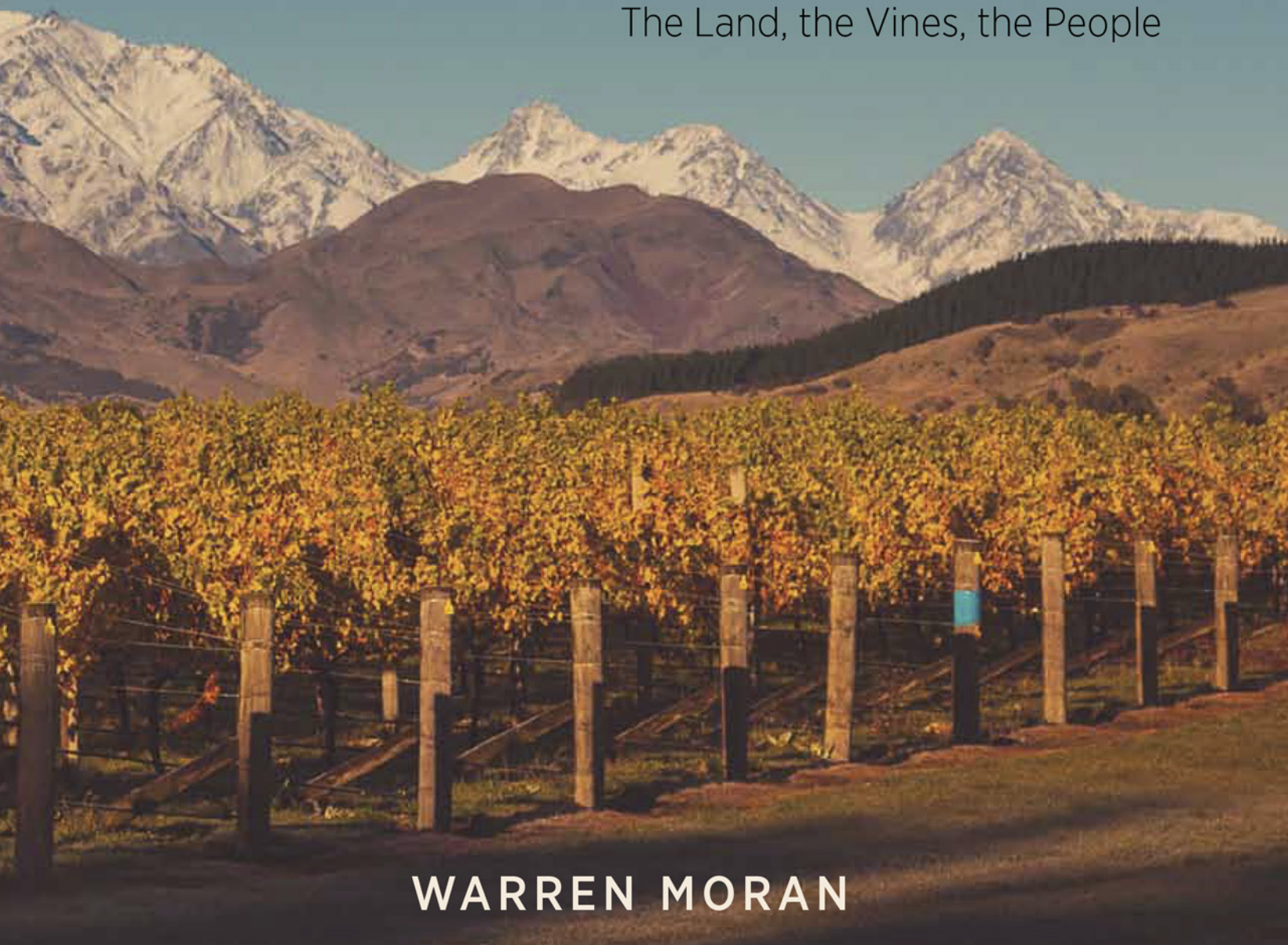


NEW ZEALAND

WINE

The Land, the Vines, the People



WARREN MORAN

A historic and geographic survey of New Zealand wine and wine-making – well researched, lavishly illustrated and lovingly told.

