



Our feature story : Part 21

Trinity Hill (Hawke's Bay, New Zealand)

Winemaking that leverages the unique blessings of nature in the Gimblett Gravels, a unique region created by major floods in the 1860s — Warren Gibson (chief winemaker)



Trinity Hill was established in 1993, planted their first vines in the Gimblett Gravels in 1994, and made their first wine in the purpose-built winery in 1997. Over the years, while they have gone through changes in ownership and direction, one constant has been the winemaking of Warren Gibson, who joined Trinity Hill in 1997 and has guided both the viticulture and winemaking to consistent heights. Along the way Warren has garnered numerous awards and industry recognition, including New Zealand Winemaker of the Year, from *Winestate Magazine* in 2005. Currently, he is Chief Judge of New Zealand's leading wine show, The New Zealand Wine of the Year Awards, and the Sydney International Wine Competition.

<Interviewer: Dion Lenting, Kiwi Copy, April 2021>

◆What are the characteristics that make Hawke's Bay good for Chardonnay and classic reds?

Hawke's Bay's strength is that we're a warmer cool climate. By way of reference, Yarra Valley, Margaret River, or Sonoma in a cool year, Burgundy in a very cool year, or Tasmania in a warm year, we are at those margins. We never have really hot days, so we don't blow away our fruit. We probably have ten 30°C days in a summer, 15-20 days in a very warm summer. This year there were only about three days above 30°C. But equally, we are not cool, so we get ripeness and flavour, but with freshness and acidity.

The soil types are quite varied. The river-derived soils are river silt, gravel and sand, and then as we go into the hillsides more interesting clays, sandstone and limestone. So there is a range of soil types and climates.

◆Where does the Trinity Hill name come from?

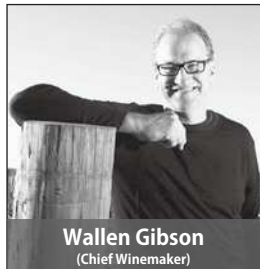
It goes back to 1993 and the founding partners. The Trinity was before my time even though I have been here for almost every vintage. They were the 3 original partners that invested into buying the land for the first vineyard and then into the winery. John and his wife Jennifer Hancock - John was the chief winemaker; Robert and Robyn Wilson - Robyn is a New Zealander who has been living in the UK for 35+ years who own restaurants in Central London, including the Bleeding Heart. They were driving force of the investment. And then Trevor and Hanne Janes who were financial partners. So Trinity was a play on the 3 partners. If you come to the winery, you will see the Hills where the winery is nestled. You could imagine there are 3 hills as well.

◆What is the varietal mix at Trinity, and what is the main focus?

Today the mix is closer to where we started than it was a decade ago. At first we did take contract fruit, but the original plantings of 18 hectares in the Gimblett Gravels in 1994 were a mix of Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet and Syrah, close to equal amounts of each. Another wave of planting in the Gravels in 2001 increased red wine plantings with more Cabernet, Syrah and Merlot. And John got very innovative and planted Tempranillo, Touriga Nacional, Arneis, Montepulciano, Viognier and more. So this was Trinity's innovative phase in 2001 to 2003.

There is also the old Irongate vineyard, one the first vineyards planted on Gimblett Road back in the 1980s by Gavin Yortt and David Irving, who sold the fruit to Babich. Trinity Hill bought it in the 1990s, sold it to Mark Blake who totally replanted the vineyard, then bought it back in 2007. We have since transitioned it from Merlot to Chardonnay.

Of our 42 hectares, approximately 17 hectares are Syrah, which is our leading variety, and our strength and flagship with the Homage. We have 6 hectares of Chardonnay on the Gravels. When the river meandered out towards Havelock North it left not only gravel, but silty outcrops, and the Chardonnay works well on the silty parts even though it is a warmer site. The Cabernet family-Sauvignon and Franc, is 5 hectares, Merlot 5 hectares, and the rest are a mix. We pulled out a lot of the varietals that were quite fun but not necessarily good for us, as they cannibalized the things we do really well. So we continue to narrow the portfolio. We have three tiers of wine, Homage, Gimblett Gravels, and Hawke's Bay, as well as the new single vineyard wines and Lost Garden range.



Warren Gibson
(Chief Winemaker)

◆Tell me about Syrah clones and the Busby story

The most relevant story is about James Busby who entered Australia in the 1830s and brought with him cuttings from not only France, but around Europe. He also came to New Zealand around the same time and brought Syrah cuttings with him, most likely from Hermitage, and those vines most likely survived in some form through to the 1970s at the Te Kauwhata research center. Dr Alan Limmer, the owner and winemaker at Stonecroft, our next door neighbour at Trinity, was working there at that time, and found a Syrah vine heat trial that was going to be pulled out, and he saved cuttings and brought them to the Bay. They may or may not have been the same clone, but they were from this derivation. He propagated them, and in his words in the early 80s made 'a bucket of wine, then a bathtub of wine, then a couple of barrels and found lots of spice and red liquorice and pepper', and by the mid-80s made a commercial wine.

