

Dazzling dozen

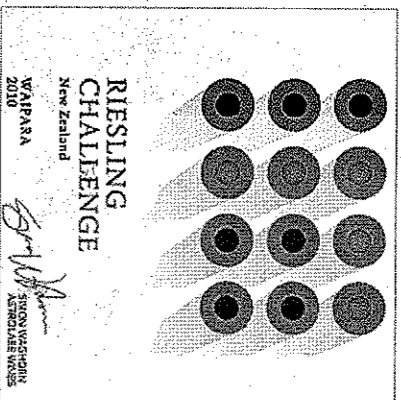
Last Friday at Waipara was a perfect day for bringing in the grapes. At Mud House Vineyard (north of Amberley on SH1) it was bone dry underfoot; the grapes – row on row of ripe riesling – trembled in the gentlest of warm breezes, and as a shaft of sunlight pierced the early morning sky, 80 of the best hand-pickers in the district roared up the drive.

The first step in the first New Zealand Riesling Challenge was underway, and there to lend a hand – and keep a slightly nervous eye on proceedings – was Neil Charles-Jones, shareholder and director of the Mud House Wine Group.

The Riesling Challenge is his idea; he has driven it from concept and this was it. High Moan in the Vineyard. Not only were there 48 tonnes of grapes leaving his company's vineyard (and his control), there are considerable costs yet to come. "The logistics are daunting," he admits. Charles-Jones "used to be an architect," but his energies are now directed to the wine industry. The Mud House Group grows riesling grapes in Waipara, pinot noir in Central Otago, and sauvignon blanc grapes in Marlborough.

A year or so back, when Charles-Jones was at a wine awards dinner, and the usual speeches and prizes were allowing those assembled to ponder the variables of such events, he had a "what if" moment. "We hear all the time that good wines are made in the vineyard, yet it is always the winemaker who receives the awards. What if half a dozen winemakers made a wine with grapes from one block in one vineyard? Surely, that would be the real test of skills?"

"At the same time," he said, "I'd been thinking how best to promote riesling. Winemakers like it, wine writers like it, but it is not easy to sell. One label will make a sweet wine, another will have a dry minerally riesling."



Signature style: a label to look for.

The synergies were too good to ignore. He set about organising a challenge he hoped would be picked up by good winemakers. From the outset he met with widespread enthusiasm for the winemaking challenge, and the novel way to spread the riesling story. "Yes, well there are lots of like-minded people around," he says. "I approached 14 winemakers and there were only two refusals which was pretty exciting. Pickers, weighers, truckers, everyone really, was right into the idea."

The challenge – in effect a competition between the 12 winemakers involved – should establish the extent to which winemaking skills can sculpt a matching batch of grapes into a top wine. It is Charles-Jones' hope that it will simultaneously show the versatility of the riesling grape.

The concept is simple. Four tonnes of grapes from the Mud House vineyard are hand-picked on stalks. Every tenth basket is loaded into a bin, ready for delivery to the individual wineries. Winemakers will crush, press, and ferment the grapes in any manner they see fit, in stainless steel or oak, to produce the best riesling wine, dry or sweet. The export certification rules

