

## OCTOBER & NOVEMBER MEETINGS

*Taste the Best of Ngatarawa in October next week  
and sample the Secrets of the Club Cellar in early November*

### MEET A FOURTH GENERATION NZ WINEMAKER



Ngatarawa winemaker, Alwyn Corban, seen here at a recent dessert wine tasting, takes special pride in his sweet wines, describing them as "magic".

*The guest winemaker at the next meeting of the Taupo Winetasters' Club at 7.30pm on the evening of Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October is Alwyn Corban, Managing Director and Chief Winemaker of Ngatarawa Wines. The meeting will be held in Indulgence, the café on the corner in Horomatangi Street, Taupo.*

Alwyn is a fourth generation member of the famous Corban winemaking family in New Zealand and he was a founding partner of Ngatarawa Wines with the Glazebrook family in 1981.

Prior to that, Alwyn gained several formal qualifications including a Bachelor of Science (BSc) from Auckland University, and a Diploma of Biotechnology from Massey University before going overseas to study for his masterate at Davis University in California. He then returned home to work as winemaker for McWilliams Wines in Hawke's Bay.

Ngatarawa began as the shared vision of two very different families. What the Corban family name is to winemaking, so the Glazebrook family name is to farming in Hawkes Bay. It was the union of these two families with their rich heritages of vision, innovation and passion that saw Ngatarawa Wines established in former horse racing Stables in 1981. When Alwyn Corban and Garry Glazebrook converted the beautiful character-filled 114-year-old Ngatarawa Racing Stables into their Cellar Door and planted their vineyard, it was one of New Zealand's earliest boutique wineries.

It was established at a time when there were only 96 winemakers in New Zealand, with just 8 in Hawke's Bay and only 2 in Marlborough. At 10 acres, Ngatarawa's original planting of

Chardonnay was the largest in Hawke's Bay at the time. Other varieties in the original 27-acre vineyard included Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Gewurztraminer and Semillon.

In 1999, after 18 years of

*(Continued on page 2)*

### NEXT 2 MEETINGS

#### NGATARAWA WINES

*With winemaker  
Alwyn Corban  
7.30pm*

**Wednesday  
12th October**

**Members: \$20  
Non Members: \$25**  
Includes Supper & Raffle

#### PRESIDENT'S NIGHT

*A Vertical Tasting of carefully  
cellared wine from the Club  
Cellar Hosted by Taupo  
Winetaster's Club President,  
Alex Harre*

**7.30pm  
Wednesday  
2nd November**

**Members: \$6 Only  
Non Members: \$25**  
Includes Supper & Raffle

#### VENUE FOR BOTH MEETINGS

**'Indulgence'**  
47 Horomatangi Street, Taupo  
(Opposite the NZ Post Shop)  
**BOOK A SAFE DRIVER**

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pioneering, the Glazebrook family sold their shareholding to cousins, Alwyn and Brian Corban who have continued their family's 100-year winemaking heritage in New Zealand at Ngatarawa.

Situated in the area of Hawkes Bay west of Hastings, known as the Bridge Pa Triangle, Ngatarawa's soil is free draining, and this, combined with the area's warm, dry climate, makes for an ideal grape growing locality.

The Ngatarawa wine portfolio extends from the sharply priced Stables range up to the premium Glazebrook and the top-level Alwyn Reserve lines. Its Bordeaux blends, which are typically Merlot-dominant, and its botrytised Rieslings are two quite distinct wine styles for which the winery is noted.

Alwyn takes special pride in his sweet wines and grows Riesling with the express purpose of making dessert wines. In 23 years, Alwyn has made only three 'straight' dry Rieslings, and the vines are now so heavily infected with botrytis, which is the 'noble rot' that shrivels grapes and intensifies their sweetness, that it kicks in automatically each vintage.

In recent years Ngatarawa has planted new grape varieties, including Viognier, Syrah and Pinot Gris. The Syrah grows in the 'Centennial Block', which was planted in 2002 to mark 100 years of winemaking by the Corban family in New Zealand. Fruit bought in from a contract grower was used to make a 2004 Ngatarawa Syrah.

