



Wine

BY MICHAEL COOPER

Star power

Constellation NZ's strength lies in affordable wines that offer good, sometimes excellent, drinking.

What do the Nobile, Selaks, Kim Crawford, Drylands, The People's and Monkey Bay labels have in common? They are all owned by this country's second-largest wine producer, Constellation New Zealand.

Croatian immigrant Nikola Nobile, who died in 2007, aged 94, planted his first vines at Huapai, West Auckland, in 1943. From the 1960s onwards, helped by several investors, the company grew rapidly. After acquiring Selaks, another long-established Croatian winery just along the road at Kumeu, in 1998, Nobile was itself swallowed in 2000 by an Australian giant, BRL Hardy.

When New York-based Constellation Brands snapped up Hardy in 2003, Nobile suddenly found itself part of one of the world's largest wine companies. Constellation NZ became even bigger in 2006, after its parent acquired Vincor, a huge Canadian company that three years earlier had bought Kim Crawford Wines.

A year ago, Constellation Brands opted to move upmarket and sold most of its Australian interests – including control of Hardy and Banrock Station – but retained its stake in New Zealand. Under Joe Stanton, CEO since 2005, Constellation NZ produces six “global” wine brands, supplemented by low-priced labels for the domestic market, such as Fall Harvest and Station Road.

Constellation NZ's strength lies in affordable wines that offer good, sometimes excellent, drinking – although they rarely reach for the stars. Kim Crawford has been positioned as a “leading luxury brand which challenges wine brand conventions”; Nobile emphasises “heritage”; and Selaks wines have been “bringing family and friends together since 1934”.

Drylands is aimed at the restaurant trade and specialist retailers rather than supermarkets; Monkey Bay is a “fun” brand for “emerging” wine drinkers. The People's range, launched in 2010, features striking colourful labels designed to “express the hand-crafted nature of wine”.



Americans love the wines. Nobile Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc – bottled with corks, rather than screwcaps, reflecting consumers' slowness to accept screwcaps as a quality closure – overhauled two California producers, Kendall Jackson and Clos du Bois, in 2009 to emerge as the biggest-selling sauvignon blanc in the US. Also in the top five were Monkey Bay and Kim Crawford.

Drylands Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 ★★★★★

Attractively scented and full-bodied, with ripe-fruit aromas (including a character often described by wine judges as “sweaty armpit”), passionfruit/lime flavours showing excellent freshness and depth, and an appetisingly crisp, dry finish. \$22

Nobile Icon Marlborough Pinot Noir 2010 ★★★★★

Powerful, weighty, full-coloured red grown mostly in the Waihopai Valley and matured for a year in French oak casks (30% new.) Strong plum/spice flavours,

with a hint of olives, good savoury complexity and a moderately firm finish. Drink now or cellar. Fine value at \$25.

Selaks Heritage Reserve Gisborne/Waipara Gewürztraminer/Riesling 2011 ★★★★★

Delicious already, this dessert wine is a blend of Gisborne gewürztraminer and Waipara riesling. It has a gingery, spicy, slightly honeyed fragrance and soft, sweet flavours showing excellent harmony and richness. \$20 (375ml)

Kim Crawford First Pick Riesling 2010 ★★★★★

“First Pick” here just means the first pick for any occasion. Grown in Canterbury, this is a fresh-scented, buoyantly fruity wine with strong citrusy, limey flavours, slightly sweet and crisp. A good drink-young style. \$18

Nobile Icon Méthode Traditionnelle 2007 ★★★★★

Moderately complex blend of pinot noir and chardonnay, disgorged after maturing for two and a half years on its yeast lees. Pink/orange tints, with good depth of peachy, gently yeasty, creamy, nutty flavour and a mouthwateringly crisp finish. \$25

Selaks Winemaker's Favourite Hawke's Bay Merlot/Cabernet 2009 ★★★★★

Estate-grown in the Corner 50 Vineyard, this blend of merlot (77%) and cabernet sauvignon (23%) was matured in French and American oak barriques. Full-coloured, it is slightly leafy, but shows very good depth and some spicy, earthy complexity. \$21

The People's Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc/Pinot Gris 2010 ★★★★★

This mouth-filling, vibrantly fruity wine has lively, herbaceous, sauvignon blanc flavours (80% of the blend), distinct hints of pears and spices (from the pinot gris) and a tangy, finely balanced finish. Drink now. Target price: \$15. ■

Wine of the week

Selaks Heritage Reserve Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc 2011 (★★★★★)

Mouthfilling, with fresh, strong tropical-fruit and herbaceous flavours, threaded with lively acidity and great drinkability. Target price: \$16.

