

KUMEU RIVER

NEWSLETTER JULY 2009

Dear Friends,

Good things come in three's.

The above comments were made by Wine Spectator writer Harvey Steiman after he tasted through a vertical of Kumeu River Chardonnay from 2001–2007. The tasting left quite an impression and he published his thoughts in his Blog on The Wine Spectator website (we have included his article later in the newsletter) This is another indication of the consistent long running quality that Kumeu River Chardonnay has achieved over the last 20 years and recognition that Chardonnay from Kumeu is truly world class.

On the same day as Harvey Steiman's article, some outstanding reviews for the 2007 Kumeu River Chardonnays also appeared on Jancis Robinson's website to give Kumeu River wonderful recognition on both sides of the Atlantic. These notes even surpass the terrific reviews we received for the 2006 wines. Julia Harding MW wrote the comments and her detailed descriptions capture the essential points of difference between these exceptional Chardonnays.

Later that same day, in the mail arrived the Australian publication Winewise that also lauded all the 2007 Chardonnays with high praise indeed: "The Kumeu River chardonnays are special wines which demonstrate the heights the variety can reach". Days like this are worth remembering!

Since we've added the two new single vineyard Chardonnays to our range customers have been amazed by the diversity of our Chardonnay wines while maintaining an extremely high level of quality. Even the Village Chardonnay has been highly recommended in all quarters.

"...I could only admire how distinctive they were. The structure was tight and mouthwatering with bracing acidity, yet their flavor profile was impressively generous and broad, hitting every note on the scale from honey to lime to pear to apple to tropical fruit in varying degrees, and always with the kind of minerality we have come to expect only from the best white Burgundies. Tasting them blind, I rated them all between 90 and 94 points."

Harvey Steiman, Wine Spectator USA

Chardonnay is certainly our most important variety and we have strived over the last 20 years to produce wines of true quality that provide customers with drinking pleasure over a number of years. The article by Harvey Steiman emphasises not only the ageing quality of these wines but also the consistent level of excellence achieved by Kumeu River Chardonnay over a number of years. With this newsletter we are offering a Kumeu River Chardonnay selection pack that will provide you with a mixed sample of our top end wines at a very smart price. Details of this are on the back of the order form.

Cheers

The Brajkovich Family

*Melba Michael Mojana
Mikha Saul.*



Old and New Zealand

Jancis Robinson, 2 July 2009

www.jancisrobinson.com

CHARDONNAY

Kumeu River Village Chardonnay 2007

Kumeu

17/20 by JH. Drink 2009-11. 13%

Whole-bunch pressed, ambient yeasts, one-third barrel fermented, full malo. A delicate bready (?champagne), flinty aroma gives way to fresh melon and citrus and a delicate creaminess. Then surprisingly tight, even austere, on the palate, but more an indication of intensity and minerality than lack of fruit depth. Pretty serious and long for their first level Chardonnay. Oak very much in the background, giving greater structure rather than any oak flavour. Upright and elegant.



Kumeu River Coddington Chardonnay 2007

Kumeu

18/20 by JH. Drink 2009-12. 13.5%

Whole-bunch pressed, ambient yeasts, barrel fermented, full malo, 11 months in barrel. These grapes used to go into the Estate Chardonnay but since 2006 have been bottled as a single vineyard. A little smoky, struck-match on the nose at first then a fine, very crisp citrus minerality on the palate. Acidity seems higher than the Hunting Hill but is still balanced by lovely fruit weight. Beautifully weighted in the mouth, with a creamy oak overlay, and a fine long finish.



Kumeu River Estate Chardonnay 2007

Kumeu

17.5/20 by JH. Drink 2009-12. 13.5%

Whole-bunch pressed, ambient yeasts, barrel fermented, full malo, 11 months in barrel. Oak more evident than in the 'Village' wine but only a delicate toasty hint on the nose. Then quite toasty and brioche-like on the palate but enlivened but a fine citrus freshness and some ripe melon flavour. Just a hint of charr reduction, which is very attractive and restrained. Beautifully balanced and elegant and long with lovely purity of citrus fruit.



Kumeu River Maté's Vineyard Chardonnay 2007

Kumeu

18.5/20 by JH. Drink 2010-15. 13.5%

18-year-old vines - their only vineyard still planted to the Mendoza clone. Not yet open but there's a hint of toasty oak and sage. On the palate, so elegant, just a hint of hazelnuts but also fine zesty citrus fruit. Could do with another year or so in bottle - or decanting - still just a baby but with excellent potential. Richness of fruit on the mid palate perfectly complemented by that savoury texture of fine oak. Excellent length.



