, which contain the many trace minerals such as boron, zinc and magnesium that Mason says give the wine its mineral notes. Produced on 10-million-year-old terraces, the vines are given a long growing season, allowing the tannins in the grapes to fully mature and produce rich, full Pinot Noirs.

The vineyard celebrates its 30th anniversary this year and last year won the Pinot Noir trophy at the 2009 Tri Nations for its 2007 Martinborough Vineyard Pinot Noir and a gold in the *Decanter* Awards, as well as numerous other accolades. Other celebrated reds from this vineyard include the 2006 and 2003 Pinot Noir vintages, which winemaker Mason recommends.

Palliser Estate was a much more sophisticated affair, reminiscent of a colonial country house with an immaculately tended courtyard and rose garden, and accompanied by a classy, no-pressure, sales approach befitting a vineyard whose wines are served in some of the world's best restaurants.

The vineyard is renowned for its Pinot Noir, but has a long history of producing some of New Zealand's best Sauvignon Blancs, which have considerable intensity, breadth and depth. The light, sophisticated 2008 Palliser Estate Pinot Gris is a delight to taste, as are the strong, zingy, passion fruit flavours of the Sauvignon Blanc 2009, which I would recommend.

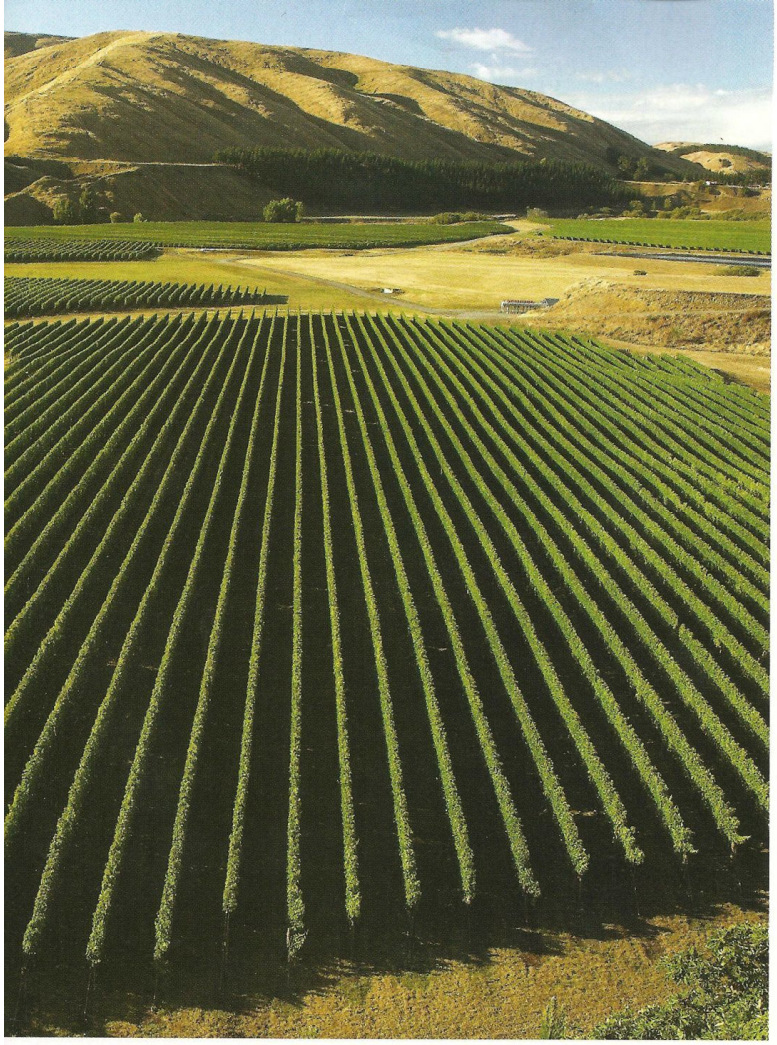
Leaving Martinborough was something of a wrench. As we drove on through the region's undulating hills and lush cornfields towards Napier, I felt primed for a return visit. However, as we approached the Hawke's Bay region, the landscape peeled back into a more desolate and edgier terrain, ideally suited to the area's resident hawks and I felt ready for a new challenge.

