



Felton Road (Central Otago, NZ): Vintage Report with Blair Walter

Felton Road's new vintage is released in Japan every June. This year's releases include the Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from 2020, and Riesling and Vin Gris from 2021. Blair Walter says that wine 'as a natural product that you only get the opportunity to make once a year' is a new experience every time for winemakers, even though there are similarities over the years. Felton Road's 26th harvest, and the 3rd since Covid upset the world, was hand-picked as every other vintage, and had just finished when we talked with Blair in early May. Please see the QR code to the right for more details.

Watch the interview on-line



<http://bit.ly/39qYW5u>



We are just wrapping up the 2022 Vintage which was very blessed in Central Otago, slightly warmer than average, picked earlier than usual under very dry conditions, the fruit was in very good, clean condition with great, well-balanced flavours, and normal size yields. We were nervous and careful this vintage, we had Covid cases in our area for the first time. Given our small size, we could see that one Covid case would significantly impact the harvest. Thankfully we completed the vintage with no illness.

Speaking of Covid, 2022 had been the first vintage in first two years that Nigel Greening could visit us – he is a fantastic chef, so we had many memorable lunches.

Since the pandemic, most of the international workers returned home and no new ones have arrived. While we are glad to have a strong and loyal team of kiwis, allowing us to hand-harvest on time, we miss the vibrancy and the diversity the international crowd brings. We hope, as people resume travelling, more from around the world will come back. Our door is open to those passionate about wine.

◆ Walking back through the vintages

<2020> It was slightly cooler than average with an "edgy" growing season. Three minor frost events and relatively wet conditions throughout December, a dry January, a wet February, and a dry but overcast and cool March. Cool temperatures during harvest and slow ripening gave us the opportunity to choose the precise time of harvest. This resulted in small berries with ripe, concentrated flavours, good vibrancy and acidity. The wines have profound character and depth. We were glad to get through this vintage with the help of our "Covid refugees" – the young workers stuck in New Zealand as international aviation came to a standstill.

<2016> 2016 had a warmer growing season and a hot spell in February, about six weeks before the harvest. This advanced the ripening, and it was a fast harvest. This heat spell around veraison time seemed to reduce the accumulation of stable anthocyanins, resulting in lighter body and colour. It also resulted in slightly lower alcohol, which may be counterintuitive for a warmer vintage, because the flavours ripened ahead of the sugar. When I say lighter colour, it's only relative. Central Otago pinots are known for deep dark colours and when we think it's not as deep and profound, we often find our international customers are more excited by them because it reminds them more of Burgundy, having greater finesse, detail and transparency.

Upon tasting, the 2016s are very youthful. But after five years in the bottle they have lost their primary immediacy and have started to take on some secondary characters. You can expect at least another 10 years of maturation.

◆ Do you adjust your vinification each vintage?

In theory, the biggest vinification variable we can control is the percentage of whole bunch fermentation. We experiment each year, but we always land on 20-25%. In a year like 2016 where there is transparency and ripeness, you could argue the riper stems allow for more whole bunch, but the depth of flavour of the fast-ripened grapes might be insufficient to support the stem flavour. In a cooler year we hold back on whole bunch to ensure any green flavour in the grapes is not exacerbated. We just want a moderate seasoning to balance the wines, we don't want stem-driven herbaceous flavours to dominate and obscure the vineyard expression. We're blessed in Central Otago with our consistent vintage conditions. Central Otago is protected by the mountains, and we normally have very low rainfall. Our inland location means we are protected from the Pacific weather system, and we have few concerns with the growing season. Even the impact of climate change is nothing dramatic like the wine regions in Europe - the last few vintages are warmer than my first few vintages 26 years ago, on average, but that's it. The consistent vintage conditions allow the vineyard expression to come through even more than seasonal variation, that's what our customers love to follow, and that's why we bottle single vineyards every year.

◆ Taking bold steps to support Ukraine

We stopped exporting to Russia the day after the invasion. We then made a significant donation to Mediciens Sans Frontier, already working in Eastern Ukraine. We also credited our wines to our Ukrainian importer who lost their inventory when their warehouse was bombed. We've introduced them to Jancis Robinson, and she now publishes updates on her page under "Letters from Kyiv (<https://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/letters-kyiv>)". It's very sad to see such atrocities.

Felton Road harvest during lockdown in 2020
An extraordinary vintage Felton Road lockdown harvest

Produced by Felton Road. Watch for yourself.

これで終わりで、2021年も頑張るぞ。

▶ YouTube <https://youtu.be/W3cXnlZooUw>

Limited time offer **Felton Road 2016**

Special selection **5 btl set**

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RRP **¥ 37,000**

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PICK UP WINE



Felton Road Chardonnay Block 2 2016 (screw cap)

Variety: Chardonnay Alc. 13.5%
RRP **¥ 7,500**

Block 2 is a gentle eastern slope located north of the Elms Vineyard. Delicate aromas of shells and citrus blossoms, with mineral clarity and persistent intensity. Whole-bunch pressed juice is naturally fermented, and after passing through MLF is aged in old oak barrels for 17 months. 93pts Wine Advocate



Felton Road Pinot Noir Bannockburn 2016 (screw cap)

Variety: Pinot Noir Alc. 13.5%
RRP **¥ 8,200**

Floral aromas reminiscent of potpourri, the harmonious fruit is surprisingly expansive and persistent through to the finish. Delicate and taut, the 2016 will show its true potential with ageing. Natural fermentation (25% whole bunch), 13 months aging in oak barrels (25% new). 92 pts James Suckling



Felton Road Pinot Noir Bannockburn 2020 (screw cap)

Variety: Pinot Noir Alc. 13.9%
RRP **¥ 7,600**

Silky tannins bring the lush fruit together exquisitely for a complex, persistent finish. In 2020, a cool year, the fruit had a long hang time and developed concentrated flavours and lively acidity. Natural fermentation (20% whole bunch), 13 months aging in oak barrels (30% new). 92pts James Suckling