

# The Busy Wine Lover's Guide to Cloudy Bay

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## The history

The Cloudy Bay winery, from [Marlborough](#) in New Zealand's South Island is a genuinely iconic estate, but at first glance it doesn't fit the classic brand template for estates owned by Louis Vuiton Moët Hennessy (LVMH), the French luxury goods conglomerate. Most of the other properties from the stable have long track records; one of them, Château d'Yquem (1572), was founded before Europeans discovered New Zealand. Others such as Ruinart (1727), Veuve Clicquot (1772), Cheval Blanc (1832) and Krug (1843) all predate [Cloudy Bay Vineyards](#) by well over a century. Cloudy Bay's portfolio has, however, also been evolving for 30 years now, while they continue to consistently produce one of the world's classic [Sauvignon Blanc](#) wines.

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Founded by Australian David Hohnen in 1985, Cloudy Bay has rapidly become an internationally famous wine brand. Hohnen had already launched one highly successful pioneering wine estate in 1970 – Cape Mentelle winery, in the Margaret River. In the 32 years since Hohnen came to Marlborough to establish the vineyard, Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc has been the acknowledged standard bearer for the rapidly growing Marlborough region. Since April 2015, Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc has consistently been the most searched for New Zealand wine on Wine-Searcher, and it has held a place in our top 500 most searched for wines continually since January 2014.

## The people

In 2003, Hohnen sold both wineries to Champagne producer Veuve Clicquot, a move that then saw them subsumed into LVMH. The winery was attractive to LVMH not just because of its international reputation but also because it gave them an opportunity to produce a high-quality *methode traditionnelle* sparkling wine in New Zealand, in the shape of the Pelorus brand which had been produced there since 1987.

Another Australian, winemaker Kevin Judd, guided Cloudy Bay's through its first 25 vintages before leaving, in 2009, to establish his own Greywacke label. Some input into the sparkling wine production has come from Dom Pérignon's chef du cave Richard Geoffroy, but principally from Australian winemaking guru Tony Jordan, the man who also set up Moët's Green Point winery in the Yarra Valley. Today, the everyday fate of the Cloudy Bay winery again lies largely in the hands of Australians, with senior winemaker Tim Heath and viticulturist Jim White both hailing from there. The estate's newly appointed director is, however, a Chinese national – Yang Shen – who was previously estate director for Moët Hennessey's new Shangri-La winery, making their Ao Yun wine in China's Yunnan province.

## The wines

As well as the famous Sauvignon Blanc and its sparkling wines, Cloudy Bay also makes excellent [Chardonnay](#) and [Pinot Noir](#). In 1996 Te Koko a premium Sauvignon Blanc aged in French oak, joined the range – it is an atypical style of Sauvignon, with a rich rounded palate, that ages well and provides interesting food pairings. 2010 saw a new departure for Cloudy Bay, producing a [Central Otago](#) Pinot Noir called Te Wahi. Originally Te Wahi was made from fruit sourced from growers but, having found it difficult to gain a consistent fruit source, Cloudy Bay bought Northburn Station's vineyard and cellar door in 2016. The first few vintages of this wine show it to be developing

rapidly into a very accomplished wine with excellent depth and structure and more of the black fruit elements expected from Central Otago Pinot Noir.

Cloudy Bay's Sauvignon Blanc has defined the style of Sauvignon Blanc produced in the Marlborough wine region for three decades, yet it is not a terroir-driven wine linked to one particular terroir. Cloudy Bay's first vintages were in fact made with purchased grapes, as their own vineyards were still being established. Today, they own 340 hectares of vines (20 of which are in Central Otago) and manage a further 75 hectares – but their Marlborough wines are not now, and have never been, single estate wines. Today, roughly 50 percent of the fruit for the Sauvignon Blanc is purchased from growers as is all the fruit for their sparkling wines. For the Pinot Noir, however, the approach is different – Cloudy Bay grows 80 percent of the fruit for their Marlborough wines, and the Te Wahi is now made entirely from the company's own vineyards. The trend has been to increase their vineyard holdings, their most recent purchase being the Staete Landt vineyard on Rapaura Road in Marlborough.

Pinot Noir, originally planted near the winery in the Wairau Valley, is now almost totally taken from the heavier, more vigorous soils of the Southern Valleys. Vineyards on the lighter, freer-draining soils surrounding the winery have now been replanted with Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay.



© LVMH | The wines overseen by senior winemaker Tim Heath (L) and viticulturist Jim White draw thousands through the winery's cellar door each year.

### **Shifting focus**

The team is eager not to be seen just as producers of white wine. They have been working hard to build the reputation of their Pinot Noirs, and attention has been paid to improved clonal selection and better sites. While the Pinot Noir clones in most of the older (15-20yrs) blocks are 10/5 and Clone 5, those planted since 1999 have used a mix of Dijon clones (114, 115, 667, 777, 828, 943) and the Abel or "gumboot" clone. They have refined the style and seek to produce wines with more consistent style, weight and richness, but one that retains the bright, lifted red fruit typical of Marlborough Pinot Noir.

Through its history the estate has slowly narrowed its offering, coming to focus on its three key varietals. In the process of refinement through the last 25 years, the company has gradually pulled out the tiny amount of Chenin Blanc once planted near the vineyard, abandoned Cabernet Sauvignon (which proved hard to ripen) and pulled out Gewürztraminer. More recently, in 2010, Riesling production was stopped.

The winery complex has also evolved, following a fire in 2009 which destroyed the old guest house, architects Paul Rolfe designed an award winning new hospitality center, affectionately dubbed The Shack in honor of its simpler predecessor.

## Consistency and class

What is quite remarkable about Cloudy Bay has been its consistent quality and accessible pricing. Demand for the estate's Sauvignon Blanc is strong and I understand production has risen to somewhere in the region of 100,000 cases a year (but the winery won't discuss production volumes). A few commentators have suggested the quality of this benchmark wine may have declined as production has increased. However, looking at Wine-Searcher's aggregated scores for the Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pelorus, this assertion is not borne out. Viewing our data, it is rare that the average scores for these wines fall outside a band between 89 – 91. Pricing of the estate's still wines is pretty much consistent between vintages and average prices are reasonable for such a high-profile brand – the Wine-Searcher average price for the Sauvignon Blanc is just \$27 ex-tax.

At Cloudy Bay's recent Pinot Salon, hosted at the winery by Moët Hennessey, the winery was happy to show Cloudy Bay Pinot Noir 2005 and 2014 (average prices \$29 and \$37, respectively) and Te Wahi 2011 and 2014 (average prices \$64 and \$67, respectively) alongside classic examples of European fine wines ranging from Burgundy producers Domain Dujac and Sylvain Cathiard to the likes of Auguste Clape, Vega Sicilia and Gaja. The wines were tasted blind and undeniably sat happily alongside their much more expensive old-world peers. Cloudy Bay has clearly not just been sitting on its laurels, but has clearly been making sure that Cloudy Bay's range of Pinot Noir wines can equal the reputation of the Sauvignon Blanc.

**Prices worldwide on Wine-Searcher** (US\$, ex-tax, per 750-ml bottle):

Wine Name	Avg. Price
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough</a>	\$27
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Te Koko Sauvignon Blanc, Marlborough</a>	\$44
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Chardonnay, Marlborough</a>	\$30
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Pinot Noir, Marlborough</a>	\$37
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Te Wahi Pinot Noir, Central Otago</a>	\$66
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Pelorus Brut, Marlborough</a>	\$25
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Late Harvest Riesling, Marlborough</a>	\$53
<a href="#">Cloudy Bay Riesling, Marlborough</a>	\$30