Mount Difficulty Pinot Noir and Spy Valley Riesling. Montana Sauvignon Blanc and Cloudy Bay Chardonnay. Though the New Zealand wine industry really began only fifty years ago, vines and winemakers have now spread across the land – from Central Otago to Kumeu, Waipara to Wairarapa – to produce notable wines for New Zealanders and the world.

For half a century, geographer and wine enthusiast Warren Moran has followed the development of the industry, talked to the winemakers and tasted the wines. In this book, he provides an unrivalled introduction to New Zealand wine: the climate, soils, and geography our winemakers work with; the grape varieties they have tried to tame; and the extraordinary personalities, families and companies who have made the wine and the industry. After introducing readers to the history and geography of New Zealand wine, this monumental book takes readers to each of the key winegrowing regions to tell the story of wines and winemakers in Auckland, Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, the Wairarapa, Marlborough, Canterbury, and Central Otago.

Illustrated with three-dimensional maps of regions and localities and spectacular photographs of the vineyards, the wines, and the winemakers, *New Zealand Wine: The Land, the Vines, the People* is a must for all of those interested in understanding the extraordinary wines of New Zealand.

Warren Moran is a geographer and professor emeritus at the University of Auckland. Beginning with his 1958 MA thesis, Moran has published extensively on wine (and rural industries more generally) in New Zealand and overseas. He was co-author of an OUP book *Geography: A Study of its Elements*. Among other awards, he has been named a distinguished geographer by the New Zealand Geographical Society.





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The Story of New Zealand Wine

I had a ‘sophisticated’ introduction to New Zealand wine when, in 1957, I walked into Paul Groshek’s tasting room in Candia Road, West Auckland, to interview him as part of my Master’s thesis on the New Zealand wine industry. Before I asked any questions, Groshek proceeded to teach me a thing or two. Grasping an open, but re-corked, bottle of Corbans Dry Red table wine resting on a noggin of his unlined tasting room, he poured a small serving into the tapered 5-ounce beer glass of the time and passed it to me to taste. I sipped and commented circumspectly. From a half-gallon jar, he then glugged a larger serving of his own red table wine, Albonez, into my glass. Again I was circumspect. Unimpressed by my commentary on the wines, he poured some of the Corbans Dry Red into his own glass, took a mouthful and promptly sprayed it all over the room, exclaiming, ‘Jesus-a-Christ, boy, bloody vinegar!’, and threw the rest away. He refilled his glass with Albonez, appraised its robe and bouquet, and at the first sip extolled, ‘Jesus-a-Christ, boy, bloody nectar!’

Groshek was doing almost everything right. He made simple, fresh, unadulterated table wines when more than 90 per cent of New Zealand wine was fortified sherries, ports and liqueurs. His grapes came from his own, sheltered, north- and east-facing vineyard. It was organic. He fermented his reds in open vats, plunging them by hand several times each day in a form of what the French call *macération carbonique*. He added no water. His wine was stored in underground cellars dug by hand, complete

Paul Groshek sitting at his Muaga Vineyards on Candia Road in West Auckland, 1963. Rod Harvey, Auckland War Memorial Museum – Tāmaki Paenga Hira, PH-2008-4

with plaques for each of his dogs that had died during the excavation. Above all, he heralded – in prose and poetry – to anyone who would listen, the health qualities of unfortified table wine drunk in moderation. He even claimed to have cured the skin ailments of his dog with internal and external applications of Albonez. Groshek was much ahead of his time in all but the grape varieties he was growing. His Albonez was named after its main variety, Albany Surprise, the *labrusca* sport of the Concord grape. Albany Surprise was hardy, disease resistant and high-yielding, but it was not a grape from which you could make fine wine.

