

HUON HOOKE  
WINE

# Flying Blind

Kiwi winemakers prove they've got boutique drops to match Australia's best.

THE FEICKERT family of Blind River wines travelled across the ditch from Marlborough for the Boutique Wines of Australia Awards and their effort paid off.

No New Zealand winery did better than Blind River, which scooped two best boutique prizes (the top wine in varietal class) for pinot noir and sauvignon blanc.

The 2007 pinot noir won a gold medal and the '08 The Sisters sauvignon blanc won a silver medal. The name refers to three sisters: Wendy Jones, Susie Feickert and Debbie Sutton.

They all work at Blind River, established by their parents, Dianne and Barry Feickert, at the lower end of the Awatere Valley.

The pinot went on to win the trophy for best wine of the show.

It's the first time a pinot noir, often the underdog in trophy judgments, has topped the competition – shiraz, cabernet and other full-bodied varietals tend to overshadow it.

But this is a sensational pinot. It is not of the massive, dark, very ripe fruit-bomb style New Zealand is often identified with but an elegant pinot with structure as well as sweet fruit and abundant pinot charm.

Call it a result of the global financial crisis or just general hard times in the wine industry but entries in the Boutique Wines of Australia Awards were down by about a quarter, to 900 entries.

This was despite the inclusion of New Zealand for the first time in the competition's 15-year history. Indeed, the Kiwis did extraordinarily well, providing 12 per cent of entries and topping 28 per cent of the classes (five out of 18).

One can only wonder whether this is a true reflection of the state of New Zealand wine or if their winemakers were more selective in deciding which wines to enter.

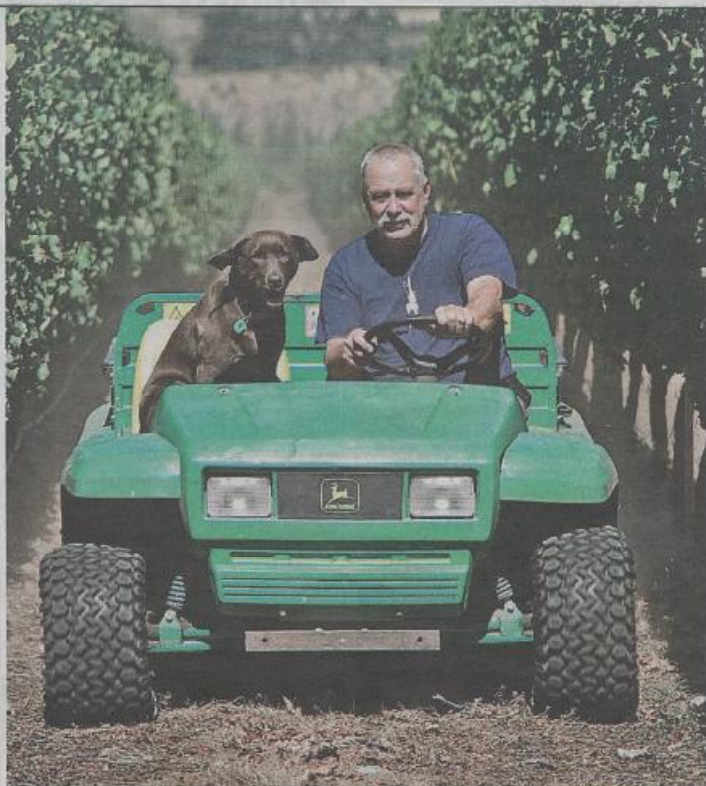
Three wineries won multiple trophies. One of them, Adelaide Hills vineyard Protero, won a gold and a silver and topped



its classes with Gumeracha Cabernet Sauvignon '06 and Gumeracha Merlot '06, respectively. Protero was established in 1998 by Frank and Rosemary Baldasso and Coonawarra viticulturalist Dennis Vice (of Highbank) and the wines are contract-made by Paul Drogemuller, of Paracombe winery, and Stephen Pannell.

The vineyard is in one of the lower, warmer parts of the Adelaide Hills, enabling full-bodied red varieties such as cabernet and merlot to ripen properly.

Another Marlborough winery, Johanneshof, also won two trophies with its Late Harvest Noble Riesling '07 (silver



On a roll ... Barry Feickert, with his mate, Bolly, of Blind River; (left) sisters Susie Feickert, Wendy Jones and Debbie Sutton. Photo: Joseph Kelly

medal) and '08 gewurztraminer (silver).

Eden Springs of Eden Valley won the best riesling award for the second successive year with exactly the same wine as last year: its '07 High Eden Riesling (gold medal). The wine must still be available to be entered again. Winning twice proves that quality will out.

If anything, the wine is even better this year and is maturing exactly as one might hope, with intense lime juice just starting to be joined by some gentle, toasty aromas.

A special mention should be made of the shiraz trophy-winner: Harewood Estate Shiraz 2007. Harewood is former Howard

Park winemaker James Kellie's vineyard in Western Australia's Great Southern, a cool, elevated chardonnay and pinot noir vineyard whose fruit is in big demand. But Kellie's shiraz is sourced from growers in warmer Frankland and Mount Barker.

The shiraz class is the biggest and most keenly contested in the show, with almost 200 wines yielding four gold medals, 21 silver and 70 bronze – a medal strike-rate of 50 per cent, which underlines the strength of this varietal and makes winning the trophy all the more prestigious.

The Harewood '07 is a rich, full-bodied, powerful but elegant wine with dark-plum, blackberry, spice and gentle chocolate aromas, smooth tannins and impeccable balance. It carries its 15 per cent alcohol well. It had already won two golds and a trophy in other shows, so this is one promising shiraz.

Lest anyone think shiraz must be 15 per cent alcohol to do well in competitions, note that two silver medals went to Hunter Valley wines of very different style, Kelman '07 and Pokolbin Estate '05, the Kelman being a pure-fruit, light- to medium-body wine of just 13 per cent alcohol.

See [boutiquewines.com.au](http://boutiquewines.com.au).

## Vignerons enhance growing reputation

An important trophy at the Boutique Wines of Australia Awards is given to the Best Boutique Grown and Made wine. It must be a gold medal winner that has been grown and vinified on the property. That means no brought-in grapes and no contract winemaking. The award encapsulates the essence of what makes good boutique wines so exciting: they are

the result of the work and passion of – typically – a person or family. This year's went to Stanton & Killeen for its Grand Rutherglen Muscat, which also won the trophy for best fortified wine. This trophy is named the Chris Killeen Memorial Trophy after the winery's late proprietor and winemaker, who was a big supporter of the show and of fortified wines.