

A Great Bargain, but Act Fast

By Dan Berger

Great Pinot Noir can be made only in cooler climates, and New Zealand's Hawke's Bay is blessed to have within it one of the finest Cabernet Sauvignon regions in the nation, Gimblett Gravels.

And since Cabernet calls for warmer weather, it is only logical to assume that Hawke's Bay isn't cool enough for it to be great PN country as well. But things are not always as they seem, and I can only say that Hawke's Bay is one of the most mystical and magical areas of the world for wine, since great Cabernet and great PN seem to be able to coexist here.

Not every producer can do this. Only a few have even tried. But when it comes together, it can be truly mind-bending. Not to mention slightly confusing because it doesn't exactly fit all the books on viticulture.

Validating a Cool Climate

One of New Zealand's best red wine regions, Hawke's Bay does brilliantly with cool-climate Syrah, validating its weather conditions. A majority of the better Syrahs here display the rotundone (black pepper) characteristics that seem

extremely difficult to
achieve in warmer regions.

The fact that Pinot
Noirs from Hawke's Bay are rarely compared with the best in
that two-island
nation may be just a quirk of fate. Martinborough,
Marlborough, Central Otago,
and North Canterbury all are better-regarded PN regions.

Trinity Hill, with
brilliant winemaker Warren Gibson at the helm, long has
produced stellar wines
from many different varieties, and less than a decade ago
began exporting wine
to the United States using a warehouse in Northern California.

Unfortunately, some
legal issues arose that had absolutely nothing to do with the
winemaker, the
winery, or the product, but the result was an almost complete
hiatus in the
ability to sell the wines.

All of the cases
that had been shipped here ended up in a temperature-
controlled warehouse, and
as time has gone on, the winery realized it needed to begin
marketing the
wines.

But to discount them as deeply as would be necessary could be
damaging to the brand image, so a few wines have been very
carefully distributed in ways that will allow them to
disappear as quietly as possible.

The goal is to fly
well under the radar.

After some of the legal issues began to be resolved, the first Trinity Hill wines to be sold began with a 2016 Sauvignon Blanc that was being closed out for well under \$10. Now we see this:

2016 **Trinity Hill** Pinot Noir, Hawke's Bay (\$5.99, Selected Grocery

Outlet stores): Bright tea/herb and medium-weight cherry aromas, with hints of cooler climate rotundone-ish notes, brisk acidity, and it gets better with aeration.

Grocery Outlet stores (about 320 of them) are largely on the West Coast (plus Pennsylvania), but the company rarely discloses its strategies; I have never had any success talking with its wine buyer(s).

When I first tasted this wine, I suspected it would sell for about \$35 per bottle. I later learned that the full suggested retail is about \$17, which would be a great value. The Grocery Outlet price is hard to imagine.