Today hardly a trace of Paul Groshek's cellar remains. He died in 1963 – the very time that New Zealanders were beginning to grasp his aspiration to make and drink table wines of quality and to plant the varieties of *Vitis vinifera* that would allow its realisation.

In the second half of the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first, the geography of international production of grapes for wine was transformed. Middle-latitude countries of the New World rapidly expanded their area in vines for the production of table wines so that many are now significant producers and exporters. This growth coincided with a decrease in the area in vines in the European Union. Persistent overproduction in Europe for much of the twentieth century was addressed under the Common Agricultural Policy by enforced reduction of the area in vines through regulation of production rights complemented by distillation of excess wine. These adjustments were sufficiently successful that, by the late 1990s, the European Union was able to consider relaxing its strict controls as it attempted to meet the competition of wine from the New World.

New Zealand is one of the New World countries to experience considerable growth in its area in vines and production of wine over the past 50 years, although with about 33,000 hectares of vines planted by 2010, it remains a small producer in global terms. New Zealand's distinctiveness lies in its successful establishment of a wine industry of quality based on its many favourable natural environments and realised by advanced viticultural and winemaking technologies. A committed group of grape growers and winemakers have shown that fine wines can be made in New Zealand from many of the *vinifera* varieties, although individual enterprises in all regions continue to seek the ideal mix of varieties for their sites. New Zealand's international status is demonstrated by its ability to sell wines of quality on some of the most competitive international markets in the world, such as Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. The average value of New Zealand wine on the British market, for instance, has been higher than that of any other country for an extended period.

The vine has been grown in New Zealand since the early nineteenth century, but the modern commercial industry is a creation of the last four decades of the twentieth century and the first of the twenty-first. Although Paul Groshek pronounced it 'bloody

nectar', his Albonez of 1957 was not fine wine. But by the end of the 1970s New Zealand winemakers Alex Corban, Denis Kasza (with Tom McDonald), Nick Nobilo, Denis Irwin, Joe and Peter Babich and others had shown that fine wines could be produced from grapes grown in three regions of New Zealand – Auckland, Gisborne and Hawke's Bay. It took about another decade – until the end of the 1980s – for the knowledge of grape growing to reach a similar level of sophistication.

Australian scientist Richard Smart, together with many receptive and innovative grape growers, had a lasting impact on viticulture by proselytising the principles of managing vine canopies in New Zealand soils and climates to ensure grapes of quality in most seasons. At the same time, the industry went through a series of regional and varietal revolutions, expanding into Marlborough, the Wairarapa, Central Otago, Nelson and Waipara, and planting a wide range of white and red varieties of *Vitis vinifera*. New Zealand now has both fine vines and fine wines that are celebrated in markets and media around the world.

Gewürztraminer vines on Seifried Estate's Redwood Valley vineyard, Nelson.



Nature versus culture?

Scholars have grappled with the question of what makes a wine great by dissecting the meanings tied up in the word *terroir*. French dictionaries always have at least two definitions of the word. The narrower, more technical, and more limited definition equates *terroir* to soil. The phrase *goût de terroir* ('taste of the soil') in relation to wine is used in the Robert dictionaries to illustrate this meaning. The second and broader meaning refers to a delimited area of land including its natural and human characteristics. This second meaning of *terroir* is linked to the word *territoire* which has a very similar meaning to the word 'territory' in English.

The advertising hype almost always adopts the narrow meaning – *terroir* as soil. In recent years we have been bombarded with so much about the soils and geology of Burgundy in particular that we are in danger of believing that the region makes great wine because the soils are ideally suited to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. James Wilson's 1998 book *Terroir: the role of geology, climate, and culture in the making of French wines*, for instance, while an accessible description of the geology of Burgundy, is almost totally directed to this environmentally deterministic argument, despite his slipping 'culture' into the subtitle. The advertising hoardings of the Bureau Interprofessionnel des Vins de Bourgogne (BIVB) that superimpose geological cross-sections over a tasting glass perpetuate such environmental folklore. Beyond Burgundy, in recent years the publicity machine of the French industry has begun to banalise the story of wine by pumping out dubious stories about the blessings of the climates and soils of its elite appellations. Reputable English journalists and wine writers have for some time added to the myths.

