

MARLBOROUGH
WINE MAP
COLLECTIVE

THE STORY BEHIND THE WINE MAP OF MARLBOROUGH

2023 marks fifty years since the first commercial planting of grapevines in Marlborough soil. From those uncharted and audacious beginnings, there has been a meteoric ascent to the Marlborough we know today. One where it is essential that every fine dining restaurant must list at least one Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc and those three words are as well-recognised a brand as the All Blacks.

Marlborough's rapid success and market dominance has occurred this past half century without any real controls in place, and certainly not the regulations the appellations and wines of Europe must comply with to protect the provenance, quality and value of their products. This situation has conjured up a dangerous tipping point where the dilution of the brand value of Marlborough is occurring because of dilution of the product itself.

Producers of very large volume region-wide blends have engendered a widespread belief that all our Sauvignon Blanc wines taste the same. This is not the case.

Marlborough's hugely diverse soils, micro-climate and ultimately terroirs, mean the many producers here can craft wildly different expressions of this grape so loved by the world's wine consumers. However, without a reference tool to explain this, these consumers and all our incredible gatekeepers – the sommeliers, retailers, wine journalists and our global distributors - have found it challenging to understand let alone communicate this to others.

The **Marlborough Wine Map Collective** was born out of a desire to unlock the information contained on and in our wines: whether that be the labels, tasting notes or the impassioned chat of winemakers at events.

It's a tool to unlock the wines of the quality-driven organisation we're all apart of – **Appellation Marlborough Wine** – the creation of which is the turning point in our region's evolution. The Marlborough Wine Map Collective, a subset of AMW, have come together as a group of like-minded producers who make wine from

different Marlborough subregions, all with decades of experience making wine here. Some of us have made wine from every subregion and have worked over 30 Marlborough harvests. Physically it has been a two-year project of research, liaison, consultation and debate amongst ourselves, our winemaking peers, soil scientists, cartographer and designer. Mentally however, it's been a nascent project of two decades.

This Wine Map of Marlborough would have looked very different twenty years ago however, as our region has evolved substantially. This wine map will also continue to evolve as the borders become more definite and as new sub-regions are added. Now, fifty years on the world is well and truly ready to revel in and enjoy this beautiful map that enables one to understand the diversity and excitement that exists in our region.

Alongside the increasing array of wines from Appellation Marlborough Wine that offer the consumer as much or as little detail they want to take away, this map will help to guide, educate and inspire.

BACKGROUND

The project was managed and driven by Marlborough Master of Wine Sophie Parker-Thomson and Matt Thomson, co-owners of Blank Canvas Wines. Sophie and Matt assembled the experienced and diverse team of Marlborough winemakers and proprietors – Brian Bicknell of Mahi, Simon Waghorn of Astrolabe, Ivan Sutherland of Dog Point and Brendan Neylon of Rapaura Springs – all members of Appellation Marlborough Wine, to robustly debate and define the current subregional hierarchy of Marlborough and to remedy some commonplace geographical inaccuracies.

Cartography guru Roger Smith of Geographx in Wellington was engaged from 2019 to produce a base map of the Marlborough region. Roger's upbringing in

Marlborough and real love and understanding of the wine industry here was a huge advantage to the project.

Local designer Megan Boreham of Eyecatcher Designs had the challenging task of creating the aesthetic look and feel of the map, overlaying the detail of the base topographic map. The brief was for it to have an illustrative hand-drawn feel, using a colour palette inspired by modern New Zealand and pastel maps of old. Taonga (treasures) and special landmarks of Marlborough are included, honouring the importance these have on our climate and terroir (Mount Tapuae-o-Uenuku, Richmond Range mountains), history and culture (Wairau Bar/first known landing of humans in New Zealand).

To the subregional hierarchy – three macroregions shape our current Marlborough wine region. The mapping of the **Wairau** macroregion was relatively easy, though a key change in thinking will be that the Southern Valleys, often referred to as a macroregion in its own right, is a subset of the Wairau owing to the fact these five valleys are tributaries of the Wairau.

Due to historic loose references, the **Awatere & Blind River** macroregion was more challenging. Many people including local industry and wine professionals refer to “the Awatere” as anything south of the Wairau. This is categorically incorrect. The Awatere refers to a river and a valley. On that basis the Awatere has been defined as the catchment of the river because if you do not define it by catchment, then where is the boundary? The ambiguity would be limitless.

Blind River/Otuwhero is a significant sub-region by planted area. Historically it has often been included with the Awatere, however it is a separate catchment and coastal outlet. Consequently, Blind River is included as a separate subregion but is included in this macroregion with the Awatere. There are identifiable stylistic differences between the wines produced in each area.

The Southern Coast macro-region is Marlborough newest and includes everything south of Blind River. Dramatic microregions such as Ward, Ure/Waima and Kēkerengū

are squeezed between the sea and the Kaikōura Mountain Ranges running down to the Clarence River. Large in area but modest in plantings, it is different from those areas further north and is notable for the presence of limestone, which warrants a separate designation.

Our filter test for inclusion on the map was based on discussions of frequency of use and significance. Some of the subregions, notably Southern Valleys, have been in common use for decades and are defined by clear soil changes. Others are less clear in terms of borders and so we have marked location but not borders for those. Over the years there will be debates that will further define where these borders are, and new sub-regions will be added.

This is the First Edition and we are very proud of it. The Marlborough Wine Map Collective provides this map to Appellation Marlborough Wine, while holding the intellectual property in trust, for the benefit of its members and we look forward to the healthy and overdue debate, the stories and the learnings that ensues from its publication.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Thanks to all five founding wineries of the Marlborough Wine Map Collective, all of whom added valuable insights to this project, and contributed significant time and resources to make this map a reality.

Immense thanks to Roger Smith and Megan Boreham for their time, energy and talent in their critical respective roles to bring this project to life.