**So turn off the tele, boot the cat out the door and get on down to Indulgence at 7.30pm on Wednesday 12th October to met Alwyn Corban the fourth generation winemaker from the famous Corban dynasty. Then early November...**

## IT'S THE PRESIDENT'S BIG NIGHT OUT



Trust this man, he can spot a good wine in a dark cellar, he's Taupo Winetasters' club president, Alex Harre.

**Meeting number two takes place three weeks later on the evening of Wednesday 2nd November and it is a vertical tasting of carefully cellared wine from the Taupo Winetasters' Club cellar hosted by club President, Alex Harre.**

Again the venue is Indulgence on the corner of Horomatangi and Ruapehu streets. Alex will have his selection and an expert spiel lined up and ready to go at 7.30pm.

As all the wine for the evening is being selected from the club cellar, which belongs to all fully paid up members of the Taupo Winetasters' Club, the entry fee will only be \$6 to cover the cost of the venue, supper and raffle. Visitors who elect not to join on the night will be charged the usual \$25 entry fee.

You can trust our worthy club president Alex Harre to present a very interesting evening of wine and wine related tales. He knows what he is doing as he was raised from childhood into young adulthood amongst the Dalmatian winemaking community of the

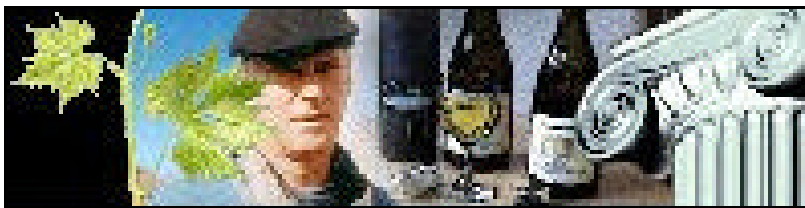
once rural Henderson of old West Auckland. He rubbed shoulders during his school years with many noteworthy people from famous families involved in the New Zealand wine industry. Now after many years as a discerning wine consumer he is well placed to conduct a very interesting tasting with wines he has personally selected from the Taupo Winetasters club cellar. His many years of constant practice have ensured that he can spot a good wine in a dark cellar with his eyes closed!

Part of the normal \$20 entry fee you have paid each night during the year has gone towards topping up the club cellar so that not only the quaffers, they are the wines you are given before the meetings start, but more importantly, the lines of vertical tastings have been added to and enhanced. In a vertical tasting wines are from different years, often in contiguous order, but from the same winery, wine estate, or chateau. For example, a vertical tasting could include the 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000 vintages of Collards Chenin Blanc. The idea of a vertical tasting is to try to identify traits that exist in the same wine year after year.

Some of these interesting lines are waiting patiently in the dark cool depths of the cellar for your enjoyment early next month. Club cellar mistress Maureen Sando has dutifully tended to our collection and now its time to be rewarded with a little taste of what can be achieved by patient cellaring. The annual President's night is your chance as a patient club member to sample the rewards of good cellaring.

**So come on give Alex a go, on Wednesday 2nd November at Indulgence. Its guaranteed to be a better experience than sitting in front of the tele!**

**For courtesy to all attending... SWITCH OFF your CELLPHONE at Club Meetings**



## WILD YEAST, WINE AND THE COLOSSEUM OUT EAST?

### *An unlikely combination...but not in the world of Matawhero winemaker Denis Irwin*

*The Colosseum Café and wine bar in Gisborne and the wild yeasts that inhabit the Matawhero winery were two of the many topics Denis Irwin, one of New Zealand's most individualistic winemakers, related to an enthralled gathering of the Taupo Winetasters' Club on the evening of Wednesday September 21st at the Indulgence café in Horomatangi Street in Taupo.*

Perched upon a stool and leaning against the café's lunch bar for support, a rather pale and frail Denis carried his audience on a wild and at times erratic trip through the highs and lows of his life.

