

Valli Vineyards 2013 Riesling (Waitaki)**Waitaki, North Otago****White wine from New Zealand****Drinking window: 2017 - 2022**

Bright, green-tinged yellow. Lovely lift to the expressive aromas of apricot, peach, lime, flowers and dusty minerals, along with a light fusel quality. Sappy and dense in the mouth, with urgent white peach and lemon flavors enlivened by almost painful limestone-driven acidity. A real high-wire act of sweetness (33 g/l r.s.) and searing (9.5 g/l) acidity. I loved it, but I'd probably give it at least another year or two in the bottle to harmonize.

Stephen Tanzer. Tasting date: February 2016

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From New Zealand's Pellucid Wines: More Light Than Heat (May 2016)

Valli Vineyards

I was eager to taste at Valli Wines for the first time because Grant Taylor's sweet, sappy Pinot Noirs have been consistent standouts in my peer group tastings in recent years. Taylor was one of the trailblazers in Central Otago, having begun making wine in the region in 1993. He established his own small venture in 1998, making wine at the outset from purchased fruit. He now owns 8 hectares of vines, including 3.6 in Gibbston Valley.

Taylor makes about 2,700 cases of Pinot Noir annually under the Valli label (plus an equal quantity of Pinot under another label), from four very different sources, one of them in North Otago. He also makes small quantities of Pinot Gris, Riesling and Chardonnay, and an "orange" wine. "Pinot Gris is the flavor of the month in New Zealand," he told me in late January.

Taylor compares Central Otago's 2013 and 2014 vintages to 2009 and 2010, adding that 2014 is fleshier than 2013 but with more energy and structure as well. He described 2015 as a cool vintage. Taylor gives his Pinot Noirs a pre-fermentation cold soak lasting between 7 and 15 ("the fruit comes in clean so we don't need a lot of SO₂"), then vinifies them in the insulated polyethylene fermenters popular in the Central Otago region, using punchdown more for temperature control than for extraction. He subsequently carries out 7 to 9 days of post-fermentation maceration. By making the Pinots the same way, he told me, "the differences between them are 90% due to the region."

Grape/Blend

Riesling

Release price

\$25.00

Valli Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir Bendigo**Bendigo, Central Otago****Red wine from New Zealand****Drinking window: 2018 - 2024**

(14% alcohol, the highest of these 2014s, as "the sugars here go up quickly," according to Grant Taylor; from Valli's youngest Pinot vines, planted in 2006): Bright, dark red. Surprisingly cool, slightly medicinal aromas of blackberry, boysenberry, black cherry, mint and menthol. Densely packed, dry and savory, with medicinal red cherry fruit complicated by licorice and herbal nuances. The least complex today of this set of 2014 Pinot Noirs, due in part to its rather strong, youthfully tough tannins. But shows plenty of palate presence.

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Grape/Blend

Pinot Noir

Release price

\$50.00

vinous

90+ pts

Valli Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir (Bannockburn)

Bannockburn, Central Otago

Red wine from New Zealand

Drinking window: 2018 - 2024

(from a high site in an area normally harvested on the late side): Bright medium-deep red. Vibrant, fruit-driven nose offers scents of raspberry, candied cherry and darker berries, plus a hint of the wild thyme that's commonly found in Central Otago. Sappy, saline and bright, conveying excellent energy to its dark fruit flavors. Finishes ripe but classically dry and broad, with a slight youthful dryness to its tannins. Doesn't have quite the grip of the Gibbston Vineyard bottling but this wine also needs some time in the cellar.

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Grape/Blend

Pinot Noir

Release price

\$50.00

Valli Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir Waitaki Vineyard**Waitaki, North Otago****Red wine from New Zealand****Drinking window: 2017 - 2024**

(13.5% alcohol on the label but Taylor notes that it's probably closer to 13%; from a very cold north-facing vineyard on river gravel with a high limestone content; 2004 was the first vintage for this bottling): Moderately saturated medium red. Aromas of raspberry, cola, underbrush and menthol are quite different from those of Taylor's other 2014 Pinots. Broad, savory and classically dry, showing terrific spicy lift to its flavors of white pepper, flowers, earth and menthol. Not at all a fruit bomb, and more red than black in character, with a hint of pomegranate and even a suggestion of red grapefruit emerging with air. This wonderfully sappy, savory wine finishes with very smooth tannins and lovely sneaky length. Taylor suggests drinking it now or waiting ten years, although he believes that his Gibbston bottling will age the longest.

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Grape/Blend

Pinot Noir

Release price

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Valli Vineyards 2014 Pinot Noir Gibbston Vineyard**Gibbston, Central Otago****Red wine from New Zealand****Drinking window: 2018 - 2026**

(from a very cool area picked two to three weeks later than the other Valli Pinots, with lower grape sugars): Bright, dark red. Explosive aromas of black raspberry, black cherry, flowers, minerals, espresso and smoky reduction. Wonderfully sappy and precise, with a tangy blood orange topnote lifting the pungent dark berry, floral and loamy earth flavors. Really explosive inner-mouth aromatics here. Finishes quite tight and long, with terrific energy and grip. This is Grant Taylor's own vineyard, planted in 2000. Finishes tight and very long.

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