

# New Zealand Wine Sommit

POST EVENT REPORT



New Zealand Wine  
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# New Zealand Wine Sommit

17-18 FEBRUARY 2025 – GISBORNE

Sommit continues to be a coveted wine experience within the international sommelier community. Attended exclusively by sommeliers, and targeted to their interests, it is a celebration of the lesser-known aspects of New Zealand wine, with particular emphasis on the facets that resonate with the on-premise community. It is designed to excite and engage a difficult-to-reach and often difficult-to-impress sector of the trade, with the objective of landing New Zealand wine on influential wine lists in both established and high potential growth markets.

The Gisborne Sommit welcomed a targeted group of nine attendees, and was led by Cameron Douglas MS and Stephen Wong MW. Attending sommeliers are predominantly selected through the [New Zealand Winegrowers Sommelier Scholarship](#) programme, with a handful of attendees selected through in-market sommelier events such as the Japan Sommelier Association's Young Sommelier of the Year Competition.

To date, there have been eight Sommits, reaching 123 sommeliers, from 19 countries.

I would have to say that my favourite experience was the 2025 Sommit. Led by local heavyweights Stephen Wong and Cameron Douglas – it was high-impact learning at its best... we weren't afraid to disagree on views on wines, creating a constructive and warm environment to learn from perspectives, opinions and debates.

- Liinaa Berry, Australia







# Attendees

With strict restrictions around sommelier-only participation, Sommit is a truly unparalleled experience for international sommeliers, an experience they can currently only have in New Zealand.

Nine sommeliers from seven countries were selected for this year's Sommit:

## Australia

**Cyndal Petty**

Head of Wine – Parker Group Restaurants (Western Australia)

**Liinaa Berry**

Founder – Liinaa Berry Consultancy (Melbourne)

## Canada

**Christopher Sealy**

Wine Director & Buyer – Alo Restaurant (Toronto)

## China

**Yang Lu MS**

Founder – TOP|SOMM Studio (Shanghai-based, nationwide)

## Japan

**Bungo Matsunaga**

Sommelier & Retail Sales Manager – Cellar Door Aoyama (Tokyo)

## New Zealand

**Suraj GC**

Head Sommelier – Park Hyatt Hotel (Auckland)

## UK

**Tom Fahey**

Owner, Chef, Sommelier – Terrace Rooms & Wine (The Isle of Wight)

## USA

**Amber Rill**

Assistant Beverage Director – Corkbuzz Wine Studio (New York)

**Jenna Isaacs**

Sommelier – Verse (Los Angeles)

Short bios for each attendee can be found [here](#).



# Results

## Peer to Peer Sommelier Education

Throughout the International Education Programme over the next year, there will be post Sommit tastings hosted in every city a 'Sommiter' hails from. This will result in eight bespoke sommelier-to-sommelier sessions, presented by Sommit attendees to their peers in market. The first of these sessions has already been presented by Bungo Matsunaga, to 23 sommeliers at the Japan Sommelier Association's Young Sommelier of the Year Competition.



## Social Media

Positive and consistent content was published by many of the visiting sommeliers, with analytics showing a reach (number of potential users to see content once only) of over 31,000 on Instagram. Sommeliers were encouraged to use both #sommit and #nzwine hashtags concurrently. Shanghai-based attendee, Yang Lu MS, has also posted to his followers in China, with a reach of over 400,000 across his four Chinese social channels.

## Attendee Satisfaction

The post visit surveys yielded 80 - 100% satisfaction rating from all attendees overall, with the only "improvements" listed being increasing the length of the event to taste more wines and facilitate more conversation. Hosts Cameron Douglas MS and Stephen Wong MW were incredibly well-received as per previous years, with 100% satisfaction rating across the board from all attendees. The selected themes were also well-received, though some flights landed better than others, as outlined in the following section.

## International Sommelier Opinion

An important component of Sommit is the commentary from the sommeliers regarding all aspects of the New Zealand wine industry, including regional and varietal expression, stylistic trends, and the manner in which New Zealand wine is received on the world stage.

As one of the major components of Sommit is that it is closed-door and sommelier-exclusive, open and honest feedback can be obtained, as presented by flight on the following pages.

“ The only complaint might be it should be longer than 1 day... ”





# Masterclass Wines

## General Observation

It was noted that the sommeliers take away more and are more inspired when flights/tastings have a specific focus.

The focused flights and discussions are what the group remembers, and what gives them a strong, positive and serious/respected memory of New Zealand wine generally.

