



MEDIA RELEASE

21 October 2005

For immediate release

“EMBARGOED RELEASE until 10.30pm Friday 21st October”

HAWKE’S BAY WINE THE CHAMPION

HAWKE’S Bay further cemented itself as a hub of top flight wines with the 2004 Gunn Estate Skeetfield Chardonnay taking the Champion of the Show award at the International Chardonnay Challenge in Gisborne today. The 2004 chardonnay headed off 460 others from Australia, South Africa, Canada and New Zealand, to take the coveted award.

Senior wine maker Tony Bish says the win tops an awesome run for the vineyard but he always knew it was a winner.

“Right from the start I knew,” he said. “When we finalized the blend, I said it was a gold medal wine.”

And he was right, the 2004 Skeetfield Chardonnay already has a clutch of gold medals and trophies to its credit and is in the running to take out the crown as champion chardonnay in Australasia.

“The weather conditions were just perfect – the harvest in autumn was dry and we got a great concentration of flavours as a result.”

The grapes come predominantly from Allan Gunn’s 30-hectare vineyard in the Ohiti Valley. Allan is the brother of Gunn Estate winemaker Denis. “It has certainly produced many a gold-medal winning wine.”

The vineyard is planted on the Gunn’s old skeet field. Allan’s father Digger was a national skeet field champion for many years. Both their father and grandfather practiced their skeet shooting on the field for many years. It has now been moved up the hill.

Allan was on hand to receive the award at a gala awards dinner in Gisborne.

About 300 cases of the Skeetfield Chadonnay, which was aged in premium oak barrels, were produced.

“This is a tremendous result for the Gunn Estate and for the success of Hawke’s Bay chardonnay,” says Bish.

Competition director Prue Younger felt that having the three international judges had brought a whole new perspective to the event.

“It brought a further international perspective into the wine judging of an event that is no longer deemed just a New Zealand competition.”

Entries were 30 percent up on last year, with 18 percent of entries coming from Australia.

It is the sixth year the International Chardonnay Challenge has been held and each year entries and interest from around the globe grows.

Younger would like to see the Challenge more aligned to the Chardonnay du Monde Competition held in France each year and aims to have the gold medal winners enter the show in the future.

Chairman of judges Larry McKenna said he felt it fantastic that New Zealand could come out on top of an international competition like the chardonnay challenge.

“Especially when the reserve champion wine was also a beautifully crafted example but quite different style.”

Two countries were recognized in the top two and two styles quite different in their own right.

“That shows the strength of this show.”

The fact that the champion wine had featured in other shows was a reflection of the quality of shows like the International Chardonnay Challenge.

Overall, he felt that while the show was not “over-endowed” with gold medals, there was a “normal” amount of medals given.

“The 2003 and 2004 vintages particularly show more under-ripe characteristics than was expected, resulting in a no more than average medal count,” said McKenna.

He was pleased to see wineries had taken on board comments made at last year’s challenge about the excessive use of oak in wines that did not need it.

“This year we saw a big improvement in harmony in the oaked classes. There is genuine desire to produce less oaked chardonnays.”

He was sure the challenge would attract far more international interest next year.

“Especially from Australia,” he said. “They have done particularly well.”

BACKGROUND

With its focus on the single varietal chardonnay, the International Chardonnay Challenge provides a unique opportunity for the promotion of the main wine style of the Gisborne region. The 2004 competition drew 355 entries from 145 different wineries.

The International Chardonnay Challenge is grateful for the support from premium 2005 sponsors: Riversun, Gilmours, Eastland Community Trust, Harveys, GisVin, NZ GrapeGrower, Westfalia and Charta Packaging.

Website: www.internationalchardonnaychallenge.com

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