Another line of thinking suggests that the advertising hype gets the causality around the wrong way. In their classic books on the French and Burgundian industries, respectively, Roger Dion and Rolande Gadille addressed the question of nature and culture. Dion opens his *Grands traits d'une géographie viticole de la France* (1943) with the bold claim that:

... Moeurs et croyances ont exercé, sur la distribution des vignobles à travers le monde, une influence qui a pu prévaloir sur celle du climat.

[Throughout the world, customs and beliefs have exerted an influence on the distribution of winegrowing that has prevailed over climate.]

He repeats the phrase in his *Histoire de la vigne et du vin en France des Origines au XIXème Siècle* (1959) before discussing the northern limits of the vine. By the time he published this major work, Dion's main message became even clearer. In the *avant-propos* he states:



... il nous plairait de voir, dans les vertus de nos vignobles, l'effet d'un privilège naturel, d'une grace particulière accordée à la terre de France, comme s'il y avait eu plus d'honneur, pour notre pays, à recevoir du Ciel que de la peine des hommes cette renommée vinicole où nos ancêtres ont trouvé un sujet de fierté collective avant même que ne se fût éveillé en eux le sentiment d'une patrie française.

[It suits us to see in the qualities of our wine regions, the effect of a natural privilege, of a particular grace accorded to the land of France, as if there were greater honour for our country to receive from the heavens than from the struggles of people this renowned wine industry in which our ancestors found a collective pride even before the feeling of a French nation stirred in them.]

Gadille is more circumspect, but she establishes a similar framework as the foundation of her Burgundian study *Le vignoble de la côte bourguignonne, fondements physiques et humains d'une viticulture de haute qualité* (1967) when she states:

A frosty morning's pruning at Neudorf Vineyards in Upper Moutere, Nelson.
Tim Finn



