



PRETTY'S FOOD & WINE



RUTH PRETTY

Ruth has catered numerous high-profile events, including serving the cast of *The Lord of the Rings* at the premiere of *The Return of the King*.

For wine lovers in the know, the new hot spot is down under—not Australia but New Zealand. The country's best-known caterer and self-proclaimed foodie, Ruth Pretty has a front-row seat on Kiwi food and wine. She sat down with *Publix Grape* to talk about the myths, truths and terroir of New Zealand wine and food, with a spirit that is generous, inquisitive and, most importantly, in touch with nature.

WHAT IS NEW ZEALAND FOOD?

What the world thinks: Lamb, thrice a day.

What it really is: The lamb misconception comes from the traditional Sunday meal: a roast leg of lamb with roasted veggies. In reality, the food here is all about variety—fruits, veggies, proteins and of course, dairy, which is actually the largest single industry in the nation.

WHAT ABOUT NZ WINE?

What the world thinks: Sauvignon Blanc with every meal.

What it really is: Yes, we well know the zesty, herbaceous Sauvignon Blanc. But there is so much more! Pinot Noir, my favorite grape, thrives in the Martinborough and Central Otago regions, often in tiny wineries and vineyards. That said, Chardonnay, Riesling, Cabernet Sauvignon and other varieties grow in the New Zealand soil.

WHAT IS THE NZ WINESCAPE LIKE?

No one region is the best; all are quite different and each yields outstanding wines. Marlborough, Martinborough and Central Otago are gaining a reputation, along with Hawke's Bay and Auckland.

AND THAT SOIL?

Despite the country's small size, the soils vary greatly from region to region. But throughout, it's very well drained (keeping the grapes hydrated,

but not saturated). The soil's very rich, as well, and littered with river stones. The climate is temperate, and every food and drink reveals a place that's here, and only here.

WHAT IS A TYPICAL DAY AT THE NZ TABLE?

Breakfast: Homemade muesli or cereal and milk and fresh fruit. Those with physically taxing jobs eat eggs and bacon, rye bread, yogurt, coffee and tea.

Lunch: Our lunches are often lighter, with salad greens, canned salmon or tuna and avocado, or a sandwich with greens and protein.

Gourmet dinner: Lovely oysters or fresh fish, and cheese for dessert.

To drink: A glass of Sauvignon Blanc is most popular, but those really interested in wine seem to choose Chardonnay and Pinot Noir more commonly. Craft beers are also popular, and there's a growing trend to drink locally made, small-company beers.

WHAT KEY INGREDIENTS MAKE UP THE NZ FOOD SCENE?

Hospitality: From a high-end gala to a restaurant or a casual dinner at home, there's a sense of welcome, of shared space.

Localism: To describe New Zealand food in four words: "in touch with nature."

Innovation: Livestock are raised in harmony with nature, but farming practices are still very modern; dairy is on the cutting edge, exports are active, and there is significant intellectual property around our dairy industry.

FAVORITE PAIRINGS?

With Pinot Noir: lamb or duck with Brie or goat cheese, mushrooms, venison or salmon. It sounds strange, but there's something about the oily mouthfeel of salmon that brings out the umami flavor in the Pinot Noir. ■