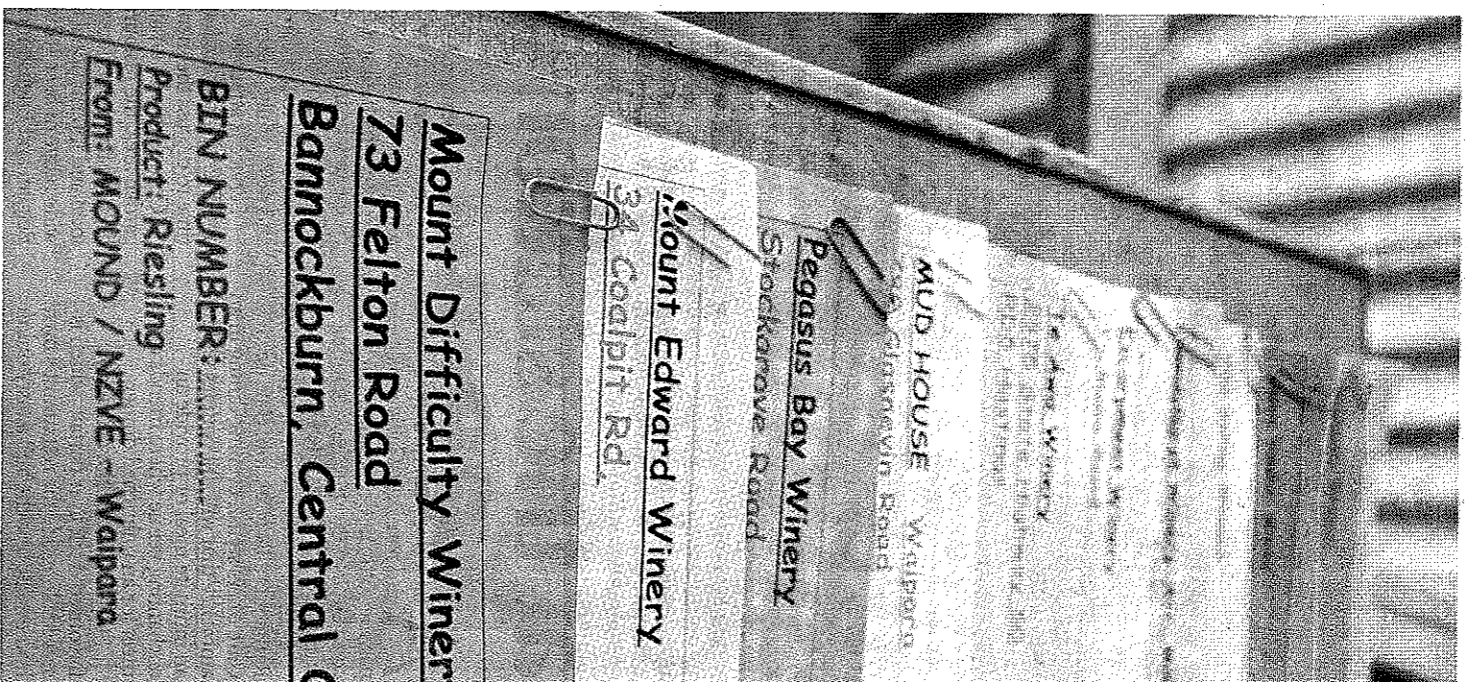
applying to the vintage allow blend additions, provided no less than 85 per cent of the grapes are from the original source. This option will allow winemakers to introduce a greater degree of complexity. All winemakers will complete and bottle their own wines, producing at least 250 cases of riesling wine. These unmarked cases will then be delivered to Wineworks in Marlborough for labelling and packing into 3000 mixed cases, with each case containing 12 bottles, one from each competitor.

Participants are Art McKenzie, of Te Ava Wines, Hawkes Bay; Larry McKenna, of Escarpment, Marlborough; Mike Brown, of Golden Hills Estates, Nelson; Paul Bourgeois, of Spy Valley, Marlborough; Jules Taylor, of Jules Taylor Wines, Marlborough; John Forrest, of Forrest Estate, Marlborough; Simon Waghorn, of Astrolabe Wines, Marlborough; Patrick Mateman, of Pernod Ricard NZ, Marlborough; Simon McGeorge, of Waipara Hills, Waipara; Matt Donaldson, of Pegasus Bay, Waipara; Duncan Forsyth, of Mount Edward, Central Otago and Matt Dicey, of Mount Difficulty, Central Otago.

Each winemaker has won awards and plaudits for their rieslings. It is intended that the wines will be presented for judging in November, but exact dates and the panel of judges are yet to be finalised. Case lots of the 12 Riesling Challenge wines will be available for purchase.

