

SUSIE & PETER NEW ZEALAND WINES OF THE YEAR 2026

Susie Barrie MW and Peter Richards MW, UK



Pegasus Bay

Pegasus Bay is a consistently outstanding producer in North Canterbury with a great story. Founder Ivan Donaldson got the wine bug so badly that he started making wine in between seeing patients as a neurologist - and press-ganged his family into helping out. Riesling is its largest production (unique in New Zealand wine) but a wide range of varieties flourish here, including Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, with fair prices attached. The house style, according to Ed Donaldson, is, 'everything dialled up a bit,' and we can confirm that the wines are just sensational across the range. For this reason, they more than deserve their Best Producer award.

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Pegasus Bay Bel Canto Dry Riesling 2024, North Canterbury (13.5%) 95 points – BEST PRODUCER



Pegasus Bay is unquestionably one of New Zealand's standard-bearer producers, consistently making characterful, elegant wines across an impressive range of styles from their base in Waipara, North Canterbury. Riesling is one of the core varieties at the estate, accounting for around a third of the home-vineyard plantings, and when we asked Ed Donaldson about the house style of Riesling, he smiled: 'everything is kind of dialled up a bit.' By this he means the deliberately long hang time of the grapes on the vine (and late picking) gives intense flavours, while the site gives vibrant acidity. Plus, there's often a phenolic component to the wines, lending sinew and structure. The Rieslings usually have a touch of botrytis in the mix too - though interestingly, there was no botrytis in 2024, so this is a slight difference in the wines from this year. Bel Canto is a drier style (they make five different Riesling iterations as things stand) but this is still a fleshy, pithy, flinty, smoky style with vibrant acidity, phenolic grip and engaging hints of ginger, roasted lemon and orange peel. There's definitely a purity to this vintage but it should develop well in the short to medium term.



Pegasus Bay

Virtuoso Chardonnay 2021

North Canterbury (13.5%)

97 points – BEST PRODUCER



Neurologist Ivan Donaldson caught the wine bug when his girlfriend Christine gave him a book called, 'Wine'. He travelled the wine regions of Europe before returning to New Zealand, planting one of the first vineyards of modern times in Canterbury – and marrying Chris. Garage winemaking filled in time between seeing patients and, later on, their four sons were press-ganged into helping establish a new vineyard site in 1985 in the Waipara Valley, North Canterbury, where warm days, cool nights and dry autumns give ample opportunity to make expressive, intense wines. This became Pegasus Bay, still a proudly family owned and run producer whose house style is described cheerfully by third son Ed Donaldson as, 'everything dialled up a bit.' In other words, wines of unashamed complexity, intensity and character – and yet which are moreish, balanced, elegant and insanely drinkable. Pegasus Bay's stellar results in this year's tasting saw it win the Best Producer award, testament to the joy and excitement that emanate from these special bottles, and which we would happily commend to any wine lover. Unusually for a single site producer, Pegasus Bay makes outstanding wines from a whole range of grape varieties, from Sauvignon Blanc to Malbec via Cabernet Franc – but beyond the core varieties of Riesling and Pinot Noir, Chardonnay also shines. This Virtuoso bottling is only made in the best years, a selection of barrels from the oldest plantings in the vineyard. Vinification is Burgundian in style, with 10 months in large French oak barrels or puncheons, 40% new. This is a wine that makes your taste buds stand to attention, with pretty much everything you could throw at a quality Chardonnay in the mix, then with a spicy energetic tension and minerality to tie it all together and make it compellingly drinkable. Toasty, nutty, flinty, smoky, appley...a monumental (and monumentally enjoyable) wine. No wonder Ed Donaldson says: 'I personally think New Zealand Chardonnay is one of the best value white wine bargains of the world.'



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Pegasus Bay Riesling 2024 North Canterbury (12.5%) 94 points – BEST PRODUCER



Pegasus Bay has a way with Riesling that's hard to resist. (Riesling, in fact, is their largest production white, probably the only New Zealand winery to do this.) This estate version is their calling card: harvested a little earlier than the Bel Canto (see above), hence higher natural acidity that is then counter-balanced by higher residual sugar (around 25 g/l). The result is a delectable balance of fleshy appley honeyed indulgence. It's slightly purer than some previous vintages (there was no botrytis in the 2024 vintage) but this is still classically extrovert, intense Pegasus Bay Riesling, with a flinty edge, phenolic sinew and exotic ginger spice. Despite the sugar, it's still pretty dry on the finish, just with extra fleshiness and a fine textural counter-balance to the vivid acidity. This has to be one of the great Riesling bargains of the world – it's certainly a firm fixture in our wine racks at home. What's more, it ages beautifully, and if you don't have the patience or self-control to do this yourself, the winery now offers aged releases. (The 2015 Estate Riesling was tasting beautiful in 2025.) Ed Donaldson describes how Pegasus Bay's Rieslings have evolved over the years, away from imitating lighter-bodied German styles to embracing the natural intensity, zestiness, richness and 'orange peel' character that their site gives. It's a winning formula.



Pegasus Bay Pinot Noir 2023 North Canterbury (13%) 96 points – BEST PRODUCER



‘There’s a lot going on with our Pinots,’ muses Ed Donaldson, and he’s not wrong. Pegasus Bay has made a laudable name for itself by crafting wines of serious, sometimes even outrageous personality and winning swagger. This Pinot brings together aged vines and a mixture of 12 different clones plus a range of winemaking techniques (including 40% whole bunch and 30% new oak barrels). The result is a serious, expressive, intense jolt of autumnal energy, packed full of wild berry, woodsmoke, ferruginous flavour and with a grippy yet elegant tannic framework. As with so many of the Pegasus Bay wines, it’s fundamentally gastronomic, so one to put with food, and it will also age well. (The 2015 Aged Release was showing wonderfully truffley maturity and complexity in 2025.) Coming back to the vineyards, part of the reason for the intensity in Pegasus Bay’s wines is the low yields – sometimes painfully so. Ed explains that they’re regularly getting half the quantities that other comparable New Zealand Pinot Noir vineyards will be achieving, sometimes significantly less. Such are the lengths that this quality-oriented producer will go to in the search for personality and age-worthiness in their wines.