Alan was friends with John Buck at Te Mata and Dr. Neil McCallum, and gifted cuttings out into the local industry that became the first generation of this clone. It has been called the MS (Mass Selection) clone, but it has so many names and misnomers now that we go back to the original source if we want to do any propagation. We took cuttings from Stonecroft for our own first plantings, and for more planting we take cuttings from our own vines so we know it is authentic. It gives us liquorice, red fruit and spice characters, pepper when the vines are young, with a density and sense of place that the other clones don't.

All up, we have about 10 or 12 different clones which have become commercially available. The other story is the Jaboulet connection. The Wilsons were friendly with the Jaboulets in the Rhone Valley, and John worked there in 1996 and got very friendly with Gerard, who gifted The Wilsons cuttings from their vineyard of the 174 and 383 clones that weren't available in New Zealand at the time. So we had first access and propagated it ourselves. The Homage story and its naming is driven by that connection. On top of that we have several other clones we experimented with as they became available, but MS and 174 are key to our Syrah program.

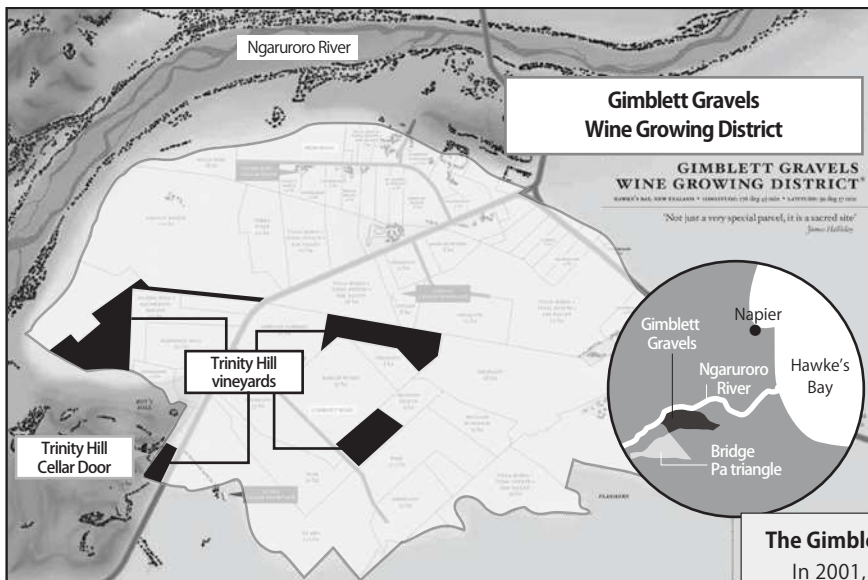
◆How has the fruit and your understanding of the vineyards and soils evolved over time, and how you handle the individual parcels?

From the 17 hectares we create 25 to 30 different wines, with the smallest parcel about 1 ton, and a lot of our best parcels are 2 ton. We have Syrah in each of our three vineyards, they are actually only about 2-3 kilometers apart, yet they are very different in the mixture of gravel, silt and stones. Closer to the river it is stonier and warmer, up to 3 degrees both day and night, so we could be picking 3 weeks earlier between the different vineyards. Then the clones, crop loading and vine age all come into play.

Some sites are more challenging if we have a difficult March and April with rain. On the Craggy Range side where it warmer, if we have a very dry season, it may be our best; if we have early rain, we go to our oldest vineyards which generally deliver every year. And the newer Irongate Vineyard is now starting to get vine age, at 10-12 years it is ready for our top wines. It takes that long, you can get sucked in and enamoured by young vine fruit, the wine is good, but at 2-3 years in the bottle it starts showing its true colours – they look good early on but fall off when they get older. We go back to our roots to what has given us strength in the past.

Stylistically, we consider Syrah to be like making Pinot Noir from the winemaking point-of-view. We are playing with things that can alter the aromatics, structure and age-ability, like whole cluster. Some parcels go 100%

Prices do not include Consumption Tax. RRP= Recommended Retail Price.



whole cluster, or partial, some parts of the vineyard respond to that better than others. There is no exact science, a lot of it is intuition, thinking on your feet at harvest time, and logistics such as is there a tank that will make this work, or not, and what will we do after fermentation, can we keep it warm etc. The great thing is we get so many parcels, we have more than we need and always find something that is going to be very good.

