

NZ Syrah



98★★★★★
2009 Trinity Hill Homage Syrah, Hawkes Bay, NZ\$120
 Homage is one of Hawkes Bay's star turns at every vintage and 2009 is no exception. This is a big, intense and very rich wine with ripe fruit, some black pepper and strong spicy oak flavours. The texture is even more appealing. It is mouth-filling and reasonably soft with support from fine, ripe tannins. Great now but will age well. The wine will not be released until later this year but can be bought en primeur through the winery website for NZ\$595 for six bottles. Visit www.trinityhill.co.nz.



96★★★★★
2007 Mission Estate Huchet Syrah, Hawkes Bay, NZ\$100
 A new ultra-premium label made by selecting the very best parts of Mission's 2.1-hectare Gimblett Gravels vineyard and managing the vines to yield small quantities of intense grapes. It has been some time since I tasted and enjoyed this dense, complex and very stylish wine. It has developed nicely in a year and is now showing attractively layered flavours of dark berry, dried fruits, Oriental spices and classy oak. Rich and warming wine that reminds me of a good Hermitage.



97★★★★★
2009 Mills Reef Elspeth Syrah, Hawkes Bay, A\$49/NZ\$45
 Like Trinity Hill Homage (above), this wine was made from grapes grown in the Gimblett Gravels district of Hawkes Bay. Elspeth is the winery's flagship label that's only released in exceptional vintages, which did not include the very good 2008 year. It's a delicious syrah – very dense and rich, with intense dried and fresh fruit flavours plus a rich chocolate and mocha character. Very long and layered, with great complexity. It is surprisingly good drinking now but will age magnificently.



96★★★★★
2010 Mudbrick Reserve Syrah, Waiheke Island, NZ\$54
 A tad sleeker and edgier than the Mudbrick's Shepherds Point (below) but with no less power and only a smidge less alcohol (15.6 per cent compared to Shepherd's Point's 15.9 per cent). Lovely length and layered berry, savoury, spice and oak flavours. Definitely a keeper, though it makes a pretty impressive drink right now. At first I preferred the more voluptuous Shepherd's Point but the slightly more powerful and complex Reserve wine won me over in the end.



96★★★★★
2009 Bilancia La Collina Syrah, Hawkes Bay, A\$100/NZ\$95
 This wine is from a steeply terraced, north-facing vineyard in the Gimblett Gravels district, where the vines are only irrigated in the driest of seasons. Normal yields are a miniscule one kilogram per vine. It shows strong sweet, ripe berry and plum flavours with a seasoning of cracked black pepper, wild herbs and hints of chocolate and mocha. Perhaps not as concentrated as the previous vintage but offering more purity and energy. Consistently one of the country's best examples of syrah.



95★★★★★
2009 Coopers Creek SV Chalk Ridge Syrah, Hawkes Bay, NZ\$28
 Chalk Ridge vineyard is a steep north-facing amphitheatre just south of Havelock North. The soil is strewn with fossilised limestone. The best syrah grapes from the top of the hill are co-fermented with a small (1.05 per cent) amount of viognier to add fragrance and complexity. Strong, sweet and dense wine with cassis, plum and dark berry flavours. More intense than most from this moderately light vintage. The wine has a lovely texture with an almost chewy density. Great value at this price.

If you like your syrahs to show density, richness, ripe berry and plum aromas and chocolate mocha characters, then look no further. Gimblett Gravels in Hawkes Bay turns out the lion's share but Waiheke Island is also producing some very impressive drops.



95★★★★★
2009 Man O'War Dreadnought Syrah, Waiheke Island, A\$50/NZ\$50
 Man O'War has a multitude of tiny but carefully sited vineyards scattered over its vast estate on Waiheke Island. This wine is a blend of seven of those vineyards. A fine-boned, perfumed syrah in an elegant rather than blockbuster (as expected) style. Red fruits, floral and white- and black-pepper flavours. Firm, ripe tannins give a pleasantly drying finish. It has good cellaring potential, at least for the mid-term, but is approachable now. This is a very serious syrah indeed.



92★★★★
2008 Cypress Terraces Syrah, Hawkes Bay, A\$47/NZ\$42
 Cypress was established by Gus Lawson, the founder of Te Awa, after he sold the winery. Grown on a terraced hillside vineyard in the heart of the Gimblett Gravels district with limestone and clay influenced soils. Deeper, darker and more concentrated wine than the regular label with strong berry and plum flavours together with chocolate, licorice, black pepper and spicy oak. This is an appealing syrah with good cellaring potential.



95★★★★★
2010 Mudbrick Shepherd's Point Syrah, Waiheke Island, NZ\$46
 Made from grapes grown in Mudbrick's Onetangi Valley vineyard on Waiheke Island near Auckland. 2010 was an extraordinary vintage for Waiheke with a long, hot and thankfully dry ripening season. With nearly 16 per cent alcohol this wine may have achieved a New Zealand record. It's a big, ripe and incredibly intense red with strong plum notes, and the sort of chocolate and mocha character I expect to find in Barossa Valley shiraz. A heroic wine from a marvellous vintage.



92★★★★
2009 Stonecroft Reserve Syrah, Hawkes Bay, A\$60/NZ\$60
 Stonecroft founder, Dr Alan Limmer, pioneered syrah in recent times when he rescued a number of trial clones from a viticultural research station and planted them in his Gimblett Gravels vineyard. He made cuttings freely available to other winemakers. This is a lovely wine with a haunting perfume of ripe berry and floral flavours. They follow through onto the palate with the addition of anise, licorice and spicy oak characters. An elegant and moderately powerful syrah with a lengthy finish.



95★★★★★
2009 Villa Maria Cellar Selection Syrah, Hawkes Bay, NZ\$40
 A blend of grapes from two vineyards in the heart of the Gimblett Gravels district. The wine was co-fermented with a small amount of viognier and, after 30 days on the skins, was matured in barriques for 18 months. This is an elegant and attractive syrah delicately scented with berry and violet aromas; it delivers moderate power with great subtlety. Ready now but should continue to deliver pleasure for many years. Exquisitely balanced.



91★★★★
2009 Trinity Hill Gimblett Gravels Syrah, Hawkes Bay, NZ\$35
 From two vineyards with vine-age spanning 11-16 years. The vines are a mix of seven clones including the mass-selected clone from Stonecroft. The grapes were hand-picked and de-stemmed, but not crushed, to give a mix of whole berries. The wine was co-fermented with viognier. It has weight and flavour intensity plus a rich texture and great mouthfeel. Dark berry and plum flavours with a hint of pepper and some chocolate and mocha character. Big, chewy and complex syrah.

Read how wines are tasted and rated on page 147.