

Norton's strategy smart

Graham Norton is selling a hefty amount of Marlborough sauvignon blanc.

Invivo, the Kiwi wine company that set up an endorsement arrangement with the UK TV talkshow host, is on a very happy roll. It reports that production of Graham Norton's Own Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc has increased by 50 per cent over the past year to meet demand.

It's very smart. The much-watched Norton (who is also now a shareholder in Invivo) frequently gives voice to his fondness for the Kiwi wine, and a glass is always perched beside him during the show.

Bottles of it are also open for his guests to taste in the green room, offering scope for the gospel to be spread through other celebrities.

All of this brings to mind Montana's arrangement with the 1979 French rugby team, an equally clever piece of wine marketing.

At the start of the 79 French tour, Montana announced that captain Jean-Pierre Rives and his men had tasted 15 red wines soon after touching down in New Zealand.

"The heritage of centuries makes every member of the touring party an expert," announced Montana. And what did these refined Gallic palates select as their "quotidien" red wine of the tour? The Montana Cabernet Sauvignon, no less.

A marketing campaign with

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magazine and newspaper ads, even a TV spot showing the Frenchmen jovially sitting down to a meal together, was used to support the endorsement.

It worked brilliantly, on several levels. It closely associated a local drop with what is commonly regarded as the world's most prestigious and refined wine culture.

But perhaps more importantly, at a time when wine sat on the fringe of this country's mainstream culture, it sent a signal to the beer-drenched rugby heartland: "Wine lovers can play Test rugby too."

That the French dealt to the All Blacks in the final game of that tour, the famous Bastille Day Test, didn't weaken the power of the message.

We've always been better at making wine than selling it. That is particularly true today. Marketing

is about ideas, but the general categories of those ideas actually change little.

One of these is celebrity endorsement, a promotional tool the producers of champagne began taking on board way back in the 19th century.

Beyond the two examples cited above, I can't recall any other cases of New Zealand wine going down the celebrity endorsement path. Given their success, you'd have to wonder why.

Graham Norton's Own Sauvignon Blanc 2016

One of a handful of 2016 sauvignons I've so far tasted, this wine won't disappoint. It delivers the requisite pungency, acid punch and flavour lift. Norton gets it for nothing, but it will cost you \$19 a bottle.



Astrolabe Wrekin Vineyard Chenin Blanc 2015 \$25

Now here's a treat for you ... a beautifully handled Kiwi chenin blanc. Appleskin and yellow fruit notes cross the palate with laser-like acidic precision. It's intense yet relaxed, with a cleansing finish.