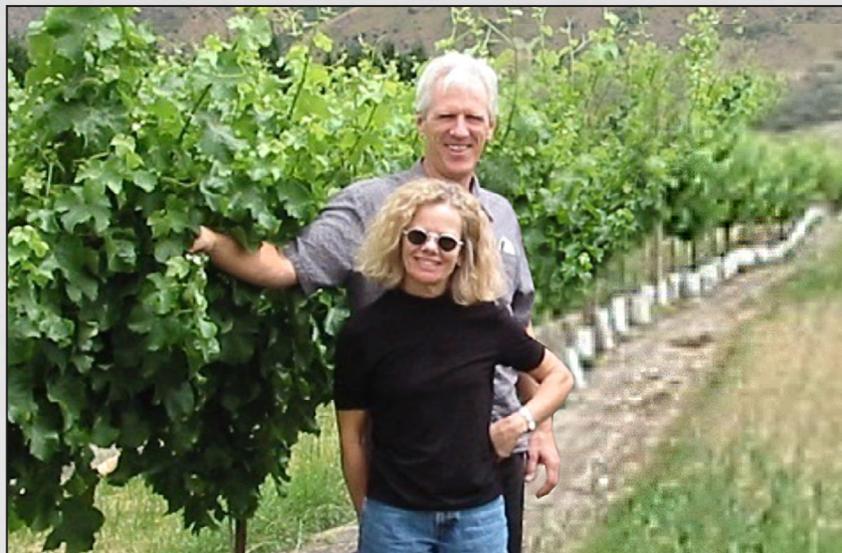


# THE SACRAMENTO BEE

## FOOD & WINE



Wednesday, May 29, 2013



**John and Lane Giguere** of Crew Wine Co. of Zamora recognized the potential appeal of New Zealand sauvignon blanc long before forming their company. They had their wine made in Marlborough and shipped to Zamora.

## By way of New Zealand

### Chasing Venus is made in Marlborough and shipped to Zamora

BY MIKE DUNN  
*Special to The Bee*

**W**ine competitions traditionally organize entries by varietals or styles. A few also define classes by price. A growing number, inspired by wine's historic association with place of origin and by an attempt to level the playing field, arrange classes by region, or what in wine circles is called appellation.

That's how they do it at the Dallas Morning News and TexSom Wine Competition, the 2013 version of which was convened in February.

There, the four-person panel on which I sat had made its way through several uninspiring flights of blended red wines from various California regions just before we hunkered down to a class we were confident would revive our flagging palates with lifting fruit and zesty acidity.

That would be sauvignon blanc from the Marlborough region of New Zealand. Of the 32 vintages of 2011 and 2012 we tasted, nine were awarded gold medals, an exceptionally high proportion for any class of wine. Only four got no award at all. All the gold-medal wines, incidentally, were the 2012 vintage.

What accounts for such an impressive showing? The same reason, no doubt, that explains

why the export of sauvignon blanc from New Zealand to the United States soared 25 percent last year, despite the rising value of New Zealand currency and a panting American economy still trying to regain traction: New Zealand sauvignon blanc is reliable; when consumers grab a bottle they know what kind of wine they are getting, almost without exception: A white wine that charges the palate with citrusy aromas, the flavors of fresh fruit, and tingling acidity. They are lean and vibrant wines that generally provoke consistently predictable descriptors, such as herbaceous, assertive, razor, pungent, zesty, crisp. "Cat pee" crops up now and then in a chuckling but positive way, as well as "gooseberry," from those who are familiar with gooseberries.

For the most part, the class we tasted provided all that. The letdowns were uncharacteristically soft, muted or flawed.

New Zealand sauvignon blanc, it should be noted, also provides value in today's marketplace, with most still priced less than \$20 per bottle. In her follow-up report in the Dallas Morning News about gold-medal wines priced \$15 or less, competition director Rebecca Murphy included two of our sauvignon blancs among the 10 wines she recommended. They were the Starborough (\$10) and the Wither Hills (\$12/\$13).

