



Wine

BY MICHAEL COOPER



Awatere Valley: cooler, drier and windier than the Wairau.

Fast-flowing savvy

Here come the latest wines from the Awatere Valley.

If the Awatere Valley was classified as a wine region in its own right, rather than as a subregion of Marlborough, it would rank as the country's second largest – behind the Wairau Valley, but ahead of Hawke's Bay.

Once dubbed "the forgotten valley", the Awatere lies south-east of the Wairau, just a twisting 15-minute drive over the dry, brown Wither Hills. From Seddon, the small town in the heart of the valley, vines sweep up and down the banks of the Awatere ("fast-flowing river").

Peter Vavasour, a local farmer, and viticulturist Richard Bowling planted the first vines in the Awatere Valley in 1986 – 13 years after Montana's pioneering move into the Wairau Valley. The availability of large blocks of land in the Awatere, coupled with soaring land prices in the Wairau Valley, later triggered a flurry of planting.

According to locals, the Awatere Valley is cooler, drier and windier than the Wairau, yielding a crisper, less tropical-fruit-flavoured style of sauvignon blanc – racy, herbaceous, minerally and flinty. The 2011s are now filtering onto the shelves.

Villa Maria Reserve Clifford Bay Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

Grown in the Awatere Valley (although the label refers only to "Clifford Bay", into which the Awatere River empties), this is a classy wine. It has a fresh, aromatic, nettley bouquet, leading into an intense wine with penetrating yet delicate flavours, finely textured, vibrant, minerally and long. \$28

Blind River Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

Estate-grown in the Awatere Valley, this wine was partly barrel-fermented. Intensely aromatic, it is crisp and punchy, with gooseberry, passionfruit and lime flavours,

a hint of nutty oak adding complexity, and a dry, lingering finish. \$25

Vavasour Awatere Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

This is the flagship sauvignon blanc of the many produced by American Bill Foley under his Vavasour, Goldwater, Clifford Bay, Redwood Pass, Dashwood, Pebble Row, The Pass and Boatshed Bay brands. Mouthfilling and creamy-textured, it is ripe and rounded, with a slightly oily texture and deep, ripely herbaceous flavours. \$24

Eradus Awatere Valley Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

A good buy. Vibrant and racy, with strong melon and green-capsicum flavours, it shows excellent freshness, intensity and immediacy. \$18

Sacred Hill Halo Awatere Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

Fleshy, pure and punchy, this wine offers generous, ripe gooseberry and green-capsicum flavours, with a dry, well-rounded finish. \$26

Sea Level Awatere Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

Sea Level is owned by Sam Smail – senior winemaker at Whitehaven – and his father, Mike. This wine has fresh, nettley aromas, leading into a mouthfilling, rounded wine, with generous gooseberry and lime flavours, finely balanced, dry and sustained. \$19

The Sisters Awatere Valley Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

From Blind River, this medium-bodied wine shows good intensity of vibrant melon, lime and capsicum flavours, dry and long. \$17

Triplebank Awatere Valley Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

From Pernod Ricard NZ, this single-vineyard wine is grown in the lower

Awatere Valley. It's aromatic, pure and punchy, with finely balanced, ripely herbaceous flavours, slightly nettley and appetisingly crisp. \$24

Yealands Estate Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

Estate-grown in the lower Awatere Valley, this wine has a scented bouquet, showing "tomato-stalk" notes, and a mouthfilling palate with fresh, strong melon/lime flavours, pure, finely textured and lingering. \$26

The Crossings Awatere Valley Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

Handled almost entirely in tanks, but 2% barrel-fermented, this is a dry wine with fresh, crisp melon/lime flavours, light and lively. \$19

Squealing Pig Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

From Matua Valley, this Awatere wine is fleshier, riper-tasting than most of those from the valley, with passionfruit/lime flavours, ripe and rounded, and plenty of drink-young appeal. \$19 ■

Wine of the week

Invivo Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 (★★★★★, \$20)

From Auckland-based winemaker Rob Cameron and marketer Tim Lightbourne, Invivo is a label to watch. This punchy dry wine was grown mostly in the late-ripening Westhaven vineyard at Dashwood. Rich and refined, it is tight and minerally, with vibrant, slightly nettley flavours, showing impressive intensity, delicacy, harmony and length.