Kumeu River Hunting Hill Chardonnay 2007

Kumeu

18/20 by JH. Drink 2009-12. 13.5%

Whole-bunch pressed, ambient yeasts, barrel fermented, full malo, 11 months in barrel. These grapes used to go into the Estate Chardonnay but since 2006 have been bottled as a single vineyard. Seems at first sniff a little less ripe than the Estate Chardonnay, more citrus than melon, even a hint of clementine skin, becoming more perfumed in the glass and creamy, almost nutty on the palate. Slightly smoky on the palate too and a savoury, mealy texture from the barrel ferment. Excellent length and freshness yet already pretty complex. Really fine and definitely worthy of separate bottling.



PINOT NOIR

Kumeu River Estate Pinot Noir 2007

Kumeu

17/20 by JH. Drink 2009-14. 13.5%

Palish garnet. Finely spiced sweet red fruit, perhaps very slightly reduced when poured without decanting. Hint of smoke. Both soft and spicy but still fresh; silky, so easy to swallow. Easy and delightful but not simple. Good length and fine depth of delicate red fruit on the mid palate. Elegant and sustained.



Winewise Magazine

Len Sorbello, June 2009

www.winewise.net.au

Kumeu River chardonnay's grapes are airbag pressed (there is no crushing, resulting in low solids) with settling by gravity. Michael advised that the chardonnay spends about 10 months on lees with battonage (stirring) right up until malolactic fermentation, then he leaves the wine alone and seals it up with no further stirring. Michael considers that this process removes the buttery enzymes usually associated with malo. Kumeu River does its own bottling and, since 2001, all its wine has been bottled under screwcap. I had the opportunity of tasting many barrel samples of the 2008 chardonnays and can report that this is likely to be another excellent vintage. The wines have concentration, elegance and long flavours with the individual vineyard wines matching the quality of the 2006s. It's not surprising that the standard Kumeu River chardonnay is usually an outstanding wine when one tastes the many separate components that comprise the final blend: toasty citrus characters, white peach aromas and flavours, vanilla creaminess and mineral notes. Tasting Notes (for comparison, I retasted the '06 chardonnays – see also Winewise Vol 23 No 6).

2007 Kumeu River Village Chardonnay \$NZ18

Sourced from the Kumeu area with no new oak treatment. Varietal white peach aromas with vibrant juicy fruit with zingy, mineral acidity in the Chablis mould. Very fresh and finely textured. Great with seafood. **Highly Recommended**

2006 Kumeu River Estate Chardonnay \$NZ36

Very fine aromas displaying grapefruit, mineral notes. The palate has a very fine creamy texture with seamless oak integration and great length. The limey acidity contributes a lip-smacking freshness. **Outstanding**

2007 Kumeu River Estate Chardonnay \$NZ36

The aromas are similarly fine but with some peachiness. This wine, as compared with the '06, has more mineral notes and is quite taut with long, lemony acidity. It's difficult not to think of Chablis – this wine should age really well.

Highly Recommended

2006 Kumeu River Hunting Hill Chardonnay \$NZ48

Spicy citrus aromas with understated richness. Very finely textured palate with balance, length and freshness. I have no hesitation in raising its rating from the Highly Recommended it received in Vol 23. **Outstanding**

2007 Kumeu River Hunting Hill Chardonnay \$NZ43

This wine is much tighter than the '06 with restrained aromas of grapefruit and cashews. The palate has an ultra fine texture, long subtle flavours and a zesty, mineral finish. Keep 4/5 years. This is a style I particularly like. **Outstanding**

2006 Kumeu River Coddington Chardonnay \$NZ48

Gloriously rich aromas with hazelnut, apricot and peach notes as well toasty nuances. The complexity and richness carries through to the creamy palate which features a long, lingering finish and great acidity. **Outstanding**

2007 Kumeu River Coddington Chardonnay \$NZ43

This wine has the same aroma and flavour profile as the '06 and, while not as intensely rich, it's no less inviting. The palate displays a fine mealy texture with limey mineral acidity on a seemingly endless palate. Another fine expression of the variety. **Outstanding**

2006 Kumeu River Maté's Vineyard Chardonnay \$NZ55

This is Michael's favourite wine, named in honour of his late father. Produced from heavy clay but low pH soils, the first vintage was produced in 1993 and is principally made from the Mendoza clone. Rich aromas of roasted nuts with creamy notes. Similarly rich and creamy on a finely textured palate with long flavours and some mineral grip on the finish. This wine is ageing well and I would now rate this higher than the panel did in Vol23. **Highly Recommended**

2007 Kumeu River Maté's Vineyard Chardonnay \$NZ50

In common with the other '07 chardonnays, this wine is more refined on both nose and palate than the '06. It has luxurious aromas of hazelnut and peaches while the palate has great length and exhibits a mineral backbone which adds balance to the rich flavours. Another wine which will benefit from cellaring.

Highly Recommended

The Kumeu River chardonnays are special wines which demonstrate the heights the variety can reach.





