



Wine

BY MICHAEL COOPER

Less is more

Mother Nature lent a hand to winegrowers trying to safeguard profitability.

The 2010 Marlborough sauvignon blancs, still in their infancy, look terrific – excitingly aromatic, vibrant, rich and punchy. Why are they so good?

Two key factors are at play. Grappling with the devastating impact on their profitability of oversupply, many winegrowers took steps in 2010 to reduce their grape crops, thereby boosting their wines' flavour richness. And Mother Nature helped.

The glut is far from over. Morrisons supermarkets, in the UK, are currently selling Crux Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2009 at £3.99 (NZ\$8.40). "If the sauvignon blanc bubble isn't bursting, then it is at least deflating," according to JancisRobinson.com. Australian consumers have been snapping up blends of "Marlborough/Australia Sauvignon Blanc" for A\$5.99.

The good news is that this year – after an average growing season, in terms of warmth and sunshine hours, but less rain than usual – Marlborough's winemakers made *less* wine than in 2009. Despite a 5% leap in the total area of producing sauvignon blanc vines, this year's sauvignon blanc crop was 4% lighter than 2009's.

The relatively small harvest reflected an unusually cool spring in 2009. October was the coldest since 1992, with below-average sunshine hours and high rainfall. "Summer has been a little slow in getting here this time around," Clayridge Vineyard declared in December. "Seems like we've had one helluva long spring, but the grapes are finally flowering."

Grape-grower Peter Morice told *New Zealand Winegrower* his crops were down because his vines had been winter-pruned to three canes, rather than the usual four; the relatively cool flowering period had also had an impact.



However, from the start, the wine-makers' reports were upbeat. Jamie Marfell, winemaker for Pernod Ricard NZ, described Stoneleigh sauvignon blancs as "fantastic, showing ... some great intensity of flavours and big aromas".

Liam McElhinney, of Marisco, described his company's sauvignon blancs as "pristine, precise, focused and expressive ..."

The wines below, some of the finest I've tasted in recent weeks, are on the shelves now, or soon will be.

Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2010

★★★★★

Marlborough's most prestigious producer is not unaffected by the glut – this outstanding wine is \$5 cheaper than the 2009. Finely scented, with pure melon/lime characters and a touch of barrel-aged complexity, it is an authoritative style with beautifully ripe fruit flavours that retain zestiness, building to a lasting finish. \$29.90

Framingham Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2010

★★★★★

This skilfully crafted wine is already drinking well. Poised and punchy, it is full-bodied, with rich, peachy, limey, slightly nutty flavours. Smooth and dry, with complexity from a touch of barrel fermentation, it is very harmonious. \$21.95

Jackson Estate Stich Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2010

★★★★★

This is a sophisticated wine – weighty and dry, with sustained ripe flavours of grapefruit and limes, woven with fresh mineral acidity. It's not a showy style, but it's deeply satisfying. \$21.95

Tiki Single Vineyard Wairau Alpine Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2010

★★★★★

This is a "full-on", high-impact but classy style. Very punchy and vibrant, it is fresh and immaculate, with penetrating, tropical-fruit flavours, a herbal undercurrent, crisp, racy acidity and a lasting finish. \$27.95

Wairau River Reserve Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2010

★★★★★
This single-vineyard Wairau Valley wine is weighty, with fresh concentrated flavours of pineapples, limes and spices, appetisingly crisp, dry and sustained. \$30

Babich Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2010

★★★★★

Very easy to enjoy, this is not a dramatic, "leap-out-of-the-glass" style. Full-bodied, ripe and smooth, it has strong, ripe flavours of melons and limes, moderate acidity and a rounded, rich finish. \$19.95

Opawa Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2010

★★★★★

From Nautilus, this wine is already delicious. Mouthfilling, very fresh and vibrant, with complexity from a small portion of barrel fermentation, it is sweet-fruited, ripe and rounded, with passionfruit and lime flavours, dry and lingering. \$22 ■

Wine of the week

Jacob's Creek Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2006

(★★★★★)

From a great cabernet year in South Australia, this dark, powerful red is packed with blackcurrant, spice, mint and nut flavours, just starting to soften. \$19.99 (but often \$14.99 on special).

