

Sip trip hits NZ (+recipe)

By [Kerri Jackson](#) for NZ Herald
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Jean-Marie Pratt is still surprised by food and wine combinations that unexpectedly work - or don't.

How do you follow up a career as head sommelier in Gordon Ramsay's three Michelin-starred Chelsea restaurant?

For Frenchman Jean-Marie Pratt, the answer was obvious ... tour the winemaking world, find out where the best tipples are being made, by who, and how. His odyssey brought him to New Zealand over the past several weeks, where he has been hopping from vineyard to vineyard tasting the best the country has to offer.

"New Zealand is in a unique position in the winemaking world," Pratt says. "The cooler climate gives the wine an elegance and balanced alcohol level, which eludes hotter wine-growing areas" - such as Australia and parts of the US.

And although Marlborough sauvignon blanc is still the wine most associated with this country in Pratt's former British stomping ground, our pinot noir is fast gaining ground, as are some syrahs, chardonnays and aromatics, he says.

For Pratt, the standout surprises of his trip were Hawke's Bay's syrah and Bordeaux blends and the pinot noir coming out of Marlborough. His list of favourite Kiwi wineries includes Pegasus Bay, Pyramid Valley, Herzog, Ata Rangi, Felton Road, Rippon, Quartz Reef and Gisborne's Gem Wines.

Gem winemaker Corey Hall is a mate of Pratt's and has been his guide around the country. Last week the pair hosted a series of food and wine matching events around Auckland - including one sell-out at Nosh in Mt Eden where guests were given wine- and food-matching tips alongside a delicious menu by Nosh head chef James Patterson, including:

* White bean and truffle soup with pancetta crisp, matched with 2007 Gem Pinot Gris, Marlborough single vineyard.

* [Chermoula-spiced baked salmon with preserved lemons and watercress salad](#), with 2006 Gem Chardonnay, Gisborne single vineyard.

* Slow-cooked pork scotch with celeriac mash and spiced cherry jus, with 2006 Gem Pinot Noir, Wairarapa single vineyard.

* Shropshire blue cheese with a blackberry reduction and dark chocolate pot, mulled wine, blackberry compote and cinnamon stick, paired with 2006 Gem Merlot, Hawkes Bay single vineyard.

The key thing with food and wine matching, according to Pratt, is to remember that it will always partly come down to personal preference. And even with his years of experience, he is still surprised by pairings that unexpectedly work - or don't.

"Good food and wine matches happen often, but perfect pairings are rare," he says. "The same wine doesn't taste the same every day; the seasoning of the dish can alter the pairing a lot, as does the temperature of the wine. That's why in a restaurant it's important to regularly taste the food and wine together with the head chef.

"As a sommelier we try to get as close to perfection as we can."

CELLARING AND SERVING:

* Wine should be kept in a cool and dark place. The ideal temperature is 10 to 12°C.

* A damp cellar is important for cork sealed bottles to keep the cork, if it has one, moist.

* After a dinner party, don't leave unused bottles in your fridge.

* Screwcap bottles can be stored upright. Cork closure bottles must be stored laying down to ensure that the corks do not dry out.

* Don't serve the whites too cold or reds too warm. A white should be served at around 8°C, it will take 2° in the glass when poured and continue too warm up. Young reds should be served at around 16C to 18C. They will also slightly warm when poured in the glass. Young reds can be served cooler and pinot noir can be delicious served cool.

* *For recipes from the Nosh menu, visit noshgourmet.co.nz*

* *For information on Gem Wines, visit gemwine.co.nz*

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