It was a compelling story of Denis versus the world as he battled against conventional wisdom to make old world wine in the new world.

Often with his eyes closed as if reliving every scene on a 3D cinema screen in his head, Denis covered topics as diverse as the unpredictable beauty of using wild yeasts, seeking his fortune in Australia, trying to do business with wallet emptying Japanese importers, the high costs involved in promoting a product that is different, and Queen Elizabeth and the awards that put him, Gewurztraminer and Gisborne on the world map.

And in turn many club members

shared fond memories with Denis. For example our club president, **Alex Harré**, reminisced that it was a Matawhero Gewurztraminer that introduced him to the small group that was the Taupo Winetasters' Club over 25 years ago when he and Margaret moved to Taupo. That's roughly how long Denis Irwin has been associated with the club.

Many long time club members have followed the exciting roller-coaster career of Denis Irwin with much personal interest over those years and been lucky enough to share many a wine with this interesting and unique winemaker. Life has been a rocky road for Denis. From the early years helping his father plant kumara on the family farm he headed off overseas for his obligatory O.E. where he wound up in the vineyards of France.

Upon his return home Denis persuaded a still sceptical father to commit all his resources to the vineyard and subsequently the first Matawhero wines were produced in 1975. Denis won his first medals for Gewurztraminer overseas after entering his 1977 Matawhero Gewurztraminer into a wine show in Paris with excellent results. The 1978 vintage was of even higher standard and the 1981 vintage was judged 9<sup>th</sup> in the world in an international Gewurztraminer tasting in New York. So the wine was discovered and everyone started to drink it, including the Queen of England.

His world famous wines were all

fermented to dryness using Matawhero's unique wild yeast strains and 100% natural malolactic fermentation to produce wines. They were specifically designed to accompany a wide range of food styles and occasions.

He strives to achieve a European style that produces wine first and varietal character as a second consideration. Commenting on the intense colours in his white wines, Denis observed that, "either something is wrong with me or 99% of wine drinkers, because by the time the men in white coats have finished wine is normally white like water and that's what most consumers expect!" "Now days the only thing that counts is shelf space on supermarket shelves" Denis lamented. He maintains that "great grapes are grown in the vineyard, great wine is made in the winery" which flies in the face of the traditional adage of great grapes make great wine. When lean times struck as the wine scene swung away from Denis and his old world styles, he headed to Australia to seek his fortune in the hotel industry with a view to pouring the money back into Matawhero.

He bought an old corner pub in Melbourne, the Rose of Australia,

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### Taupo Winetasters' Club

### COMMITTEE DIRECTORY

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**Committee:** Cassie Blair, Robert Johnston, Ley Lewis, Oliver Nees, Janet Shrive, Rosalea Sullivan, Ray Toms, Colleen Watkins

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where Ned Kelly was reputed to have drunk. But unfortunately he found out too late that the patrons, and a staff member or two, were in the same mould as the notorious bush bandit and had varying degrees of connection to the infamous Melbourne mafia. The strain of wondering if the car headlights sweeping through the windows of the bottle store late at night were going to be followed by a hail of bullets took its toll on his nerves and made him reconsider seeking his fortune in this hard nosed city. The final message was delivered to him one evening when he was cleaning out the toilets. He found five .35 magnum silver cased bullets hidden behind one of the cisterns. Within the ranks of the type of person that patronised his pub, the message was clear, the sixth bullet was meant for Denis!

It was definitely time to sell up and flee back to the safety of Matawhero!

However it was a serious car accident back in New Zealand that nearly killed Denis and wife in the late 80's. He was just getting back on track after his Australian sojourn and was proving to be a popular and sought after speaker at every notable wine event throughout the country when "the wheels fell off Gewurztraminer".

Today he is aged in his late fifties and the serious injuries he sustained from the car accident, are taking their toll on his health with a set of depilating symptoms that the doctors are having trouble to label.

But that's Denis Irwin, a hard man to neatly label in a world of conformity.