KATE FRASER

50.97 tonnes of riesling grapes were harvested at the Mud House Glasnevin Rd block with 08 bins of grapes filled by 5.15pm Friday, April 23; the remaining bins, plus extras filled before the rain arrived on the Saturday. The grapes had been delivered to the wineries by 8am on April 25 and most were crushed that day.



Start your rieslings: Delivery dockets lined up for the challenge. Photo: JOHN KIRK-ANDERSON



VICTORIA STREET CAFE

Mother's Day Buffet Lunch

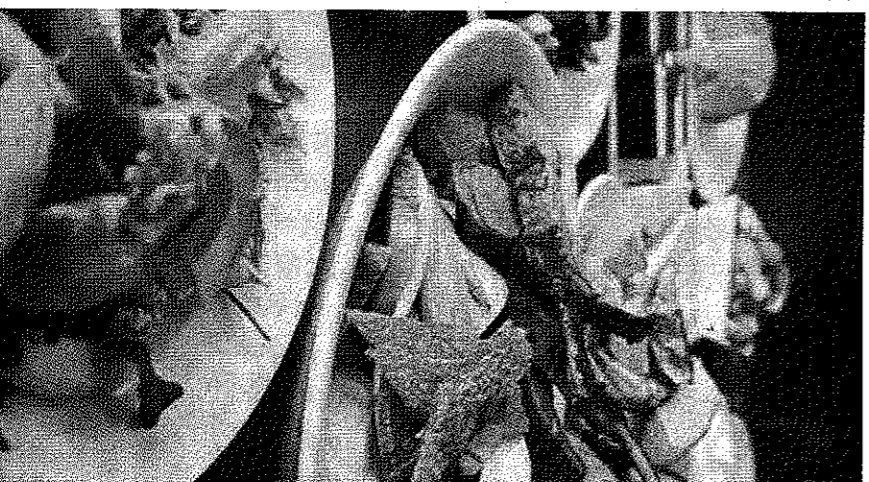
Treat your Mum this Mother's Day and go all out with our Mother's Day buffet lunch.

Enjoy a fresh buffet selection including dishes such as chicken and leek soup, Clevedon Coast oysters, Akaroa poached salmon, sole fillets, baked ham and prime beef sirloin with roast potatoes, kumara and wok fried vegetables.

Finish a great meal with baked creamed rice pudding, mini fruit pavlova and pannacotta, as well as tea or coffee.

Lunch buffet available 12.00 - 2.30pm
\$58 per person
\$29 per person, 9-11 yrs
\$15 per person, 5-8 yrs

Reservations essential, contact Victoria Street Cafe to make a booking now.



VICTORIA STREET CAFE

Sunday Roast

Warm up with a delicious Sunday Roast in Victoria Street Cafe this autumn under our large glass roof overlooking the autumnal colours of Victoria Square.

Start off with either a soup or salad, followed by a large platter of roasted meats and vegetables served with various sauces and warm gravy. Finish off with a dessert platter overflowing with sweet treats.

Sunday Roast available 12.00 - 3.00pm
\$36 per person
\$18 per child, 12 yrs and under

Sunday Roast menu may vary each week.

For further details, menus and bookings, contact Crowne Plaza Christchurch by phoning (03) 365 7799 or email hotel@crowneplazachristchurch.co.nz.

All venues are located at Crowne Plaza Christchurch, corner of Kilmore & Durham Streets, Christchurch 8011. Priority Privilege and Entertainment Card discounts are not available for some advertised events and menus, please check when booking. If discounts are applicable.

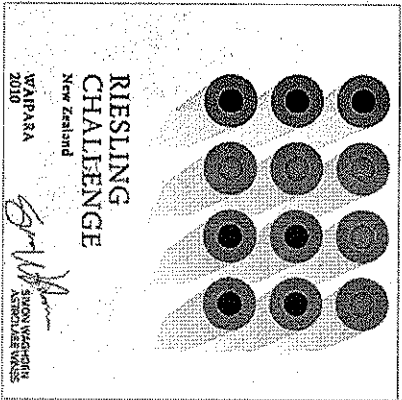
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