

The History Behind the Pioneer Block Wines

Neal and Judy Ibbotson, owners of Saint Clair, are pioneering viticulturists in Marlborough with over 30 years experience and extensive viticultural knowledge of the region.

Over time Neal, along with winemaker Matt Thomson, has experimented, gained knowledge and identified a number of special Marlborough sites which provide the ideal terroir to produce small parcel quality wines for the Pioneer Block range.

These wines, first launched in late 2005, are assisting in the understanding and knowledge of the best sites for each variety and have helped Saint Clair identify a new area for Sauvignon Blanc in Marlborough which consistently delivers gold medal quality wine. They have also proved that for Sauvignon Blanc, the yield-quality relationship is soil and vigour related, with vine stress being extremely detrimental to quality, hence dispelling some earlier myths.

The Saint Clair Pioneer Block Philosophy

The philosophy behind the Saint Clair Pioneer Block range is to gain knowledge by;

- Identifying the best locations, for the best fruit, for each variety, from throughout the Marlborough region
- Exploring the terrior and experimenting with different winemaking methods
- Attempting to make the best wines possible from various Marlborough regions and having the market evaluate and enjoy them

Managing Director of Saint Clair Family Estate Neal Ibbotson comments, "the French took many hundreds of years of trial and error to produce some of the world's greatest wines. We've fast-tracked the process and have come a long way in a comparatively short space of time, but we've got a long way to go yet. I'm proud of what we've achieved but get really excited when I think about what we have yet to achieve".

Market Demand

This boutique range of wines over-deliver on quality, resulting in people recommending them to their friends, creating strong and growing demand.

This demand has resulted in exports to over 25 world markets. The strongest market is the UK, where sales have topped 4000 cases for Pioneer Block Sauvignon Blancs and 1000 cases for Pioneer Block Pinot Noirs. They have gained a number of requested, exclusive listings including the Claridge's Hotel, (one of London's most up-market hotels as well as one of London's top High Street retailers) and in New York, Sherry-Lehmann's (one of the city's leading fine wine retailers).



Saint Clair Pioneer Block wines have also been selected for a number of the world's leading airlines including Air New Zealand, British Airways, Qatar Air, Lufthansa and Qantas.

An indication of the success of this range is that over the last four years Pioneer Block wines, including Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, Gewurztraminer and Pinot Noir, have been awarded 25 Trophies and 99 Gold medals in both national and international wine competitions.

Saint Clair Pioneer Block Wines are Unique

- Pioneer Block wines are made from outstanding small parcels of fruit identified by Saint Clair's winemakers from selected specialist vineyard sites with unique terroir in the Marlborough region.
- Innovative or different wine-making techniques may also be utilised to produce a Pioneer Block wine and so gain further wine-making knowledge.
- Each wine has subtle style differences and individual elements that develop as a result of its unique style.
- Each vineyard has a separate identifying vineyard/block number which shows on the label.
- Each wine carries a label name linked to the vineyard origin.
- Pioneer Block wines are normally single vineyard wines, although blending may occur if knowledge can be gained, or a higher quality wine can be produced as a result.
- Each year every batch of Saint Clair wine is evaluated and scored for quality. The highest scoring wines make it into Saint Clair's Reserve or Pioneer Block range.
- If the Pioneer Block quality is not of the highest standard, that wine (specific block number) is not produced from that vintage.