Denis has been winemaking now for thirty years and thinks it is time to consolidate and get back to the original philosophies of the mid seventies. He has consolidated his vineyards and sold off half his property. A sad move that he is remarkably philosophical about when he says that although he lost all his white

variety vines he at least saved his business. Despite his health problems he is determined to stay in the winemaking business for the long haul and has begun a replanting program on the remainder of his property. Ironically the part of the vineyard he sold to Montana has been replanted to establish the largest Gewurztraminer vineyard in the world and now Gewurztraminer is back in fashion thanks to the promotional power of Montana and Nick Nobilo's much publicised specialty niche Gewurztraminer Gisborne vineyard and winery.



A Matawhero Icon: This Matawhero 1999 Reserve Gewurztraminer was one of eight wines tasted during the evening with Denis Irwin.

### EXPLORE THE WORK OF WILD YEAST

#### Matawhero 1999 Estate

**Chardonnay:** This chardonnay was designed to last a long time. A mature golden yellow coloured wine that was subjected to wild yeast malolatic fermentation giving it a nice firm base that does not overpower the natural fruit acidity. The nose revealed a slight hint of mushrooms giving away the influence of Europe that Denis pursues in all his wine. The mouth feel is full but still tight with mellow wood tannins encasing a complete palate structure and the fruit and wood are perfectly balanced. It is subtle, yet vibrant,

with an excellent concentration of ripe, peaches and citrus fruits with a hint of nuts balanced on a good acid spine with a tight lingering finish. The wine is very complex and made to be enjoyed with food. Like all Matawhero chardonnays, it was barrel-fermented, given full malolactic fermentation, lees-aged, and held up to eighteen months in wood.

#### Matawhero 1995 Reserve

**Sauvignon Blanc:** Looks can be deceptive in a blind tasting as this wine proved by looking much younger in the glass than the following 1999 vintage. Factors such as riper fruit and a concerted effort from Denis to lower the sulphur content to provide a no headache wine probably contributed to the extremely youthful look of this remarkable ten-year-old Sauvignon Blanc.

Again hints of Europe wafted past the nose from this golden yellow wine that truly sparkled with intensity. Opulent but still tight fruit flavours were displayed in a complex palate structure. Denis describes this unique style of Sauvignon Blanc as white Bordeaux but with more fruit.

There was not a trace of the canned peas, asparagus or mouth puckering green grass we normally associate with old New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc evident in this lovely honeysuckle ripper.

#### Matawhero 1999 Reserve

**Sauvignon Blanc:** Peter Potter reckoned this was the best Sauvignon Blanc he's tried for years! An exciting nose structure exhibiting ripe grapefruit, lime and gooseberry were the aromas. Careful handling combined with a long slow fermentation has retained the rich tropical, gooseberry and herbal characters. It was a full bodied wine with rich fruit flavours and a luscious honeysuckle sweetness that lingered across the mid palate before slowly disappearing with a long and satisfying finish. A true Sauvignon Blanc with excellent fruit and acid balance and sweet

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honeysuckle lingering long after the last drop has slid smoothly down.

#### **Matawhero 1999 Estate**

**Gewurztraminer:** Twenty years of growing Gewurztraminer fruit is secondary to the pleasure Denis derives from continually striving for better ways to make great wine in the winery. A bright yellow gold coloured wine with fragrant rose petal nose and that classic Gewurztraminer muskiness. It's a vibrant lifted wine in the mouth, full and fleshy with a stone fruit richness, classic gewürztraminer spice and a long full-bodied finish with lingering orange and cinnamon. It's nicely developed for current drinking.