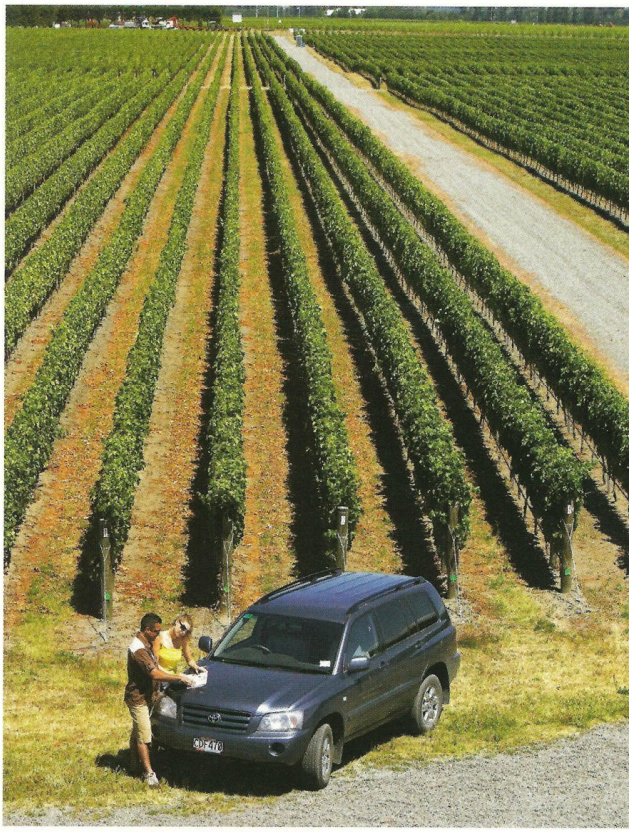
Our stopover in Napier was short but allowed us a chance to recuperate between the vineyards. The town has a quirky charm and is home to all things Art Deco, from vintage style 20s-inspired dresses to home wares,

Top left Driving around North Island's picturesque wineries is a delight

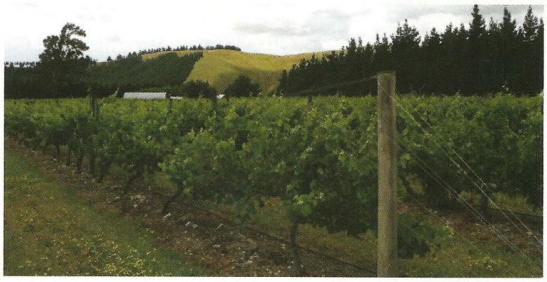
Above Bicycles lined up outside Martinborough Vineyard

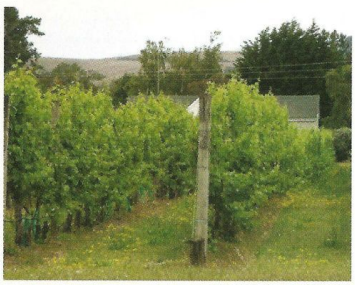
Centre The best vineyards are found on river plains, surrounded by hills











beads and jewellery. Leaving Napier rested and refreshed the next morning, we headed off on State Highway 50 to Hawke's Bay. It was only a mere 20 minutes later that we found ourselves drawing up to CJ Pask's Cellar Door, just off a suburban street.

HAWKE'S BAY

Established on a hunch in 1981, following Chris Pask's 1970s flight over the region, during which he correctly identified the vine growing potential of the region's famous 'Gimblett Gravels', the vineyard is renowned for its intense Cabernet Sauvignon flavours. It also has an eye on the export market judging by the warehouse-like tasting room, stacked with boxes of the vineyard's Declaration, Gimblett Gravels and Roy's Hill ranges packed and ready to go.

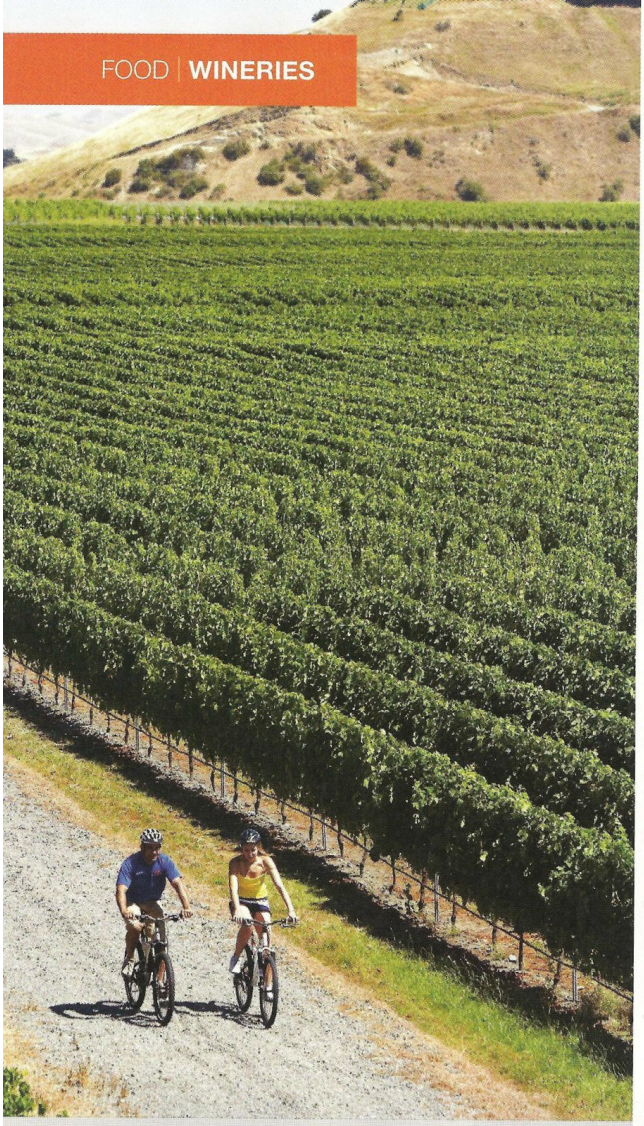
The warm climate of Hawke's Bay allows for a much broader range of grape varieties and styles. It's also noticeably bigger, more cosmopolitan and trendier than Martinborough, which is reflected by its wineries. Having traversed through central Hastings and Havelock North, we discovered lush, inland vineyards sheltered from the extremes of the nearby coast and mountains. Certainly, the lush green vegetation and local fruit and vegetables proudly grown alongside the plentiful vines seemed to testify to the region's family-friendly feel and the flock of sheep grazing happily in the apple orchard beside Tuki vineyard seemed pretty content with their lot, adding to the area's charms, while emphasising its unique character.

