



NICHOLAS PARIS MW

Managing director and co-owner,
Monte Christo Winery

Nicholas Paris.

How did you get your start in wine?

After falling in love with wine during a summer abroad in France's Loire Valley at the end of my university studies, I returned home to the United States to learn more about wine and the wine industry. I applied for a sales position at Zachys Wine & Spirits, one of the nation's largest wine retailers. Within a few months, I became their auction director at Christie's Auction House in New York City where my role was to oversee Zachys' business, find wine collections to sell and clients to buy them. From there, I eventually wound

up at Gallo, the world's largest winery, where I had a variety of roles in sales, public relations, importing, education, wine blending and consulting.

What is the best thing about working in the wine sector?

The best thing about working in the wine sector is that, regardless of one's role within the supply chain, we are all working together to create or promote an agricultural product that has a long and rich history, an origin story that's different for every bottle, and a delicious tasting product that's fun to learn about and share with others. Outside of work



Monte Christo Winery Managing Director
Nicholas Paris

hours, people in the wine industry often love what they do so much that they spend weekends or holidays traveling to wine regions or dining at restaurants to learn and taste more. Most people I speak with outside of our industry don't share the same level of passion and commitment.

What have been some of the highlights of your career in wine?

Career highlights include having earned the Master of Wine and Advanced Sommelier qualifications, extensive travel to the world's most famous wine regions, working with some of the industry's greatest minds and businesses and, last but not least, reconnecting with my New Zealand heritage and opening my own winery, Monte Christo Winery, with family in Central Otago, New Zealand. I've enjoyed selling or working for so many great wineries in my career, but I most enjoy using all of that experience to help develop, produce and promote our Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays.

What are some characteristics of New Zealand wine that help it stand out from other countries?

I think a big part of the appeal of New Zealand wine is the country's abundance of natural beauty (gorgeous lakes, rivers, mountains...) and friendly people, a reputation which consumers want to connect with when reaching for a bottle or glass. In the glass, New Zealand wines tend to show an optimal balance of pure, ripe and overt fruit coupled with non-fruit aromas like subtle floral and herbal undertones that not only make for a very enjoyable and complex wine but also one that is easily identifiable with its grape variety and origin. On the palate, the wines are frequently medium

to medium plus bodied, with a slightly, but not overly, luscious character and balancing, refreshing acidity. In contrast, many other New World wines that are as ripe and overt as New Zealand's show less varietal character, often more jamminess, less freshness and are much fuller-bodied.

How have you been able to explore viticulture throughout your career and across different regions?

In addition to my theoretical knowledge from reading or course work at UC Davis, the WSET or IMW, I have spent a lot of time in the vineyards during the growing season working with viticulturists to understand and influence grape growth and ultimately wine style and quality. Most of my experience in the vineyards and in wineries blending and consulting has taken place in France, Italy, California and New Zealand. I've worked with more than a dozen white and red grape varieties across these regions.

What are some of the challenges involved with being a part of the winemaking industry?

Gaining winemaking experience



Nicholas wine tasting

working for others early in your career is relatively easy with the right background and work ethic, especially if you are willing to travel, but upward mobility becomes increasingly difficult as there is usually only one head winemaker per winery and they don't tend to move around that often. Also, it's great to make wines in a style you believe in, but many wineries chase trends or market segments where target wine styles differ than those you may prefer to produce. Fortunately, at Monte Christo Winery our viticulture, winemaking and

As owner of Monte Christo Winery in Central Otago, New Zealand, I read the *Grapegrower & Winemaker* for a better understanding of technical issues and best practices within the entire supply chain from the vineyards to the winery, to the business of running a winery including sales and marketing. It also helps me stay relevant on topical issues including trends affecting both New Zealand and Australia, our two primary sales markets.

Nicholas Paris on the *Grapegrower & Winemaker*

management teams are all aligned on producing elegant, site-expressive wine styles from predominantly Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

What would be your advice to someone just entering the industry?

Be curious for knowledge and experience, and hard working. Take on as much as you can early in your career before you have too many family commitments, find out what you want to do, set goals and pursue them, even if they change over time. If you follow your passion you'll have a career you love and, if you are great at it, one that should pay well too.

What place do alternative varieties have in the New Zealand wine industry?

Although traditional grapes still predominate in New Zealand, with the impact of climate change, a shift away from bigger reds towards lighter and fresher whites, and a younger demographic that is more open to trying new things, a lot more wineries are planting alternative varieties. One of the alternative white grapes that are on the rise in New Zealand is Albariño, a variety of Spanish origin that thrives in the country's cool maritime subregions. While Cabernet Franc is not new to New Zealand, it is considered an alternative grape for Central Otago where Monte Christo Winery has planted some in our warmer Pisa subregion with the goal of making elegant reds reminiscent of those in the Loire Valley. We are also looking

at other grapes like Syrah and Chenin Blanc which are also not traditional to our region. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay will always be our focus, but winemakers love to experiment and consumers loves to try new wines too.

Why is it important for the wine industry to explore innovation and connect with new people?

The wine industry globally is at the beginning of what is believed to be a long-term gradual decline in wine consumption for a number of reasons including health concerns, the retirement of older generations who tend to consume the most wine and the rise of younger adults who often substitute other alcoholic beverages over wine or don't drink at all. To remain relevant, the wine industry must find new ways of reaching consumers, especially younger generations, through innovative wine styles, alternative packaging, winery experiences, storytelling and social media. **GW**

Location:

**Clyde, Central Otago,
New Zealand**

