

1 TOP MERLOT

★★★★★

MATUA VALLEY SINGLE VINEYARD MATHESON HAWKE'S BAY MERLOT 2009 \$70 ↓ -8

A rib roast of beef is grand fare and for a wine to match, look no further than this beauty, which went unanimously five stars first time up. It's fragrant and youthful, with a nose of appetising redcurrant and plum, underpinned by more complex roasted nut and cedary notes. The layered depth of the palate makes it a sophisticated style with creamy finesse and fantastic length of flavour. [B]



TOP WINE PROFILE

AN EDUCATION

As a child, Nikolai St George, Matua Valley's head winemaker, saw how hard his father worked on their remote King Country sheep and cattle farm. "I thought I'd like to work a lot less hours than Dad did," Nikolai says. "I liked the idea of wine, but I was wrong about the hours."

He left school at 17 and studied winemaking and viticulture, first in Gisborne with tutors Jeff Sinnot (ex-Amisfield) and Simon Waghorn (Astrolabe), "who passed on the passion", and later in Australia. He also worked at wineries across New Zealand. "Winemaking isn't about studying at university," he says. "It's all about experience, seeing how other people do things, seeing what makes quality wine." Six years at Goldwater Estate on Waiheke Island further honed his skills as did sojourns in France, the US and Chile. Now at Matua Valley, his Goldwater stint with Bordeaux varieties stands him in good stead. With long-standing Matua viticulturist Andrew Stove, Nikolai has crafted a wine that had the panel enraptured from the first drop.



2 ★★★★★ **Craggy Range Merlot Gimblett Gravels Vineyard Hawke's Bay 2009 \$31.95 ↓ -8**

Magnificent Craggy Range is a must-see on any visit to Hawke's Bay and its wines have few peers in the region. This merlot is a ripe, complete wine of superb focus, beautiful balance and great persistence. Dark, rich, brooding fruit is at the core, with notes of mint and nutmeg. Serve it with braised oxtail.

3 ★★★★★ **Cypress Merlot 2009 \$20-\$22 (Hawke's Bay) ↓ -6**

There's a savoury peaty touch on the nose of this young merlot, more Bordeaux-like than Australasian, along with dark berry aromas, a hint of mocha, caramel and herbs. John Belsham admired its "lovely density and drive" and the panel agreed. There's good concentration and juicy flavour. Serve with lamb racks with Provencale herbs.



4 ★★★★★ **Black Barn Vineyards Reserve Merlot 2009 \$58-\$65 (Hawke's Bay) ↓ -6**

A wine of elegant fruit character with excellent balance between ripe boysenberry-like fruit, choco-mint, spice and waxy complexities, tangy acidity and a tight spine of tannins. It's fleshy in the mouth with good length and presence.

5 ★★★★★ **Trinity Hill The Gimblett Merlot 2009 \$34 (Hawke's Bay) ↓ -8**

A powerful blend of merlot, cabernet sauvignon, petit verdot, malbec and cabernet franc from one of Hawke's Bay's premier vineyards. Juicy blackcurrant aromas, floral notes, a whisper of hazelnut and balanced toasty oak introduce a big, rich palate of slightly raisiny sweetness, great depth and a long smoky aftertaste. A perfect fireside wine.

Merlot is almost Shakespearean in its differing faces, from a light, succulent "comedy"-esque quaffer to a rich, full-bodied drama. It can be simple; it can be complex

BOTTLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON CREAGHAN; PORTRAITS BY KEN DOWNIE