

by Courtney Schiessl



Equally likely to be found in boutique wine shops as chain supermarkets, New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc is one of the most ubiquitous wines in the world. But when the late Nikola Nobilo first planted vines on New Zealand's North Island 75 years ago, Sauvignon Blanc was virtually unheard of in the country's sparse vineyards—and it might have stayed that way if not for this forward-thinking vintner.

As the iconic Nobilo winery marks its diamond anniversary this year, it also celebrates the innovative vision and commitment to quality that puts Nobilo at the forefront of modern New Zealand winemaking. When Nikola immigrated to New Zealand with his wife Zuva from their native Croatia in 1936, they brought along 300 years of family winemaking history. Though the first grapevines were planted in New Zealand in 1819, a combination of the destructive phylloxera pest and legislative challenges hindered the development of the country's wine industry until

the 1970s, making Nikola one of New Zealand's earliest commercial vintners.

The first Nobilo vines were planted in Huapai, located northwest of Auckland, in 1943, but the winery has since become synonymous with Marlborough wines. That's because Nikola helped launch this now-blockbuster South Island region, which currently yields the fruit for all Nobilo wines: By the early 1970s, when other Marlborough projects were just getting off the ground, the seasoned vintner was encouraging other winemakers to eschew hybrid grape varieties in favor of more noble *Vitis vinifera* vines.

The two grapes in which Nikola saw great potential were Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir. His vision clearly took root, as the varieties represent the two wines for which New Zealand is now known. Sauvignon Blanc in particular boomed internationally, as the variety comprised 86 percent of the country's wine exports in 2016, according to New Zealand Winegrowers. In recognition of Nikola's role in developing New Zealand's wine industry, he was awarded an Order of the British Empire medal before his death in 2007.

## Classic Wines from Noble Grapes

Fittingly, Nobilo's wines center on the Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir grapes the winery's founder believed in early on. Current Winemaker Dave Edmonds upholds Nikola's vision to produce wines with freshness and balance, crafting three bottlings that express the diversity New Zealand—and the Marlborough region in particular—has to offer.

Though Marlborough is a familiar appellation on wine labels, there's more to this area than meets the eye. Located on the northeastern tip of the South Island, sunny, dry Marlborough



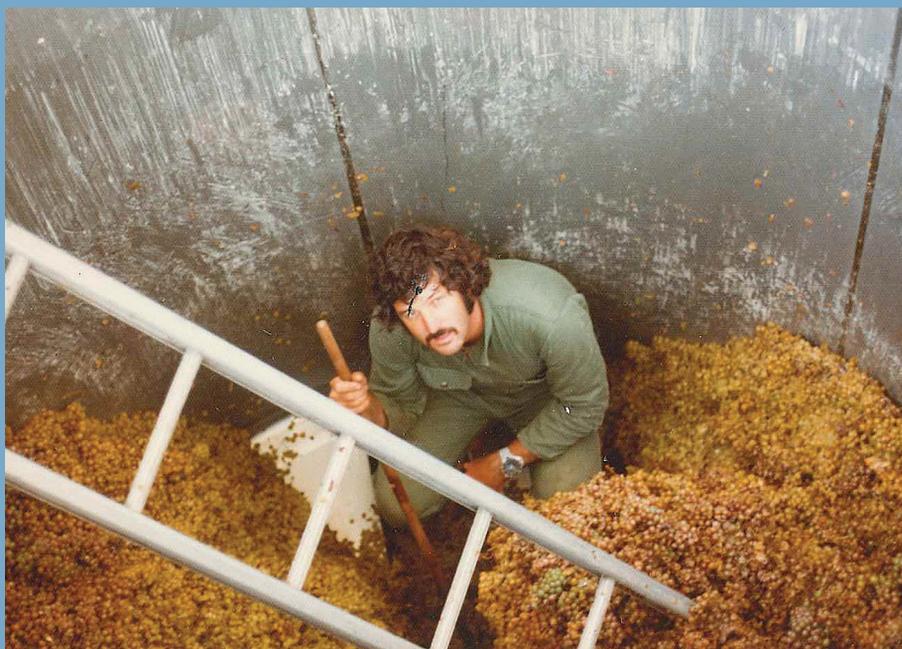
**A piece of Nobile history from the 1970s: Mark Nobile was the former Vineyard Manager and youngest of founder Nikola's three sons, all of whom joined the family business.**

is comprised of six subregions, each of which creates a nuanced style of wine. The most prominent of these areas are the Wairau and Awatere valleys, which is why Nobile focuses on these two regions in particular.

The Wairau Valley tends to emphasize the characteristic tropical fruit notes of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, while the smaller Awatere Valley coaxes out the herbal side of the grape to produce wines with a fine thread of minerality. Nobile slightly favors fruit from the Awatere Valley, which is responsible for creating the winery's signature bright, crisp-fruited, herbal-accented style of Sauvignon Blanc.

Known for its classic flavors and approachability, the top-selling Nobile Sauvignon Blanc is crafted from fruit grown throughout Marlborough. It features everything New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc lovers have come to expect—ripe grapefruit, pineapple, and grassy green pepper notes—while remaining remarkably well-balanced. Though the palate is abundant in flavor, the finish is clean and cool with a snap of brightness that wholly refreshes.

If the Nobile Sauvignon Blanc is about everyday value, Nobile's Icon Collection aims to showcase the renowned quality



of Marlborough by sourcing from the region's best vineyards. The Nobile Icon Sauvignon Blanc, the flagship wine of the estate, is primarily crafted from grapes in the Wairau, Rapaura, and Awatere subregions. By blending fruit from several areas, the finished wine combines their attributes to balance full, round fruit with lifting acidity.

While Sauvignon Blanc is certainly the breakout star of New Zealand winemaking, Pinot Noir is one of the fastest-growing segments of the country's production and export markets. The award-winning Nobile Icon Pinot Noir exemplifies Marlborough's phenomenal ability to produce a cool-climate wine with sunny fruit flavors

and fine acidity. Edmonds specifically seeks out vineyards with more difficult growing conditions in order to create a more complex Pinot Noir accented with spice and berries.

Some might assume that as Nobile moves into the next 75 years of winemaking, it would feel pressure to reinvent itself in order to stay current. On the contrary, the estate aims to continue upholding the ideals behind its steady ascent in the New Zealand wine industry. Inventive winemaking, a commitment to quality, and a mission to showcase the best of Marlborough's vineyards in all their diverse excellence: Those priorities will propel Nobile—and New Zealand—forward. ■■



*Nobile's Sauvignon Blanc, Icon Pinot Noir, and Icon Sauvignon Blanc are all produced from grapes grown in the Wairau and Awatere valleys in Marlborough, New Zealand.*