Not far from the Tuki vineyard crossroads, we discovered New Zealand's oldest winery, which also boasts three of the oldest vineyards in New Zealand. Te Mata Estate was established in 1896 and its well heeled clientele are prepared to travel a long way to purchase some rich Te Mata pickings. During our visit, we enjoyed the Coleraine 2007, the Woodthrope 2008 Chardonnay and the Te Mata Sauvignon Blanc.

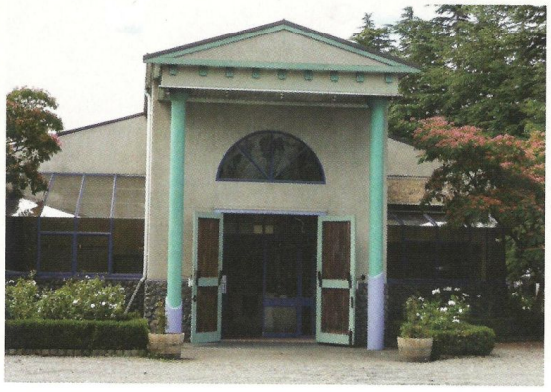
Nicholas Buck, director of Te Mata Estate explained that the warm temperatures of the region, which are generally in excess of those in the South Island, have allowed producers to create fuller bodied whites >>

Top The Gimblett Gravels region is known for its top red wines

Above (left to right) The award-winning vineyard of Martinborough; The pioneering Te Kairanga vineyard; The sophisticated Palliser Estate









Images left & top right: **Tourism New Zealand** All other images: **Penny Parkin**

from Chardonnay, Viognier and Gewürztraminer grapes and red wine blends of Cabernets and Merlot. He also champions the newer varieties, such as Syrah.

The Te Mata Cheese Company is a few yards from the vineyard and makes an excellent lunch stop. For NZ$2 you can taste a small selection of six delicious cheeses, including the lovely Te Mata feta and the creamy Port Ahuriri Blue Strong Cheese, which won a silver medal in the Champions of Cheese contest 2009.

Further down the road from Te Mata lies another of Hawke's Bay's gems and perhaps the region's pièce de résistance. The short journey to Craggy Range exposes some awe-inspiring views and leaves you on the edge of your seat, wondering if the wine reflects the spectacular peaks that rise up past the river gully preceding the mountainous landscape ahead.

The winery itself is an impressive operation and gives the impression of being the cellar of choice for true wine experts. The dark, brooding hills that surround the vineyard lend a dramatic feel even before you reach the elegant tasting rooms.

Run by Terry Peabody and Steve Smith, these are a sophisticated operation more reminiscent of the Marlborough vineyards. No fee was charged for our tasting session as we only tasted three bottles, all of excellent quality, which would lend themselves to cellaring to intensify their flavours. I was impressed.

If the intimate vineyards of Martinborough and Hawke's Bay are anything to go by, North Island's wineries are in a class of their own.

Top left Fresh air, exercise and a procession of welcoming cellar doors await wine-loving cyclists

Top Grand, modern buildings, such as this one at Te Mata Estate, are a unique feature of Hawke's Bay

Above left The grand Art Deco exterior of CJ Pask's Cellar Door greets prospective wine tasters

Above right Craggy Range winery boasts a dramatic exterior and some awe-inspiring views

Further Information

Martinborough

- **Te Kairanga Vineyard,** Martins Rd, Martinborough. Tel: 0064 6 306 9122; Web: **www.tekairanga.co.nz**
- **Martinborough Vineyard,** Princess St, Martinborough. Tel: 0064 6 306 9955; Web: **www.martinborough-vineyard.com**
- **Palliser Estate,** Kitchener St, Martinborough 5741. Tel: 0064 6 3069019. Web: **www.palliser.co.nz**

Hawke's Bay

- **CJ Pask Winery,** 1133 Omahu Rd, Woolwich 4175, Hawkes Bay. Tel: 0064 6 879 7906. Web: **www.cjpaskwinery.co.nz.**
- **Te Mata Estate Winery Limited,** 349 Te Mata Rd, Havelock North. Tel: 0064 6 877 4399, Web: **www.temata.co.nz**
- **Craggy Range Winery,** 253 Waimarama Rd, Havelock North 4294. Tel: 0064 6 873 7126. Web: **www.craggyrange.com**