

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The rare vintner who makes wine from grapes only

Clive Dougall had a dream to make wine using nothing but the fruit, which is much harder than it sounds.



Clive Dougall tending to his organically grown grapes at Deep Down.

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The last time I saw winemaker Clive Dougall was at Seresin Estate in Marlborough, New Zealand, where he showed me a few pinot noirs he was producing without any additions at all – no added yeast, no added acid, no added preservatives at bottling. Just organically grown grapes.

Now, five years later, I'm watching Dougall on my laptop screen as he tells me about the pinot noir he's making, still without any additions. Except he's no longer at Seresin: he left in 2018, started consulting to organic vineyards, and established his own wine company, Deep Down, in partnership with Auckland-based wine marketer, Peter Lorimer, to produce pinot and other small batches of single-vineyard Marlborough wines.



The goal at Deep Down Wines in Marlborough, New Zealand, is to keep everything but the grapes out.

“Peter’s a really awesome dude,” says Dougall in his still-recognisable London accent (he migrated to NZ more than two decades ago). “He’s a Kiwi, bit younger than me, used to be a sommelier in London at The Dorchester, then sold wine for Lea & Sandeman before moving back to Auckland. And he’s passionate about organics. It just seemed like a natural fit: he can run the business, and I can run the winemaking.”

The key to Deep Down, says Dougall, is transparency. As well as being made from certified organic grapes and having as little as possible added to the products – or, in the case of the pinot noir, nothing at all – the wines in the Deep Down range also list ingredients on the label if and when they are added, something that very few wine producers are willing to do.



Sauvignon blanc grapes at Deep Down Wines, where little – if anything – is added to the wine, except of course the grapes.

“It’s something I’m passionate about,” he says. “I believe there’s going to be more and more conversation about what’s in our food in the future, and I just wanted to be open about what we do.”

The label of the Deep Down Sauvignon Blanc, for example, says it was made from certified grapes, using pectolytic enzyme for juice clarification, bentonite for protein stability, sulphur dioxide gas as a preservative, and yeast Actiflore BO213 and yeast hull nutrient to restart stuck fermentation.

“It started out fermenting spontaneously,” says Dougall, “but then 'stuck' [stopped fermenting] with about 10 grams of sugar per litre left. And then it started to go through malo [malolactic fermentation, in which bacteria convert sharp malic acid in the grape juice to softer-tasting lactic acid in the wine, not normally encouraged in

Marlborough sauvignon blanc]. It was a bloody nightmare.”

When he was at Seresin, Dougall had dozens of larger batches of wine to play with, and was able to blend away ferments that didn’t work out. But with the Deep Down range – just four small batches of wine, from four different vineyard sites – he can’t do that.

“Each wine is like a transparent window into each site,” he says. “My options aren’t big, you know. I just had to trust myself, and follow my intuition.”

So, he let the malo proceed, and inoculated with a commercial yeast to finish the alcoholic fermentation. And he has been refreshingly up-front on the label about doing that, especially considering his ideal is not to add anything at all during the winemaking. “It’s not an either-or situation. It’s just about doing the best you can with the fruit every year.”— Clive Dougall, Deep Down Wines

“I don’t want any of my wines to have any adjustments if I can help it,” he says. “For instance, I won’t allow myself to change the acid. I feel, as a winemaker, if you need to add acid to juice, it means you’ve picked the grapes at the wrong time.

"I’m not saying I won’t add acid if I need to. I’m not going to put wine in a bottle that’s high pH and unstable just because I didn’t want to add acid. I’ve remortgaged my house to set this business up. But my desire is *not* to do that.

"Similarly, my desire is to make sulphur-free pinot noir. But if a wine needs sulphur I’ll add a small part, when it’s needed. It’s not an either-or situation. It’s just about doing the best you can with the fruit every year.”

Luckily, in 2019, the grapes he sourced for the first Deep Down pinot behaved themselves in the winery and he was able to stick to his principles and take the wine all the way through to the bottle – without adding a thing.

“Peter and I believe now’s the right time for this approach,” says Dougall. “It’s time wine producers started shouting about these things on their labels. Being organic, vegan, single vineyard, low or no additions – all of those things are key for the market now.”

Tasting – deep down

2019 Deep Down Sauvignon Blanc [Marlborough]

Unlike the vast majority of Marlborough sauvignon blancs out there in bottle-shop land, this one naturally went through a secondary, softening malolactic fermentation. It's still unmistakably Marlborough savvy to smell and taste – bursting with passionfruit and sugar-snap pea – but it has a deliciously unusual, creamy, satisfying texture on the tongue.

2019 Deep Down Chardonnay [Marlborough]

This is a pleasant Marlborough chardonnay with some herbal, honeyed aromatics and a chalky lemon character that reminds me of flat blanc de blanc champagne. But for me, it's the least impressive of the four wines in the Deep Down range.

2019 Deep Down Arneis [Marlborough]

There are very few examples of the north-west Italian white grape arneis grown in New Zealand so this is a curio, really, made in very limited quantity – only a few cases were shipped to Australia – but, perhaps predictably, it's the wine that is turning heads. Picked fully ripe, but still with high acid, it has the spicy, rich vinosity of, say, a pinot gris, and the long, steely backbone of a bone-dry riesling. Gorgeous.

2019 Deep Down Pinot Noir [Marlborough]

Dougall gained a lot of experience making relatively large volumes of pinot noir with nothing added – no yeast, no preservatives – when he was winemaker at Seresin, and it clearly shows in this excellent wine. Quite deeply coloured for a Marlborough pinot, it has dark, seductive aromas of plum and black cherry, and dense, savoury, even earthy, flavours in the mouth, finishing snappy and dry. Very good.

For more information about the wines, head to the [website](#).