#### **Matawhero 2004**

**Gewurztraminer:** Just to prove the previously reported story wrong that he had given up making Gewurztraminer for the time being and that he had made no white wines at all in 2004, preferring instead to concentrate on his Bridge Estate Bordeaux blend of Pinot Noir and Syrah, Denis produced this little "hand crafted love of God" for the club to sample. Matawhero's success has hinged on Gewurztraminer. It's the grape that put it, and Gisborne, on the map internationally. So this newest incarnation of the variety was received with great anticipation and high expectations. We were not disappointed as we observed the rich golden colour and inhaled the long lasting, rounded, rose petal opulence of the bouquet. Ripe pawpaw and lime flavours filled the well-structured palate with a long sinewy finish in keeping with the best dry style traditions of Alsace.

#### **Matawhero 1995 Dry Reserve**

**Chenin Blanc:** A trademark coloured deep golden glowing wine that won a bronze at the Romeo Bragato competition in August this year at Gisborne. This Chenin Blanc is dry because rain in 1999 stopped it becoming the sweet styled wine Denis set out to

make. The aromas are of waxy pears and white pepper with a rich fruity palate, well-structured wood and acid balance and a lingering finish of cloves and honey. A fat wine in the Irwin style Euro style that has developed well over the past ten years and is drinking well now particularly with food.

#### **Matawhero 1999 Bridge Estate Merlot/Malbec/Cabernet Franc/ Cabernet Sauvignon:**

This one is only starting to mature now, some 6 years after vintage and that is exactly how Denis designed it to develop in the winery. Denis used a predominately soft merlot base so the heavier cabernets would only start to come though with the age it has behind it now. By Denis's terms it's a medium weighted Bordeaux structured blend of four classic varieties, Merlot 55%, Malbec 18%, Cabernet Franc 10%, and Cabernet Sauvignon 10%. But it certainly packs a punch for its age with strong mushroom and licorice characters coming through. Denis likens its structure complexity to a good novel that you can sit down with and think about. Showing good aged characters with plenty of holding power it's just started to loosen up, "just like my head" said Denis. Like an aged relationship it takes time to mellow out.

#### **Matawhero 1990 Cabernet**

**Sauvignon Merlot:** The nose was still holding up very well while the colour exhibited a gentle trace of browning but was amazingly dark for a 15-year-old wine. A magnum is "a must have acquisition" in the eyes of club member **Paul Sanderson** and one sip of this velvet gloved red that packed a big punch convinced him this must be added to his cellar. Denis reckoned "1990 was not a good vintage" but that didn't put Paul off purchasing a magnum to add to his ever-growing collection much to the dismay of Rosalea, the chequebook keeper in his household. This wine is made in the old world European

style Denis is so in love with. The traditional European barnyard nose slowly dissipates in the glass to open up a full bouquet.

A velvet smooth blend of Malbec 34%, Merlot 30%, Cabernet Sauvignon 20% and Franc 16%. The colour was an amazing deep red brown with hints of rich toffee on a remarkably young and fully fruit acid balanced palate.



Matawhero Winemaker Denis Irwin donated the raffle and drew the the winning ticket for visitor John Olsen.

### **A VISITOR'S LUCKY NIGHT**

It was a very lucky night for first time visitor **John Olsen**. Not only was he the guest of the ever youthful Loan Arranger, **Jo Bergman**, he also won the raffle kindly donated by Denis, which was a coveted Matawhero 1989 Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot. What an evening!

Thanks Denis, and hopefully we can entice you out again from the Colosseum when you release some more mellow vintages. Our treasurer, **Peter Potter** was so impressed he even promised to pay the speeding tickets and I'm sure **Peter Taylor** won't mind sharing another birthday with you! Meanwhile some club members are planning a visit to the newest Matawhero venture, the Bridge Estate Caravan Park. **Ley Lewis** has already booked her tent site under the vines and **Alex and Margaret Harré** hope for a cozy cabin to crash in after enjoying a keenly anticipated session of Irwin hospitality.

## THE GALATEA CONNECTION

### *It was great to welcome our Galatea members Bob and Des (Desirée) Covell of Covell Estate Wines to the meeting with Denis Irwin.*

They have many kilometres to travel through vast, lonely dark forests and sparsely populated farmlands from their far-flung Galatea outpost to attend our functions.

