

Tempered by the mountains and the sea

Wines of New Zealand and Greece get uncorked in Montreal

By Jeff Heinrich

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The extraordinary view of Elephant Hill Winery at Hawke's Bay in New Zealand.

Photo: Elephant Hill

Greece and New Zealand are almost at opposite ends of the globe, have completely different histories, wildly different economic situations and don't speak the same language. What they do have in common, however, are geographic features – mountains and seas – that temper the climate and influence how viticulture is practiced.



The sun beats down at Robolo Cooperative in Cephalonia, the largest Ionian island in western Greece. *Photo: Robolo Cooperative*

And it shows in the glass: Wines from Greece and New Zealand can have a freshness, a tang and a minerality that reflect their maritime locations, Mediterranean and Pacific.

In early May, a sampling of wines from both nations came to Old Montreal for two professional tastings that, hopefully, will lead to more presence on the shelves of our liquor monopoly, the Société des alcools du Québec.

Out of 9,000 wines available in SAQ stores, only 72 now come from Greece and 115 from New Zealand.

That's nothing compared to the selection on offer here from top-ranked France (4,500) and Italy (1,500). But from what I tasted at the two shows, consumers would be well-served by more variety in the SAQ's listings. New Zealand produces pinot noir reds that rival much pricier ones from Burgundy, while Greece has a wealth of native varietals to discover.

At both shows – [New Zealand in a Glass](#), at Bonsecours Market on May 5, and [New Wines of Greece](#), at the Centre des Sciences at the Old Port on

May 7 – I started with the sparkling wines and the whites. For New Zealand, that meant sauvignon blanc and some chardonnay; for Greece, grapes like assyritko and malagousia. The New Zealand show was the



"A land like no other" and an homage to a goalie like no other: Habs solidarity at the New Zealand wine show. *Photo: Jeff Heinrich*

more modest affair: 19 producers, a simple buffet table of cheeses, breads, nuts and dried fruit. Greece, by contrast, despite its near-bankrupt economy, had 51 producers, a seafood bar of freshly shucked oysters and clams, and roving duos of hors-d'oeuvre waitresses (one to serve, one to retrieve the wooden skewers).

Among the wineries were familiar names (the Kiwi bestsellers Kim Crawford and Oyster Bay, for instance) and many unknowns, at least in this part of the world: Karavitakis, Glinavos, te Pā, Toi Toi. Some of the wines are listed at the SAQ but most are by private import only or, in the case of



Wine agents at New Zealand's Schubert Wines stand at Marché Bonsecours. *Photo: Jeff Heinrich*



The entrance to the New Wines of Greece show at the Palais des Sciences. *Photo: Jeff Heinrich*

many of the Greek wines, are still without an agent here (fingers crossed).



Montreal photographer Heidi Hollinger (right), representing Douloufakis Winery of Crete, takes a selfie with Sofia Perpera, director of the Greek Wine Bureau, North America. *Photo: Jeff Heinrich*

Here are my top picks from the two shows

Best value pinot noir: Hunter's Wines, Wairau Valley Marlborough 2012 (\$33.95 at the SAQ through private import; \$19.75 at the LCBO, with a few bottles still on shelves in the suburbs north of Toronto).

Best mid-price pinot noir: Schubert Wines, Marion's Vineyard Wairarapa 2013 (\$37.25 at the SAQ starting in June); a cheaper alternative to their Block B pinot that was a Cellier selection last winter and quickly sold out.

Best high-price pinot noir: Craggy Range, Aroha Martinborough 2011 (\$89.99 at the SAQ).



Good value: Hunter's Wines 2012 pinot noir *Photo: Jeff Heinrich*

Best value sauvignon blanc: Villa Maria Estate, Cellar Selection Marlborough 2014 (\$24.99 SAQ; \$19.95 LCBO, and there's lots available in Ottawa).

Best New Zealand sparkling: Oyster Bay, Cuvée Rosé Hawke's Bay (SAQ \$24.95; LCBO \$21.95, and there's lots in Ottawa).

Best Greek sparkling: CAIR, BOhème 2014 (\$13, but no agent yet).

Best value Greek whites:

Antonopoulos Vineyards, Malagousia 2014 (\$15) and Robola Cooperative of Cephalonia, San Gerasimo 2014 (\$17.95). Neither has an agent yet in Quebec.



The bottles are cool and the wine ready to serve at busy Gaia Wines.
Photo: Jeff Heinrich

A bit pricier but excellent: Gaia Wines, Thalassitis Assyrtiko 2014 (SAQ \$24.60).

And if you want that traditional retsina flavour – a Greek speciality – try the 2014 vintage from Papagiannakos Winery. It's not yet at the SAQ, but they do have the winery's 2014 savatiano, a white varietal, at \$17).

Best Greek red: I didn't try nearly as many reds as the whites but I thought this one from Karavitakis Winery in western Crete went down quite well: The Little Prince 2012, an unoaked blend of kotsifali and mandilari. They don't have an agent here yet, however.

And one of the few (and damned good) dessert wines: Argyros Estate, Vinsanto 1991 20-Year (SAQ \$110).

Just one last thing I should mention; maybe you already noticed. Not only does Ontario carry a lot more New Zealand wines than Quebec does (167 there versus 115 here), they're also a helluva lot cheaper – up to 40% off. So if you're planning a day trip to Hawkesbury or Ottawa, [check out the Vintages site to see what's available](#) and bring some back.

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