

# The winemakers of New Zealand

[R napavalleyregister.com/wine/the-winemakers-of-new-zealand/article\\_95a44670-1f80-5414-9054-1dc436c89b95.html](http://napavalleyregister.com/wine/the-winemakers-of-new-zealand/article_95a44670-1f80-5414-9054-1dc436c89b95.html)

Diane Covington-Carter

March 14, 2019



Diane Covington-Carter

Although a missionary planted vines in 1819 and stated, “New Zealand promises to be very favorable to the vine,” it took another 160 years for those vines to materialize. In the meantime, the tiny country, with just 4 million citizens and more than 30 million sheep, was known for its dairy, beef and wool production.

Then in the late 1970’s a few farmers in the Marlborough region of the South Island decided to take a chance on planting vines. The warm days, cool nights, free draining soil and abundantly pure artesian water made the area seem well suited for grape growing.

Chris and Phil Rose, owners of Wairau River Winery, were the first people to apply for a "change of land use" from farmland to vineyards, subject to objection. After 56 objections, they took the issue to the Court of Appeals and won, but the process took two years before they could begin planting. But their success opened the way for other wine growers to also begin to plant vineyards in the region.

During the early years, in the late '70s and throughout the '80s, the Roses grew grapes for others while learning as they went along and raising five children. In 1991, they released a Sauvignon Blanc under their own label, creating Wairau River Winery. Their first vintage won a gold medal at the New Zealand National Wine Show.

Their winery started with the Home Vineyard, 40 hectares, (90 acres), on the edge of the Wairua River and gradually expanded. The winery now consists of 13 estate vineyards, producing 100,000 cases or a million bottles a year. Their vines are some of the oldest in the region, which give lovely ripe characters and flavors to the wines.

Their Sauvignon Blanc, known for its crispness, freshness, and a balance of fruit and acidity, is still their corner stone, at 80 percent of their wine production. They also produce Pinot Gris, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. They plant all their vines by hand and their company is 100 percent family-owned and run; from the ground to the bottle, they do it all.

They now have 35 employees in the winery and their Cellar Door Restaurant and Tasting Room. Their wines continue to win awards and recognition. In 2018, their Sauvignon Blanc earned gold medals in the New Zealand International Wine Show and for the New Zealand Wine of the Year.

### **A Family legacy of wine-making**

---

As the Roses' five children grew up, completed their studies and overseas travel experiences, they each returned and found niches in the family run business. The eldest daughter, Phillippa, runs the Cellar Door Restaurant where the youngest daughter, Caroline is the chef, with her partner Tane Malcolm. Middle daughter Anna helps out in various roles in the family business.

Son Hamish, once an abalone diver, loves his job as the viticulturist. "I just love it out in the vineyard, watching the plants grow and develop. You can taste the differences in the grapes, due to variations in the soil," he said.

Son, Sam Rose, whose passion is fishing in the nearby Marlborough sound, has claimed the job of Wine-Maker.

When you enter the Wairau River Winery's elegant tasting room, you'll notice the photographs of the family on the walls. Chris and Phil sit surrounded by their five grown children, spouses and twelve grand-children, all smiling happily into the camera. After the free wine tasting, you can step outside to the Cellar Door Restaurant, next to rows of their beautifully tended vines, for a delicious lunch paired with their award-winning wines.

Phillippa's husband Lindsay Parkinson, heads the company as the General Manager and CEO and when I visited the winery on our recent trip to New Zealand, we sat down for an interview.

"Chris and Phil helped to open the doors to the industry in the seventies. They are the most amazing people, and we so appreciate their vision and what they've set up for all of their children. We are a true family company now," Parkinson said.

Though Chris and Phil have stepped back, turning the reins over to the younger generation, they still stay involved. Each morning, they come into the restaurant for coffee and to catch up with the staff.

"We've had some staff for twenty years. We pay them well, create a nice work environment and have good retention," Parkinson said.

Phil Rose won the life-time achievement award from Wine Marlborough, recognition by his peers in 2011.

"Phil's willing to try new things, works hard and expects the same from everyone," Parkinson said of his father-in-law. "But he'll only do business with someone he'll have a beer with."

The elder Roses live at the 'Home vineyard', the first and original vineyard to be planted by hand.

"My mother-in-law Chris loves to cook, so Hamish, Sam and I go home for lunch several times a week and chat about the business with Chris and Phil. Nothing is hidden, everything is open and honest," Parkinson said. "We're so lucky we've been given something so well founded."

The Roses' pioneering spirit laid the groundwork for the success of the region's wine industry, which produces two-thirds of the country's wine. When you visit Marlborough, neat rows of vines surround you as far as the eye can see. In the distance, the deep blue water of the Pacific sparkles in the sun.

New Zealand's Sauvignon Blanc, makes up 60 percent of the wine grown and 86 percent of the nation's exports.

In 1990, the value of the country's wine exports was \$18 million New Zealand dollars, (roughly \$12 million US ). The forecast for 2020 predicts 2 billion (1.3 billion US dollars), a hundred-fold increase.

Parkinson shared some thoughts about the growth and success of the New Zealand wine industry in general: "Kiwi's are collegial, we're in this together. We're a small country at the end of the world, but we pack a pretty good punch."

New Zealand wine information is at [nzwine.com/en/our-regions/marlborough/](http://nzwine.com/en/our-regions/marlborough/). The website for the Wairau River Winery, Tasting Room and Cellar Door Restaurant is [wairauriverwines.com](http://wairauriverwines.com).

Diane Covington-Carter is an award-winning writer who married a Kiwi and now spends her winters on the South Island of New Zealand.

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