

PALATE | INTERNATIONAL FOOD

Culinary Culture

—Marlborough,
New Zealand

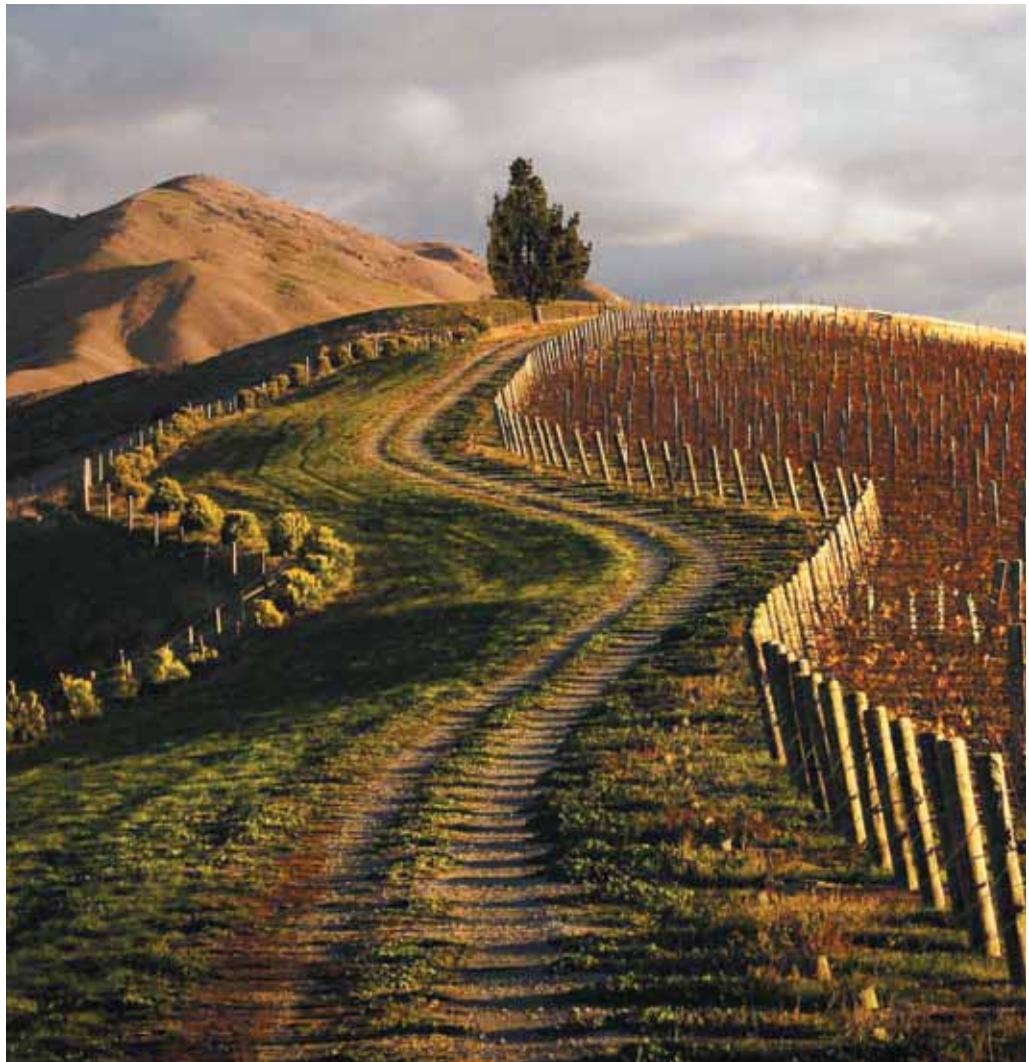
LOCATED AT THE TOP of New Zealand's South Island, Marlborough is not only the largest wine region in the country, but it has also become the country's gourmet capital. Marlborough's flavourful mix of culinary innovation and cultural diversity has helped earn New Zealand its reputation as an exciting culinary destination for discerning foodies. Pacific influences, organics and indigenous foods all make Marlborough worth a visit.

With countless wineries and an abundance of fresh local produce, Marlborough is best experienced during the summer. Bound by the blue Richmond Range and the tawny Wither Hills, Marlborough's Wairau Valley is the largest wine area within the region. Paved roads roll past cherry trees and tidy rows of grapevines; the region is perfect for cycling from winery to winery.

First visit Mahi, where winemaker Brian Bicknell is making stylish, complex, mostly single-vineyard wines. Sample his finely textured, just released sauvignon blanc with fresh Sounds oysters. Next, make a stop at New Zealand cinematographer Michael Seresin's estate; it is a pioneer of biodynamic viticulture in the region. Try the 2008 Seresin Sauvignon Blanc. It is not a typical Marlborough sauvignon blanc; by blending with semillon and using barrel fermentation, the winery brings out extra layers of flavour, and as a result, the wine has more mystery, more depth.

Seresin also produces a range of extra virgin olive oils, including some that are enhanced with accents of citrus. The Lemon blend is enhanced with organic Lisbon and Villa Franca lemons. The subtlety of the enhancement is brilliant, and adds another dimension to the exquisite oil. The result is highly fragrant, and lends well to fish.

For lunch, visit Hans Herzog's Cellar Door Bistro—Marlborough's so-called "best-kept secret"—to enjoy simple and delicious regional cuisine while taking in the view of the mountains from across the vineyard. You may become so relaxed in the garden that you might not realize



that it has started to rain: my girlfriend and I were soaked from cycling back along the vine-lined Rapaura Road to our accommodation at Vintner's Retreat. We didn't care.

Once dry, dine with the locals at Gibb's Vineyard Restaurant. Here, local lamb and cervena (venison) pair well with grape-grower Ivan Sutherland and winemaker James Healy's delicious 2007 Dog Point Pinot Noir or Fromm winemaker Hätsch Kalberer's standout 2005 Clayvin Vineyard Pinot Noir, one of New Zealand's most distinctive pinots.

On Sundays, join the locals again as they meander through the Marlborough Farmers'

Market. Not only can you find fresh, regionally grown vegetables, but the market also attracts specialty produce and gourmet goods including locally roasted coffee, subtropical fruit such as feijoa and tamarillo, and jars of manuka honey. Be sure to also pick up some Sherrington Grange artisanal cheese; try the Havelock—it's dipped in 10-year-old oak-aged local brandy and wrapped in a chestnut leaf. Delicious.

Or time your visit with the Marlborough Wine Festival, held in February each year. This is New Zealand's largest culinary festival, with more than 300 wines available for tasting, as well as wine tutorials and a food-and-wine pairing competition. Food tourism within New Zealand is developing at a rapid rate, and the Wine Festival is yet another example of how New Zealand's worldwide reputation, award-winning produce and specialist chefs draw tourists to the source.

—Paul Ross

FROM TOP: Raupo Creek vineyard at Seresin Estate; A rack of local lamb from Gibb's Vineyard Restaurant.

PHOTOS: SERESIN ESTATE; GIBB'S VINEYARD RESTAURANT.