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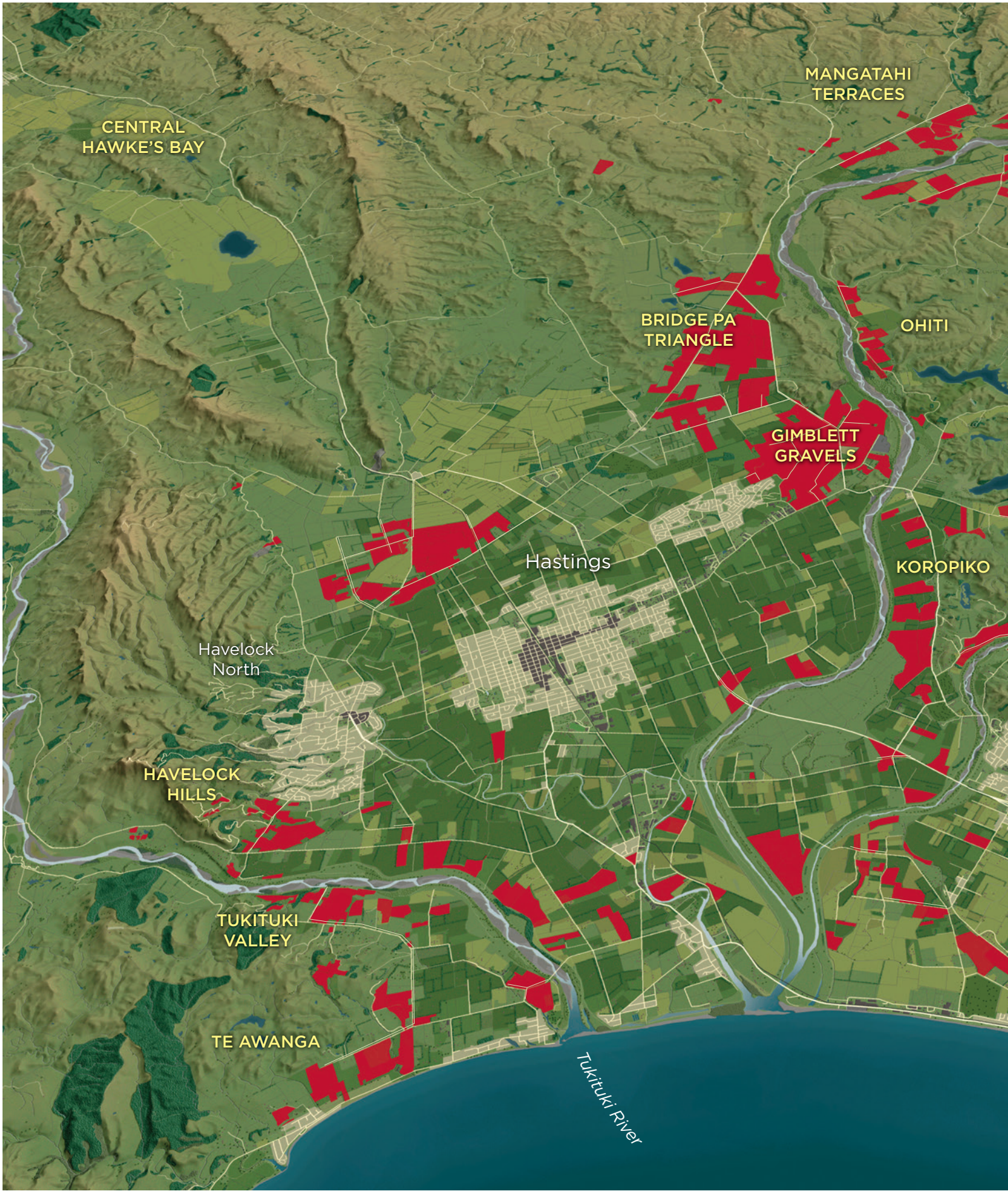
Hawke's Bay

The Hawke's Bay Province is, in my opinion, the most suitable for vine-growing I have visited in New Zealand. It possesses thousands of acres which, by reason of the nature of the soil, natural drainage, and sufficiency of heat, will produce grapes of both table and wine making varieties in rich abundance. – ROMEO BRAGATO

At the turn of the twentieth century, Romeo Bragato was fulsome in his praise of the viticultural potential of many regions of New Zealand, perhaps too fulsome. Yet he was quite unequivocal that Hawke's Bay was the best that he visited, although it must be remembered that he did not assess Marlborough. Despite Bragato's enthusiasm, the Hawke's Bay region has had a chequered history of grape growing and winemaking.

Three interrelated circumstances are responsible. First, the four local companies producing 90 per cent of this region's wine in the mid-twentieth century – Glenvale Wines, McDonald's, McWilliam's and Vidal – were closely connected to New Zealand's brewing companies and even more dependent on making fortified wine than those in the Auckland region. They had to change their mindset and commercial strategies to get fully involved in the production of table wine. Second, competition for land on Hawke's Bay's Heretaunga and associated plains has always been more intense than in any other rural region of similar size in New Zealand. Vines did not automatically have first choice of land here as they did in Marlborough. In Hawke's Bay, grapevines had to

Elephant Hill Wine Estate in Te Awanga, Hawke's Bay, looking from the coast up toward Havelock North and Te Mata Peak. *Bruce Jenkins Photography*



