

The S factor

A dream begun in Germany has borne fruit with the Wairarapa label Schubert.



Warren Barton

KAI SCHUBERT is a kindred spirit — a big bloke whose passion was food, till he discovered wine and now, like me, enjoys too much of both. In Kai's case, the discovery was made when he was still at school in Waiblingen, near Stuttgart, in Germany, and his class went on a trip to Alsace, in France, where locals wash down their foie gras with delicious late-picked aromatic whites.

It was apparently all too much for the young man, who, had he not gone on the trip, might have become Germany's answer to our Peter Jackson. But instead of a career in photography and film-making, which had been his hobbies, he decided to become a winemaker.

Kai served his apprenticeship under Erni Loosen at the renowned Dr Loosen Estate in Bernkastel, which makes some of the finest rieslings in the world. It was here, through Loosen, that he also developed a taste for pinot noir and later, at Geisenheim, the German wine-making and viticultural institute, that he developed the passion to produce the classic red, which brought him to New Zealand.

Why here? Because, he says: "It blew us away. We really didn't find any bad wines down here. It is the holy place." And he says that having worked in Oregon and having also looked at possible sites for the venture in Victoria's Yarra Valley and South Australia's Adelaide Hills.

What Kai, his partner, Marion Deimling, and their original partner, Karl Heinz Johner, finally settled on was 40 hectares at East Taratahi in the Wairarapa. Karl has, however, since gone his own successful way, leaving his former partners to make a big impression with the wines they are producing off the 13.5 hectares of vineyard so far planted, another 1.5 hectares that surround their cottage at the end of Cam-



Making a big impression: Kai Schubert and partner Marion Deimling in their Martinborough vineyard. Picture: MARK ROUND

bridge Rd in Martinborough and fruit from Hawke's Bay.

Just four years after the release of the distinctive S for Schubert label, the wines are now listed at such acclaimed restaurants as the French Laundry in Yountville, California, the Aureole in Las Vegas, Chi-

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nois in Tokyo, and others in New York, Chicago and New Orleans. And in Germany, of course.

My bet is that, as production grows, you will also see them listed more widely in New Zealand restaurants and available in more than the selected fine wine outlets that have them now.

The main appeal is in the robust, highly coloured and flavourful reds that Kai and Marion make at their Greytown winery, as well as a selection of whites that include two unusual but increasingly popular blends. One of them, a dessert wine named Dolce, is built around Muller-Thurgau, the

grape developed from sylvaner and riesling by the professor at Geisenheim who gave it his name. The other, Tribianco, also includes pinot gris and chardonnay.

At this stage, though, the stars of the eight wines in the range are the big, black-berried, tarry, tobaccoed 2001 Hawke's Bay

Wairarapa Pinot Noir (\$45) is robust stuff: redolent of berries, dark cherries with a lick of chocolate and a kiss of spicy French oak. The debut 2002 Marion's Vineyard Pinot Noir is slightly more fragrant, only slightly lighter, but, at \$30, cheaper, too.

The 2001 Hawke's Bay Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot (\$38) is a 50-50 blend that exhibits the same sort of power and finesse but would probably benefit from at least a few months in the cellar.

The whites include a well-made 2002 citrus and stonefruit Hawke's Bay chardonnay (\$25), a crisp and limey 2002 Hawke's Bay sauvignon blanc (\$20), the lush, apricot and honey 2000 Dolce (\$25) and the Tribianco, which, in spite of the unusual mix, is an absolutely delightful and refreshing wine. It sells at \$20 a bottle.

Dolce and the the Schubert pinot, cabernet sauvignon, syrah and cabernet merlot are also available in 375ml and larger bottles, which means there's no excuse for balking at the prices if you want to try them.

Good thinking, eh?

(Gimblett Road) cabernet sauvignon that won the trophy for this variety at last year's Air New Zealand Wine Awards and a stunning syrah from the same vintage. Most of the fruit for this wine came for the first time from the East Taratahi, some from Hawke's Bay. The result is a fragrant but full-flavoured, brooding syrah with a liberal shake of pepper and a matching twist of spice. Both wines have a \$45 price tag.

The pinot noirs are a work in progress. Both are made entirely from Wairarapa fruit and both show the promise the Germans believed they would find in this part of the world. The 2002 Schubert 2002