On this occasion they decided to make the hour long trek to renew their friendship with Denis, as he was instrumental in helping them establish Covell Estate more than 20 years ago. He has been a good advisor and friend for all those years and has supplied them with many of the clones they grow in their vineyard.

Covell Estate is one of the most unusual and remote vineyard sites in New Zealand. The five hectares of vines are on volcanic soils on the fringe of the bush-clad Ureweras.

The former dairy farmers produce mainly Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, but have experimented with other varieties, including Gewürztraminer, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. Autumn rains and spring frosts can be challenging but, on the plus side, volcanic clay underlying the topsoil never dries out and there's no need for irrigation, even though the area is drought-prone.

Bob and Des are excellent hosts as anyone can testify that has made the pilgrimage to one of their now defunct annual summer garden picnics. Sensuous lashings of hot ham off the bone from their own estate grown pigs and cool Covell Estate chardonnays were the highlight of these very popular social annual outings that attracted a hundred or so friends, relatives and loyal winery customers from all around the Bay of Plenty.

## HotGossip

It was good to be able to welcome back local accountant **Ian Cooper**, an ex member who decided to renew his membership when he came along as a guest of **Jan Graham** to the Denis Irwin evening. Welcome aboard again Ian.

Also seen at the Denis Irwin evening was relative newcomer to the club **Michael Johnston** who was taking a break from the rigours of establishing a new business in Taupo with his wife, Carol. They have just opened Taupo's first spinning centre, a cycling studio called Spinfit in Motutaiko Street. The idea is that participants ride a bike for 30 minutes or so in the safety and comfort of their indoor cycling studio. The bikes are of the fixed position exer-cycle variety. An instructor will teach the basics of bike setup and safety, the spinning technique and provide the motivational music to keep those legs pumping and the calories burning off. So get on the phone to **Carol Johnston** as Spinfit is her baby. Carol knows from her own experience that you will get some serious definition in the legs and that it's a great low impact exercise for overall fitness. Just the sort of preparation the serious wine taster needs for added endurance and staying power.

During the evening, Denis Irwin spilled the beans on Taupo Winetasters' Club member, **Peter Taylor**, when he let slip that it was Peter's birthday the next day. What a day September 22nd must have been. It was probably the earliest Peter has ever been awake to celebrate his birthday. But knowing Peter well as we all do, maybe not! Anyway Peter that will teach you for trying to keep your big day a secret.

Club member, **Andrew Martin** was spotted in salubrious company lately. Not only was he seen to be listening intently to Denis Irwin last

month, he was also seen in a recent Taupo Times photo paying close attention at the first meeting of a new group called Towncentre Taupo which has been formed to promote Taupo's town centre.

The new executive committee is the face and voice for business in Taupo.

Missing from the photo is another Taupo Winetasters' Club member, **Sue Toms**, who is also part of the ten member executive committee. Presumably she had important business else where at the time of the photo!

We extend a big "get well soon" to **Diana Nees** who fell seriously ill while travelling overseas on holiday recently. Oliver and Diana were en-route to continents further a field than Perth in Western Australia, when Diana fell ill and was instructed by doctors to cancel the rest of the trip and return home. We can report that she arrived safely back in Wellington and at last report was recovering slowly.

## DIARY DATES

### Wednesday 23rd November

**A Knees Up at the Nees**  
*Early Summer Fun and Games in the garden of Diana and Oliver Nees*

### Sunday 4th December

**AGM & Christmas Luncheon**  
*The shortest AGM you've ever attended followed by a traditional Christmas Lunch with a selection of aged wine from the Club Cellar*

## NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING

**Sunday 6th November 2005**

**6.30pm at the home of Colin Cockburn**

12 Ngauruhoe Street, Taupo.  
Bring pot luck food and a bottle of wine.

Masked Wine: Janet Shrive

### Contributions Welcome

Contact Colin Cockburn:

[colin@reap.org.nz](mailto:colin@reap.org.nz)

Deadline for next issue:

Sunday 6th November