



Brick Bay

wines

art & wine entwined

The Vineyard

With over 80 hectares planted in vines, the Matakana wine district is one of the country's smallest wine areas, with grapes having been grown here since the early 1980s. Our 5 hectare north-facing vineyard, sloping down to lakes and flanked by native bush, was planted in 1995. By 2009, 25 vineyards were producing under their own label with plantings of Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, Syrah and the red Bordeaux varieties of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Malbec being the most popular.

At Brick Bay, the Pinot Gris block was the first to be planted while we waited for further low-vigour rootstocks for the grafting of our red varieties which were added in 1996. The original plantings gave us 25% Pinot Gris while the remaining 75% were Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Malbec. Subsequent successful topgrafting has increased our Pinot Gris and Malbec, reducing our Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. In 2003 a new 1 hectare block was established with more Pinot Gris and Petit Verdot.

Boasting a warm, maritime climate, most vineyards are frost-free, enjoying long growing days and a warm mean summer temperature. At Brick Bay our low crop loading ensures that even the late-ripening Cabernet Sauvignon reaches the optimum ripeness at harvest.

Higher levels of rainfall and humidity than many other wine regions means that local growers need to look carefully at the siting of vineyards to allow excess moisture to drain away and organize the vine canopy to allow maximum air movement and sunlight penetration. Our vine canopy is trained on a mid-height Sylvoz trellising system which allows the vine's fruiting zone to be separated from the main leafing canopy, allowing good sunlight penetration for ripening and colour development plus air circulation to minimise disease.

At Brick Bay we have a number of strategies to mitigate the rainfall and humidity issues. Extensive vineyard perimeter drainage and inter-row mole-ploughing is effective in drawing excess water out of the vineyard, while inter-row long-rooted cover crops also absorb unwanted moisture.

Our undervine cultivator controls weeds by lifting them out at the roots which not only avoids the excess use of herbicides but cutting the vines' roots near the surface also helps prevent water absorption. Our calcium sprays also toughen up the skins of the grapes which helps prevent splitting caused by excess water absorption.

For this reason our vines have never been irrigated (prohibited by law in the major winegrowing regions of France in the belief that it compromises quality) but we also believe the roots need to delve deep into the substructure to develop complex flavours as they access a multiplicity of minerals and trace elements in the soil.

The soil in the Matakana region is an iron-rich granulated clay/loam which is relatively free-draining, but unlike stony soils, does not allow excessive leaching of the essential minerals important for healthy and well-balanced vine growth.

Because of our uncompromising focus on quality, most operations are carried out by hand, with machinery only used for spraying, trimming the canopy and mowing between the rows. Each vine is carefully tended through its yearly cycle by hand, from the initial shoot selection which controls the framework of the new season's growth, to leaf plucking to expose the developing bunches, to selecting which bunches will stay to maturity and which will be discarded. This means the vine will concentrate on ripening a small load of fruit well, rather than a large load indifferently, with a subsequent loss in flavour.

At harvest, a small team carefully selects the perfect bunches to handpick into small containers. No compromise on quality in the vineyard means low yields, but it gives us rewarding quality in the resulting wine.