The potential downside for New Zealand

sauvignon blanc as Americans have come to know and love it is that it can be seen as too constant, with one release interchangeable with another. "They all taste alike," I can imagine some wine enthusiasts concluding.

In going over my notes, however, I did find variation among the gold-medal sauvignon blancs in intensity and scale, even though all were from the same region and the same vintage. The aforementioned Starborough, for example, had the dryness and refinement often identified with sauvignon blancs from France's Sancerre, while the Wither Hills combined Marlborough's typical effusiveness with an unexpected elegance. Other gold-medal entries showed other sorts of shading: The Sileni was as citrusy and creamy as Key lime pie, which could not be said of any of its competitors; the Forefathers Wax Eye Vineyard had more green-apple fruit, minerality and overall complexity than others; and the Spy Valley was a veritable fruit basket, offering all sorts of suggestions, from pink grapefruit to pineapple.

An interpretation that tended to be rounder and heftier than others but with fruit no less focused and intense was the Chasing Venus 2012 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc. It's more an up-front take on the varietal, leading with fresh suggestions of herbaceousness and citric fruit and trailing with an acidity that while refreshing was more tapered than barbed.

[www.crewwines.com](http://www.crewwines.com)

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## Chasing Venus 2012 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc

**By the numbers:** 13 percent alcohol, 6,600 cases, \$16.

**Context:** The Giguieres recommend that the sauvignon blanc be paired with pungent cheeses drizzled with honey or a seared tuna salad spiced lightly with a wasabi dressing, or simply taken on its own poolside.

**Availability:** In the Sacramento area, the Chasing Venus is stocked by Nugget markets and Taylor's Market. It also can be ordered through Crew's website, [www.crewwines.com](http://www.crewwines.com).

Read more:

<http://www.sacbee.com/2013/05/29/5453435/by-way-of-new-zealandchasing-venus.html>

Though I've no figures to verify this, I suspect that Sacramento, especially during the summer, is a keen market for sauvignon blanc. The evidence to back up this view is purely anecdotal – the great number and range of sauvignon blancs to be found in the region's grocery stores and wine shops. Several of the gold-medal sauvignon blancs from Dallas can be found hereabouts, but perhaps none more than the Chasing Venus.

There's a strong local tie to account for that. Chasing Venus is one of several brands created by Crew Wine Co. of Zamora in the Dungen Hills of Yolo County. While Crew is focused largely on making California wines, its owners, John and Lane Giguere, saw the potential quality and appeal of New Zealand sauvignon blanc long before they created the company. Thus, they have the wine made at Marlborough and ship it all to Zamora.

"I think this is the most balanced sauvignon blanc we have made. The cool growing season brought out more herbaceous qualities that blend well with the pronounced grapefruit," said Lane Giguere.

And 2012 was an exceptionally cool and challenging growing year in Marlborough, which is at the northeast corner of the south island, extending west and southwest from Cloudy Bay, across Cook Strait from Wellington City at the southern stretches of the north island. A wet spring was followed by a cool, damp and cloudy summer. Yields in some vineyards were down by as much as a third.

The 2012 Chasing Venus sauvignon blanc was made with grapes from two Marlborough vineyards, Griggs, in an old riverbed against the appellation's eastern hills, and Burdon-Shutkowski, in the region's southern reaches.

As was Cook Strait, the name Chasing Venus was inspired by explorer James Cook, who as a captain in Britain's Royal Navy was dispatched in 1769 to track the planet Venus in its transit across the face of the sun. That assignment completed at Tahiti, he commanded the HMS Endeavor on to map New Zealand and the east coast of Australia, which he claimed for Britain. Today, he's recognized more for that than for chasing

Venus, though his cover story lives on as a spirited example of New Zealand's prowess with sauvignon blanc.

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*Wine critic and competition judge Mike Dunne's selections are based solely on open and blind tastings, judging at competitions and visits to wine regions. Read his blog at [www.ayearinwine.com](http://www.ayearinwine.com) and reach him at [mikedunne@winegigs.com](mailto:mikedunne@winegigs.com).*

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