

# Mixing with the best

A winemaker looks outside his region for the best grapes

**C**OREY HALL and his wife Megari are an unusual pair. He is a winemaker and dad who juggles caring for his young daughter with establishing a new wine brand and business, while she is working full-time to support the family.

Hall is a passionate sauvignon blanc maker who left Matua Valley Wines to set up on his own last year. His aim is to make wines which he hopes will have an individual taste and express a sense of place. However, the sense of place won't be the one where Hall, his wife and daughter, Pepper, live.

Like many winemakers, Hall buys grapes from this country's main wine regions to make wines under their own label or brand. In this case the brand is called Gem, which expresses Hall's aim of giving wine drinkers a taste they will treasure.

At the time of writing, there were just two wines under the Gem label — a sauvignon blanc and a chardonnay — but reds are soon to join the range. The reds are a challenge because of our unreliable climate and because, Hall says, New Zealanders are opting for red wines other than the Hawke's Bay merlots and cabernets that he and many other local winemakers have traditionally made.

The low price of imported reds from Australia, Europe and South America, and the often (though not always) high quality-to-price ratio of those wines and their wide availability are among the reasons.

One might then suggest to Hall that he could try making something different. He is not that easily deterred, though, surmising that New Zealand winemakers have only begun to tap into the potential of merlot and cabernet sauvignon from Hawke's Bay.

And now that vineyards there are planted with better quality grapevines on more suitable sites, this country's red wine drinkers may have as much to look forward to locally as they do from abroad.