



Shell-warmed grapes are ripe for the picking

By Yvonne Lorkin

Nelson has long held the crown of New Zealand's Sunshine Capital and those extra sunshine hours make it the perfect environment for wine grapes to thrive.

"But if you can trick your vineyard into thinking it's located just a little bit further north than that's ideal," says Tim Finn, owner of Neudorf Vineyards and a fan of encouraging light reflection up into the canopy.

"We've been using oyster shells, which work really well," he says, kicking some of the crackly white stuff back underneath the vines.

"During veraison (ripening) you've got two things going on, sugar accumulation and ripening of the phenolics — so more exposure to light encourages that and it means you can pick at an earlier stage of sugar ripeness, which of course leads to lower sugar levels and more elegant alcohol levels.

"It's particularly effective in our 10/5 pinot clone, which can sometimes have that slightly green, herbal character — that extra degree or two of ripeness helps get rid of that."

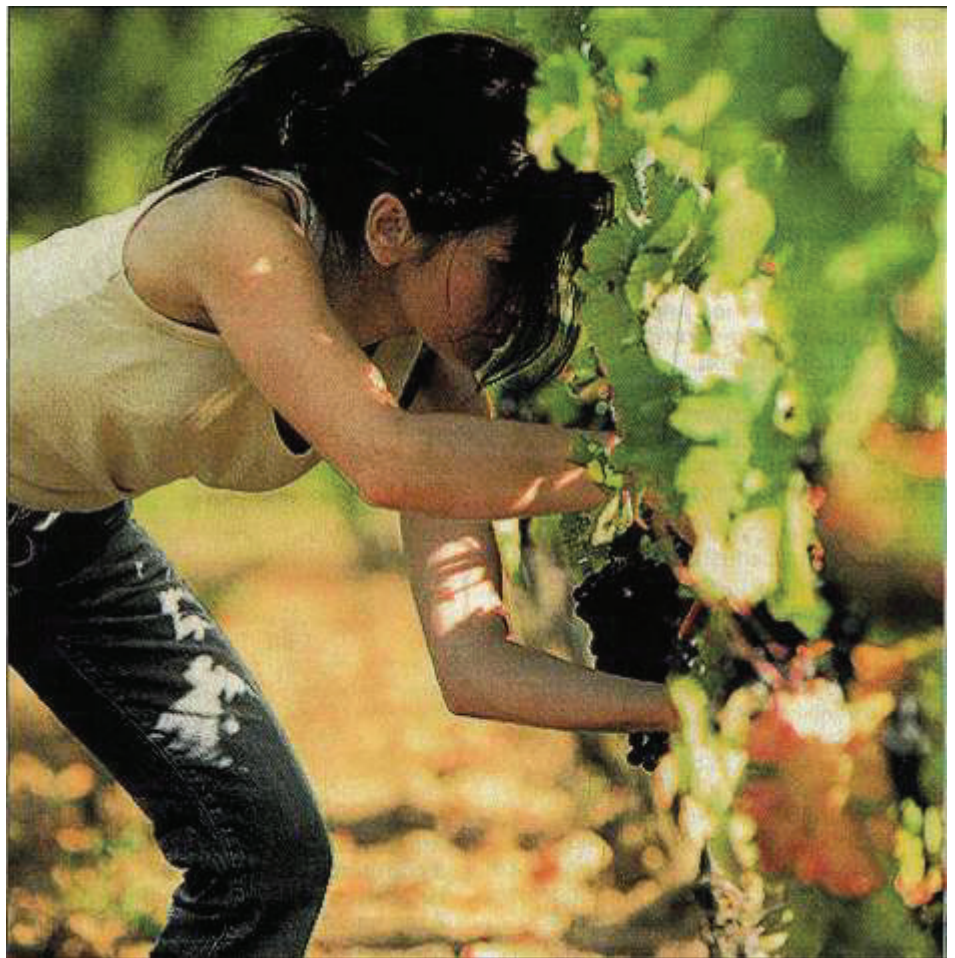
But it's his pinot gris which really spins my wheels because over all the years I've been tasting pinot gris, I can't recall ever being disappointed with one from Neudorf.

The trick I think is how they manage high alcohol levels (14.5 per cent in the Maggie's Block) without a hint of heat in the wine.

Theirs always have freshness, elegance and purity of fruit — and pinot gris is a style where high alcohols tend to stick out like (insert well-used canine reproductive simile here).

Hand-picking is essential to manage the phenolics (those bitter characters that come from the juice being exposed to the skins and seeds of the grapes during processing) and a hint of drying, phenolic character is really good for pinot gris, according to Tim. "It stops the wine from being blousy," he says.

"We come from a winemaking background in New Zealand of getting rid of phenolics, yet I don't think we should always do that — it's in the fruit, so you've gotta work with it."



PICK AND CHOOSE: Oyster shells help grapes ripen faster.