## Provenance

This flight was intentionally placed first, to challenge any preconceptions that may have existed among a group of international on-premise professionals, by diving beyond regionality and subregionality to single sites and their expression of place. For a wine to qualify for this section, it had to be a vineyard that multiple wineries source from - wines for this particular flight came from Two Terraces, Churton, Wrekin, Settlement, Clayvin and Calvert.

As intended, the group were not expecting a tasting focused on this topic and it was a “lightbulb moment” for many, who were unaware that this approach to vineyards takes place among producers in New Zealand. Debating whether a wine authentically conveys the voice of a particular vineyard was not part of their “usual” New Zealand wine conversations in their home markets.

More specifically, while there was positive conversation across the board for the vineyards that were presented (mentioned above), there was particular focus on the Wrekin and Churton vineyards.

With regard to Churton, the quality of the Sauvignon Blanc presented was discussed in depth, as compared to the sommeliers usual experience with New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. The room was overwhelmingly positive about the Sauvignon Blanc, and would like to see more of this site specific/smaller production style of Sauvignon Blanc in their markets and on their lists. The Pinot Noir was not as hotly discussed in this regard, likely due to the generally higher opinion of

Pinot Noir than Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand.

With regard to Wrekin, the conversation primarily centred around the wines that were more restrained/less fruit forward. While these wines showed exceptionally well in the Selection Tasting conducted by Cameron and Stephen, in the flight on the day they were “lost”.

Overall, the sommeliers felt they saw higher quality from all of these sites, and could easily taste the attention that was paid to the wines in the vineyard and the winery. The discussion concluded strongly about the future of New Zealand wine generally, and in this space specifically.

The flight took them beyond what they knew about New Zealand, setting them up for the remaining flights with an open/curious mind.

“Buying decisions are informed by comparison. All these themes were relevant to the NZ wine landscape and to my buying. I wouldn't have changed a thing.”





## Smaller Planted Varieties

While this flight showed generally well, the overarching feedback was that the theme/focus was not specific enough (simply being a showcase of smaller planted varieties in New Zealand) and that the varieties themselves are more desirable from their native (or more celebrated) countries.

The sommeliers were generally already aware that wines made from these varieties existed in New Zealand, but felt unable to list examples from New Zealand as they don't yet outperform that variety when made from its native or more celebrated country/region – they needed the level of complexity and ultimate quality to be higher.

Pricepoint was also discussed. Currently, the successful wines on lists from these varieties are the benchmarks from the native/celebrated countries/regions that exist in the market already – these currently tend to provide a better price to quality ratio.

With regard to Chenin Blanc, the group felt that while the wines were of suitable quality, at a global level they do not currently compete with the premium end of South African Chenin Blanc. It was felt that we could charge more for our Chenin Blanc, but the wines would need to be higher quality.

For Gamay in particular, the wines shown were at a relatively high pricepoint (when revealed) and though the wines showed well, the group expected more Cru Beaujolais level at that price point, and would need that level/reputation to charge that price to their customers.

With regard to Cabernet Franc, again though the quality was felt to be good, unfavourable comparisons were made with Cabernet Franc from the Loire. This cohort was generally younger, and feel that Loire is now the benchmark for this variety and invariably cannot help but compare to the Loire expression. It was interesting that the group unilaterally referred to Loire Cabernet Franc – Bordeaux (though blended) is no longer the benchmark for this variety in the on-premise. The sommeliers felt that producer comparisons to Bordeaux felt out-of-touch.

Currently, the general consensus is that while it is interesting that New Zealand produces these varieties, they are not going to open doorways onto wine programmes unless the quality delivered at the prices charged is considerably lifted.





## Chardonnay & Pinot Noir from Limestone

This was another very well received flight, similar to the first flight focused on single site wines from multiple producers, again due to the specificity of the topic.

The wines were presented blind, and the sommeliers were challenged by Cameron and Stephen as to whether the effect of soil, in this instance limestone, could truly be tasted.

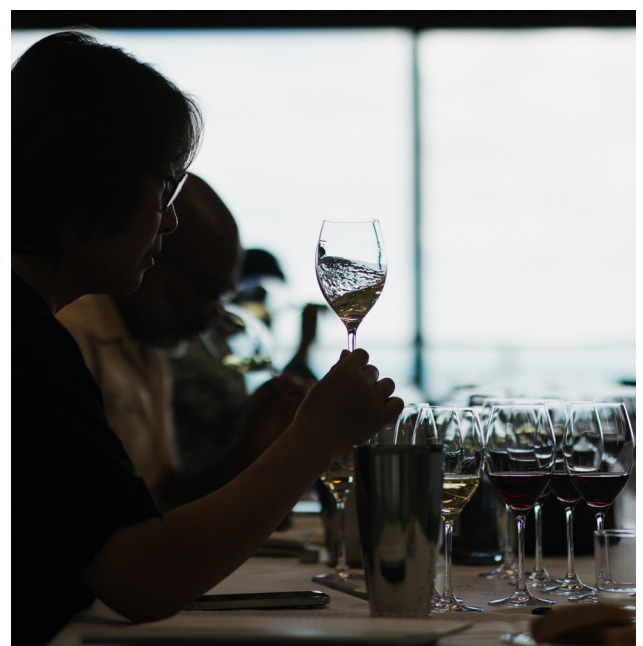
The sommeliers had not tasted with such a specific lens and it was a paradigm shift for them, into thinking about soil underpinning some of the characteristics in these wines, and for some wines, the entire character of the wine. Many did not expect the voice of the soil would have such a commanding role in the wines presented them.