Harvey Steiman At Large

Harvey Steiman, 1 July 2009

www.winespectator.com

NZ's Best? Hint: Not a Sauvignon or a Pinot

When you mention New Zealand in a wine conversation, no doubt the first thing that comes to mind is Sauvignon Blanc. Indeed, the country has hung its hat on the tangy, bright, zingy wines that come out of the Marlborough region. Those Sauvignons are good and there are plenty of them. Plus, Marlborough produces more wine than anywhere else in New Zealand.

What else? After a moment of thought, someone might bring up Pinot Noir. And yes, the Kiwis have made huge progress with Burgundy's classic red wine grape. Deftly balanced, vibrant wines come from several regions, including Marlborough, Martinborough, Central Otago and Waipara.

Even more consistently outstanding, however, are the Chardonnays from Kumeu River Winery. And by outstanding I mean exactly that. In the 2000s, of 23 Kumeu River Chardonnays reviewed by Wine Spectator, mostly by me, 21 have rated 90 points or higher ("outstanding" by definition). (Some of those reviews have yet to be published.) And yet, Kumeu is seldom the first thing that comes to mind when someone says "New Zealand wine."

Maybe that's because the vineyards and winery lie near Auckland, far north of those other regions making their names on Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir, so there's little context as there is for Sauvignon and Pinot Noir. Too, New Zealand hasn't established an identifiable style for Chardonnay. No one else around Auckland makes wines anything like these Chardonnays, and the best Chardonnays from Hawkes Bay, Marlborough and Otago seem different and not quite so complete.

All this crossed my mind as I tasted through an impressive vertical of 16 Kumeu Chardonnays from this decade. The winery (which is pronounced KYOO-mee-oo) had sent me the wines so I could taste them without the winemaker prompting me about what I should be tasting. As I did, I could only admire how distinctive they were. The structure was tight and mouthwatering with bracing acidity, yet their flavor profile was impressively generous and broad, hitting every note on the scale from honey to lime to pear to apple to tropical fruit in varying degrees, and always with the kind of minerality we have come to expect only from the best white Burgundies. Tasting them blind, I rated them all between 90 and 94 points.

That's a lot of character, and quality, for the price. Comparably distinctive Chardonnays from Burgundy or California almost always cost much more than the \$35 the estate bottling gets, or the \$42 to \$48 for the single vineyards. There are now three of those, Maté's (pronounced like Matty's), Coddington and Hunting Hill, plus a \$19 "village" bottling of remnants that's usually good in a more easy-going style.

Kumeu was out front of the parade to screw caps, making the switch in 2001. When I visited Michael Brajkovich in January of that year, he spent the better part of lunchtime worrying over whether to bottle all of his wines under the then-controversial closure, or keep some under corks because more conservative buyers were nervous about them. In the end, he jumped in with no reservations, bottling everything under twisties. Following his leadership, more than 90 percent of New Zealand's wine now comes with screw caps. Because of that, all of the wines in this tasting were pristine. (And they didn't need to send any backup bottles.)

A bottle of the 2002 Maté's, the single-vineyard Kumeu has bottled separately the longest, will disprove any lingering thoughts that wines can only age well under cork. Soft and deftly balanced, it has developed into something less tart than the younger vintages, its acidity integrated with honey and hazelnut overtones to its still-fresh pineapple, pear and cream. 93 points non-blind. Or the 2003 Maté's, my favorite of the tasting. It shows both maturity and freshness, with hints of oatmeal cookies and cream against lemony acidity, balanced against pineapple and pear, while the finish lasts and lasts. 94 points. The oldest vintage, Maté's 2001, a couple of degrees darker than the '02, has almost a botrytis character, with more apricot, peach and honey than the other wines, finishing long and silky, poised and balanced. 93 points.

OK, six to eight years is not a long time for Chardonnay in classic Burgundy. But these wines are aging along the same lines, retaining freshness and adding extra nuances in the bottle. I would not hesitate to hold on to the 2002 or 2003 Maté's for 10 more years. The screw caps provide extra assurance that they will not poop out.

The estate bottling from 2002 is less exuberant and showy, more mature and complex than the Maté's. It has style, but lacks the depth. 90 points. The 2003, however, is polished, round and complex. Although the acidity sticks out, the flavors have deepened and picked up honey and spice that come up strong on the finish. 92 points. Both are right there, ready now.

The estate bottlings stand out as more delicate and approachable than the single vineyards, which have more depth and flavor to munch on. Of the younger wines, the shining star was Maté's 2004, much more flavorful than its brethren, distinctive with lime and orange marmalade notes around the juiciness of star fruit, long and zesty on the finish. 94 points, maybe going past 95 with more time.

The younger wines are aging along the same curve, only further behind. That's a good sign. Bottom line for Kumeu Chardonnays: Drink them young if you favor the vibrancy, but don't worry about leaving them in the cellar for a few years. They only get more complex, without losing their vitality.