



DUNNE ON WINE

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Embrace Criterion and Mt. Beautiful wines

HIGHLIGHTS

Two brands to count on for character and value

U.S. consumers may overlook wines of these labels



BY MIKE DUNNE

Special to The Bee

The American wine consumer is adventurous, willing to embrace uncommon styles of wines from unfamiliar places, despite the strength in the market of a few highly popular varietals and a few especially dominant brands. If the American wine consumer weren't eager to explore, neither domestic wine production nor the import of foreign wine would have climbed as dramatically as it has in the U.S. over the past few decades.

To capitalize on the intrepid spirit of the American wine consumer, I'd like to introduce a couple of brands that may be overlooked. This selection is based on tastings over the past several months in which wines from these producers especially impressed me with their overall consistency. I might not have been blown away by every sample I tasted, but a disproportionate number of their wines won me over for their lucidity and verve. As a bonus, they almost invariably were priced appealingly.

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Mt. Beautiful

Few people who jump into the wine business must feel the pressure to succeed as keenly as David and Leigh Teece. He, after all, is the Tusher Professor in Global Business at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business, while she is founder and chair of World Mentor, a Web-based mentoring program for educational institutions, companies and so forth.

Their investment in the wine trade, not surprisingly, looks to be working out quite favorably, for both themselves and for wine consumers. In just a decade, their brand, Mt. Beautiful, has become an especially exciting label, particularly for aromatic white wines like sauvignon blanc, pinot gris and riesling.

IN A DECADE MT. BEAUTIFUL HAS BECOME AN ESPECIALLY EXCITING LABEL.

In 2004, the Teeces ventured into his native New Zealand – she's a native Californian – to start planting grapes in the North Canterbury region along the South Island's northeast reaches. They made their first wines off the 2007 harvest and ever since have been cultivating a devoted clientele both in New Zealand and the United States.

Their current releases include these notably satisfying wines:

- Mt. Beautiful 2014 North Canterbury Sauvignon Blanc (\$16): The 2014 growing year was progressing splendidly right up to harvest, but then rain complicated the outlook for the vintage. By being selective in their picking and then clever in their winemaking, the vineyard and cellar crews of Mt. Beautiful salvaged a sauvignon blanc without blemishes. It's actually a quite vibrant interpretation of New Zealand's best-known varietal wine – pungent and floral in smell, ripe with grapefruit and lime on the palate, intriguing in its suggestions of watermelon and jasmine, and nervy with acidity in its refreshing finish.

- Mt. Beautiful 2015 North Canterbury Riesling (\$22): I first wrote of a Mt. Beautiful riesling nearly four years ago, when the 2009 version caught my attention for its floral aroma, willowy grace, and vivid suggestions of apricot, apple and lime. This release is cut from the same cloth, though a little riper, with more texture and more grapefruit, especially in the energy of its acidity.
- Mt. Beautiful 2014 North Canterbury Pinot Gris (\$19): Grapes for this wine were picked in two sweeps through the vineyard, the earlier harvest intending to capture and retain the variety's floral aromatics and high-toned acidity, the later one to get grapes that would yield more ripe-fruit flavors and more body. The method worked, resulting in an unusually well-proportioned pinot gris that gives off suggestions of fully ripe pears in flavor but also finishing with the snap of a crisp apple.
- Mt. Beautiful 2014 North Canterbury Pinot Noir (\$26): "Elegance" is a word best reserved for the finest of wines. This has it, even if the bottle is finished with a screw cap, not a cork. Get over it. The wine is brilliantly colored, vivid with cherry and strawberry fruit, and just tannic enough to reinforce its backbone. Its complexity lies in understatement more than bravado.

In the Sacramento region, the Mt. Beautiful sauvignon blanc is available at Whole Foods Market along Arden Way and in Roseville. The pinot noir is stocked by [Nugget Markets](#). One or the other or both are at some branches of [Total Wine](#). All can be ordered through the winery's website, mtbeautiful.co.nz.

Wine critic and competition judge Mike Dunne's selections are based solely on open and blind tastings, judging at competitions, and visits to wine regions. He can be reached at dmichaeldunne@gmail.com.

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