◆How have you evolved your style in the winery over time?

Yeast is just a vehicle to get the fermentation through. We use indigenous fermentation mostly for our Chardonnay. For the Syrah, it's a combination that comes down to risk management. The yeast management is not so important for Syrah, we just want the fermentation to be sound and get through to dryness, which is much more important than being cute with it. We are happier to be cute with Chardonnay, because we have lots of individual lots we can manage through the year, but the last thing you want is a stuck red fermentation. So we're a bit more safe with Syrah.

Our best wines will often have 30-40% whole cluster, which gives the spice, different aromatics and textural side to it. With oak, we are moving away from the smaller barrique style. It's an ongoing debate in the wine world in general, initially we were very strong on small barriques for our Homage and Gimblett Gravels. But as we get more confidence in the vine age, we are moving away from them. We still use some small oak to give some dramatics, but we want the beauty to be there without too much make-up on the wine, so we have moved to large, large format, using custom 5,300L neutral oak ovals made to work with our program.

My best analogy is from a music point of view, people ask why are we using stainless steel, and the ovals instead of small oak. To me stainless steel is fine, it's like a CD, too clean and not doing anything special. Whereas the ovals are more like vinyl, they give the wine some life, not really adding anything specific.

◆How was the 2021 harvest?

2021 is the classic "another great vintage" line, which is what the winemakers always say, isn't it! But the last three, even four vintages, 2018 was very good after 2017 which was difficult, though it was a bit producer dependent, but then 2019, 2020, and 2021 have all been slightly different but excellent vintages, so we have had 4 in a row.

We are just pressing off our Hawke's Bay Syrah right now and it is super dramatic. A lot of people would be happy to have it as their top wine. It has been a particularly good for Syrah and Chardonnay this year.

The Gimblett Gravels

In 2001, wine producers and growers from this special area formed the Gimblett Gravels Winegrowers Association, the only wine region in the world demarcated by soil type. Covering 800ha, the Gimblett Gravels Wine Growing District is strictly determined by the gravelly soils laid down by the old Ngaruroro River, which were exposed after a huge flood in the 1860s. 90% of the Gravels is planted in red grape varieties, pioneered by Chris Pask and Alan Limmer, whose Busby cuttings were the only Syrah vines in New Zealand at the time.

Gimblett Gravels Wine Growing Association — gimblettgravels.com

Hawke's Bay

Historically, the North Island is original center of wine production in New Zealand, starting in Auckland and then Hawkes Bay. The Marist Missionaries planted the first vines in 1851, and Te Mata Estate started producing commercial quantities of wines in the 1870s. The Bay shares a familiar history with other wine regions and countries after the turn of the century of falling production due to the depression, prohibition and war, but led the revival of commercial production in New Zealand in the 1960s and 70s due to the climate.

While Hawke's Bay is a very large region, for premium wines the great vintages come from either the very gravelly alluvial soils of the Gimblett Gravels or Bridge Pa Triangle, or the floodplains of one of the four rivers fanning out through the Bay. Producing New Zealand's finest Bordeaux and Rhone style reds and Chardonnay, today the Bay is New Zealand's second largest wine region after Marlborough, though much smaller in size.

《From Village Cellars》

We first met with Trinity Hill founder, John Hancock, when he was winemaker at Morton Estate, one of the first New Zealand wineries Village Cellars distributed in Japan. Through John we began handling Trinity Hill, starting with the 2006 vintage for Hawke's Bay Syrah and Gimblett Gravels Syrah. John always used the name 'Syrah' to communicate that the style is different from New World 'Shiraz'.

PICK UP WINE

CODE 11270



**Trinity Hill Gimblett Gravels
The Gimblett 2016 (Screw Cap)**

Origin: Hawke's Bay, New Zealand
Varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon 43%, Cabernet Franc 41%, Merlot 14%, Malbec 2% Alc. 12.9%
RRP **¥ 4,500**



"The Gimblett" is traditionally made from a blend of Bordeaux grape varieties. The Cabernet family gives structure and fresh aromatics, the Merlot gives richness and mid-palate weight, with the Malbec helping with complexity, density and colour.

CODE 11366



**Trinity Hill Gimlet Gravels
Syrah 2018 (Screw Cap)**

Origin: Hawke's Bay, New Zealand
Varietals: Syrah, Viognier Alc. 12.6%
RRP **¥ 4,800**



Syrah grapes are hand-picked and fermented in parcels separated by individual sites and clones. 30% whole bunch fermentation contributes freshness, aromatics and structure. After blending, it is aged in 5,000L barrels for 8 months to slowly mature the inherent beauty, purity and freshness.