CENTRAL
HAWKE'S BAY

MANGATAHI
TERRACES

BRIDGE PA
TRIANGLE

OHITI

GIMBLETT
GRAVELS

Hastings

KOROPIKO

Havelock
North

HAVELOCK
HILLS

TUKITUKI
VALLEY

TE AWANGA

Tukituki River



< Ngaruroro R

CROWNTHORPE
TERRACES

NORTH

< Tutaekuri R

DARTMOOR
VALLEY

Napier

ESK RIVER

Hawke Bay



Crab Farm Winery sits among a number of new and old enterprises in the Esk Valley, Hawke's Bay.
Richard Brimer

pay their way in competition with many other fruit and vegetable crops (Figure 6.5). Some wealthy landholders were even prepared to withhold land from the market rather than see it go into vines. Third, because Hawke's Bay had a small but established wine industry when New Zealand winegrowing expanded, the region faced all the difficulties of rapid growth.

Conflicts between grape growers and wine companies were sometimes vitriolic in Hawke's Bay as protocols for winegrowing were established. In particular, the vine extraction scheme of 1986 affected Hawke's Bay severely. It took until 1998 for its vineyard to reach the size that it first attained in the early 1980s. Since 1998 its area in vines has almost doubled in size to over 5000 hectares as the region has begun to realise the potential that Bragato recognised.

This chapter begins by discussing the distinctiveness of the Hawke's Bay experience compared with Marlborough and Gisborne. The vine varieties, climates and soils of Hawke's Bay are then interpreted with a view to assessing whether Bragato's assertion is credible. As in Marlborough, the spatial pattern of growth in the Hawke's Bay vineyard

is revealing (Figure 6.4). After initial plantings not far from the coast by 1960 (from the lower Esk Valley in the north to Te Awanga in the south), vines became scattered across the Heretaunga Plains during the 1980s, before finding two niches where they became dominant: the first on the gravel soils of former riverbeds and the stony terraces of mainly two rivers – the Ngaruroro and the Tutaekuri – and the other on clay soils, often overlain by loess. This sequence is interpreted through the actions and commentary of participants in the Hawke's Bay industry, both local family firms and the large corporate enterprises who at first let contracts to Hawke's Bay grape growers before buying land and planting vines on land more tightly under their own control.

Vines without many wineries

Growth of the area of vines in Hawke's Bay has fluctuated greatly. It grew slowly but steadily until 1975 when the rate of growth quickened for a decade as both grape growers and local wine firms planted mainly Müller Thurgau. By 1980, Hawke's Bay vineyards were growing 737 hectares of this variety, or almost exactly half of this regional vineyard. The vine pull of 1986 resulted in 534 hectares of vines being removed in Hawke's Bay, only 50 hectares less than Gisborne. From 1990, steady growth recommenced from a lower base as winegrowers renewed and extended the regional vineyard by planting *vinifera* varieties. From the late 1990s the rate of growth quickened once again when the major companies refocused on Hawke's Bay as opportunities for buying quality viticultural land in Marlborough became fewer. During this decade many new winegrowing enterprises decided to invest in Hawke's Bay, a substantial number of them bringing capital from outside New Zealand.

Between 1960 and the mid-1980s, therefore, Hawke's Bay and Gisborne were the beneficiaries of the first phase of rapid growth in New Zealand winegrowing. By the early 1980s these two regions shared 65 per cent of the New Zealand vineyard in about equal proportions. Marlborough had just 20 per cent, with the remaining 15 per cent across other regions. But the major Auckland companies chose to invest in modern vinification facilities in Gisborne and Marlborough rather than in Hawke's Bay. The sole Auckland wine company to acquire a Hawke's Bay winery in the 1970s was Villa Maria. In 1976, George Fistonich purchased the Vidal winery in Hastings and made it the focus of his Hawke's Bay and Gisborne vinification. To keep Villa Maria in the public eye, he also opened New Zealand's first vineyard restaurant on the same site.

In contrast, by 1972 both Montana and Corbans had built large, modern processing and storage facilities in Gisborne. Montana had also completed its Marlborough winery by 1977, even though they planted their first grapes there only in 1973. Hawke's Bay was denied such state-of-the-art wineries until 1988 when Montana surreptitiously

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