Interestingly, perhaps due to the time spent there prior to Sommit, the very strong regional signature of Central Otago Pinot with its continental climate, was much more evident and trumped any of the signatures that they saw from limestone, as compared to the wines from other regions. The paedogenic lime of Central Otago was less evident – not absent, but played a less important role in the final expression of the wine.

Conversely, limestone was particularly evident in the signature of the wines from North Canterbury and Waitaki Valley.

With regard to quality, the sommeliers were extremely impressed with all wines from this flight.

It was also noted by Cameron and Stephen that the group clearly understood New Zealand regions in order to be able to make statements such as those made about Central Otago as above.







## The Ageability of Bordeaux Reds

While this flight had a clear focus, which as mentioned earlier, tended to result in more successful discussions and flights, unfortunately for this particular flight the message did not resonate with the group.

The aged examples (all 2013) were showing very freshly with no obvious development. In some ways this could be considered positive in that it shows longevity, but equally, there was no way to prove if/ how well these wines would age.

Ultimately the desired learning outcome for this flight (ageability) was not achieved.

When focusing on ageability in the future, the aged example may need to be tasted prior. This has been avoided in the past to avoid requesting too much library stock from members.

In terms of quality, the response was very positive, the wines all delivered in that respect and were discussed favourably.

However, it was also noted that the younger generation of sommelier in particular, does not seem to have as much of a love affair with Bordeaux as has been common in the past. So while of very high quality, the wines were not as “exciting” as some of the others, due to the attendees not being excited by Bordeaux and Bordeaux Blends generally.

It was also noted that this sort of tasting targets a specific type of sommelier and establishment, one with a wine programme that cellars wine for significant periods of time.



# Dinner Wines

## General Observation

In previous years the focus of the pre-dinner tasting has been more limited to allow for deeper discussion and understanding, however we expanded the offering this year following member feedback that the focused flights were too narrow.

Upon reflection, it is likely that the structure of the pre-dinner tasting will return to the more targeted format to deliver a more intensive tasting focus and allow for robust conversation. This provides the sommeliers with a better understanding of a particular topic, and results in a more positive opinion of New Zealand wine generally.

Additionally, a weather event necessitated a change of venue for the dinner, which meant that the evening tasting was not as structured as in previous years, and feedback on the wines was more difficult to receive.

## Sparkling

The Sparkling flight was very well received overall.

There were many questions regarding the Ancestral method, some of the guests were not aware of it being made in New Zealand, and enquired as to who else produced it.

For the Méthode expressions the focus was very much on the overall (high) quality of the wines, and notably Champagne wasn't mentioned at all as a benchmark.

Most of the Sparkling bottles were empty at the conclusion of the evening, indicating repeat tasting, and/or choosing these wines to drink with dinner.

## Riesling & Albariño

This was the most difficult selection of wines to get concrete feedback from as the theme was largely varietal, rather than a stylistic focus of any kind.

That said, the reception to these wines was overall positive, again with many of the wines being brought to the table to be tasted with dinner.

Interestingly, being a walkaround tasting with labels visible, there was a discussion around labels and the sommeliers were positive about the large number and wide variety of New Zealand producers using more modern labels. There was general comment that the more traditional labels were no longer as relevant in their establishment(s) and market, particularly for the younger demographic.

## A Selection of Reds (St Laurent, Sangiovese & Blends)

This flight sparked a conversation in the group regarding a general move away (by both them as sommeliers and the customers in their establishments) from heavily extracted, ripe and oaky wines.

The wines presented here were not in the above style, and were very well received. One showed slight oak (positively) and the conversation regarding the preference for fresher, brighter less oaky wines (again for them as sommeliers, and also the customers in their establishments), stemmed from there.





# Facts and Figures



48

Wines at the  
Masterclass



28

Wines at the  
Dinner



584

Wine Glasses



10

Regions

24

Subregions



2

Bottles of Gin



1

Sunrise Swim