



Pinot Noir, New Zealand Style

By Michael Franz

Wednesday, February 23, 2005;

“...With the slumping dollar jacking up prices for Côte d’Or Burgundies, pinot noir lovers need some good news. And here it is: The flow of high-quality pinot from New Zealand has turned from a trickle to a torrent during the past few years, and the wines in this new wave are not only numerous but also remarkably consistent.

..... To appreciate this Kiwi accomplishment fully, it is important to recognize that pinot noir is difficult to grow and craft into fine wine. The pinot grape’s thin skin leaves it vulnerable to a whole slew of maladies in the vineyard. Once in the winery, it must be lavished with careful attention, as pinot’s extremely delicate juice will reveal many little winemaking flaws that would be undetectable in a big, robust cabernet.
.....Cabernet has loyalists, but pinot has lovers. Pinot lovers endure one disappointment after another because pinot noir -- when really right -- is incomparably wonderful.

..... The speed with which New Zealand has achieved excellence with pinot noir is truly unparalleled, and the consistency of the wines reaching us proves indisputably that New Zealand is among the four or five best places in the world for growing this grape. ...

....Top performers from my recent tastings are recommended below in order of preference, with regions of origin, approximate prices, and importers indicated in parentheses:”

OUTSTANDING

Schubert Wines, Wairarapa 2003 (\$52, New Zealand Wine Imports): Impressively rich but not remotely heavy or obvious, this stunning newcomer is skillfully wrought.