



## KING OF THE HILL

Hawke's Bay is the most diverse wine region in the country, which is why winemaker Steve Skinner from Elephant Hill is spreading the risk with new vineyards, writes *Editor Joelle Thomson*

"I THINK people are starting to think much more about where they plant grapes in Hawke's Bay and not just going for their own immediate area, but blending between different places," says Steve Skinner, winemaker at Elephant Hill Winery at Te Awanga, Hawke's Bay.

Skinner, who was formerly at Trinity Hill Wines, says Elephant Hill is growing and diversifying; this year it acquired grapes for the first time from a 15-hectare vineyard in the Bridge Pa Triangle; the country's newest wine appellation. And also from the Gimblett Gravels.

"I think the three sub-regions together give us a really interesting flavour profile in our wines and as it's a long term lease arrangement, it will add to the quality and style of our wines."

The owners of Elephant Hill have also purchased a 17-hectare vineyard on the Gimblett Gravels. Together these new vineyards will see Elephant Hill Winery grow from 25 hectares – currently all at Te Awanga – to a new 56 hectare total.

"Whether we label our wines as Gimblett Gravels remains to be seen since we will probably blend between the regions and for a wine to be labelled 'Gimblett Gravels' it must contain 95% of grapes grown on the gravels," says Skinner.

Since planting the first Elephant Hill vineyards in 2001 and building the winery

and restaurant in 2008, owners Reydan and Roger Weiss – who are overseas-based – have developed 20 export markets and seen an increasing demand for the wines.

"Investing in these new vineyards is the next step in the growth of Elephant Hill from 15,000 cases of wine a year to a maximum of 35,000 cases over the next three vintages and these vineyards fit perfectly with our plans for sustainable growth. Having total control over the viticulture and winemaking is very important to keep our quality standards high," says Roger Weiss.

Skinner says the new vineyards in the Bridge Pa Triangle and Gimblett Road areas offer him grapes from different soil types and micro climates to add to the grapes from the home block at Te Awanga.

"The resulting structural differences in the wine will give us the freedom to either blend the best qualities of each vineyard or to make terroir based, site specific, single vineyard wines."

### TOP TASTES FROM ELEPHANT HILL

#### 2010 Elephant Hill Hawke's Bay Chardonnay **RRP \$29**

This is the sole Chardonnay from Elephant Hill at Te Awanga and winemaker Steve Skinner used 30% new French oak and no

malolactic fermentation in a bid to preserve the acidity and mineral freshness in this vibrant, full bodied and outstanding value Chardonnay.

#### 2009 Elephant Hill Reserve Syrah **RRP \$49**

A teeny 1% of the white Viognier grape was co-fermented with Syrah here to enhance the colour, perfume and tannins in the red – believe it or not, Viognier is an extremely tannic grape. And this is a soft, smooth, full bodied red with gentle acidity which supports its intense black plum flavours. Great drinking now and will cellar.

#### 2009 Elephant Hill Hawke's Bay Airavata Syrah **RRP \$90**

Airavata is the king god of elephants in Hindu mythology; its name here intended to denote a unique wine; which this definitely is. Only 100 cases were made in 2009, using whole bunches and stalks to add structure and firm backbone to this wine. Pricey, yes, but Skinner's a dab hand at Syrah after more than a decade of experimenting with it. This is a top wine to serve in your bar, restaurant or cafe.

#### TO STOCK ELEPHANT HILL WINES

To buy Elephant Hill Wines contact Procure Limited; Misha Taylor, phone (021) 543 652 or Jonty Hammer, (09) 376 9385 or (021) 866 552. Email: [info@procureliquor.co.nz](mailto:info@procureliquor.co.nz). Or contact Vince Labat, marketing & sales manager at Elephant Hill, phone (06) 872 6066, mobile 0275 210 053, email: [vince@elephanthill.co.nz](mailto:vince@elephanthill.co.nz), [www.elephanthill.co.nz](http://www.elephanthill.co.nz)

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