

KUMEU RIVER

Winemaking Philosophy



At Kumeu River Wines, the winemaking philosophy can be summarized in a single word: quality. The Brajkovich family endeavors to grow grapes of the highest quality and then treat them with respect when they turn those grapes into wine. In this way, the potential quality is maximized, and Kumeu River is able to make wines that are truly representative of its land.

From the vines to the wineglass, every drop of Kumeu River wine is a blend of tradition, innovation and dedication to both the science and the art of winemaking.

Quality Wines Begin With Quality Grapes

Wine Region

Auckland: Auckland has the distinction of being the historical birthplace of viticulture and winemaking in New Zealand. The first vines were planted in 1819 by Anglican missionary Samuel Marsden, though there is no record of wine being produced from the grapes. In 1839, Scotsman James Busby successfully made the country's first wines. In the late 1800s, immigrants from the now-Croatian Dalmatian coast came to New Zealand hoping to make their fortunes in the country's gum fields, eventually turning to farming and grape growing.

Kumeu: Kumeu is a sub-region of the Auckland wine district. Despite being situated well north of New Zealand's other viticultural regions, Kumeu's climate is kept cool due to its close proximity to the Tasman Sea, just 20 kilometers (nearly 12.5 miles) to the west, and the Pacific Ocean 30 kilometers (18.6 miles) to the east. These two large bodies of water generate clouds, keeping peak summer temperatures below 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit).

Caring for Kumeu River's Vineyards

Soil: Kumeu River's 30 hectares (74 acres) of estate vineyards are comprised of predominantly clay soil over a sandstone base. These soil types retain sufficient water at depth, even during the summer months, ensuring that the vines are supplied with moisture without vigor getting too excessive. The vineyards do not require irrigation, a factor that is critical to the quality of Kumeu River's grapes.

Trellising: Kumeu River employs the "Lyre" or "U" trellising system to protect the vines from over-exposure to sunlight and UV rays resulting from the region's depleted ozone layer.

As you look down a row of vines, the u-shape of the trellis is clear, with two side curtains of vines rising from two opposing, 14-inch-long horizontal shoots which in turn originate from a 3-foot-tall trunk. The side walls are 28 inches apart at the base, inclining slightly outward towards the top of the canopies, and trellised on inclining posts. The fruit is born at the base of the canopy so the center is open for sunlight and air circulation. Kumeu River has developed a machine to trim the top and outside and inside walls of the vines.



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Bird Netting: Due to flocks of starlings, local blackbirds, thrushes and mynahs, all of whom can remove whole berries from the vines, bird netting is an essential part of growing grapes at Kumeu River. A smaller migratory bird called the white-eye pecks holes in the berries, causing rot and fermentation on the vine. To avoid losing too many crops to these birds, Kumeu River has invested in reusable netting to protect its vineyards.

Harvest: All grapes that go into Kumeu River's wines are hand-harvested. Although it takes more time than machine-harvesting, harvesting by hand allows sub-standard grapes to be removed in the vineyard instead of back at the winery, resulting in a net yield of purely high-quality grapes.

Back at the Winery

The fruit arrives at the winery intact in bins and is tipped directly into an air-bag press where it is directly pressed — Kumeu River does not use a crusher. The juice that comes out of the press is very clean and can go straight into fermentation.

Fermentation

Barrel Fermentation: Kumeu River barrel-ferments its best Chardonnays in a combination of new and old French oak, a technique that draws out flavor nuances that are crucial for fine-wine styles. Only indigenous wild yeasts are used to further enhance the texture and complexity of the wine (this is also the case with Kumeu River wines that are tank-fermented).

Malolactic Fermentation: Although always common in red wines, malolactic fermentation was not as prevalent in white winemaking 30 years ago. Because it is a natural process that biologically reduces wine acidity and complexes the flavor — resulting in a wine with better acid balance and improved drinkability — winemaker Michael Brajkovich introduced malolactic fermentation to Kumeu River's white wines in the early 1980s. The result has been a series of wines that are innovative, distinctive and unique in both style and quality for New Zealand. In fact, Michael's Chardonnays are often compared to white Burgundy.

Aging Chardonnay On Its Yeast Lees

Michael believes that allowing the Kumeu River barrel-fermented Chardonnays to age on their yeast lees for an additional nine to 10 months after fermentation is one of the most important stages in winemaking; by doing this, the wine is kept in a reductive state, preventing it from oxidizing. Additionally, the alcohol in the wine slowly breaks down the cell walls, allowing the release of nutrients and other compounds back into the wine. In this way, the wine "feeds" on the yeast and regains some of the compounds that were removed from the new juice by the growing yeast cells. During this stage, the process is aided by stirring the barrels once or twice each week to re-suspend the yeast cells, a practice referred to as batonnage.

