



NICK RYAN

STAR TURN

ACTOR SAM NEILL HAS SERIOUS
CHOPS AS A WINEMAKER

It was inevitable that actor Sam Neill would end up peddling booze. He just got a little sidetracked on the way. Neill's great grandfather arrived in Otago the same year gold was discovered, 1861, and intuitively knew the best way to make money from a goldrush was not with pick and shovel but with the liquids soothing those wielding them. The family firm, Neill & Co, became a major player in New Zealand and by the time Neill's father returned to the business after a distinguished military career, Neill & Co was, among other things, the producer of New Zealand's biggest selling brandy. "It was called Beehive Brandy and Dad always said the key to its popularity was pronunciation," Neill explains. "It was a lot easier for Kiwis to ask for Beehive than Courvoisier."

Acting ambitions may have taken the young Sam away from Neill & Co but they also lured him deeper into the thrall of the product. Living in London in the 1980s was a matter of right place and right time for a man deepening his love of wine. He even had Captain Nemo show him the way. A bottle of red Burgundy at dinner with James Mason kickstarted Neill's passionate pursuit of pinot noir. Increasing success brought better bottles. In 1993 serious success brought an escalation.

In the same year he made *Jurassic Park*, Neill purchased 2ha in Central Otago's Gibbston Valley and planted pinot noir. Film director Roger Donaldson did the same with an adjoining block and the plan was to have a label together they would call, prosaically, Two Paddocks. Donaldson pulled the pin early, but Neill ploughed on. That first vineyard was joined by three more, and what was initially a bit of fun became something really substantial. The fact Two Paddocks is really four is just one way most people only get half the story. This is not, and never has been, a celebrity side-hustle. By his own admission Sam Neill isn't Brad Pitt. By general acclaim he's not Kylie Minogue. Nor is he Jon Bon Jovi, Jay-Z, Sting or even Cliff Richard. He's a vigneron to his core, an integral part of one of the most dynamic winemaking communities on the planet and another in a long line of Neills who understood all the artistry in the world can be found in a glass.

TWO PADDOCKS 'THE FIRST PADDOCK' PINOT NOIR 2021, \$120

The cornerstone wine for Two Paddocks, sourced from the original 25 rows of pinot noir planted in 1993. An array of fragrant spices through a compote of dark berries and black cherries. A good whack of whole bunches in the ferment delivers an intriguing seam of scruffy funk. **12.5% alcohol, 94 points**

TWO PADDOCKS 'THE FUSLIER' PINOT NOIR 2021, \$120

A nod to Sam's father, Dermot, a major in the Royal Irish Fusiliers, from a site at the end of the famed Felton Road in Bannockburn. Pinot noir in hero mode: muscular, surefooted, firm. Dark berries, hung game and dried herbs strewn across rocky hillsides. Plush, precise, beautifully fine. **13.5% alcohol, 95 points**

TWO PADDOCKS 'THE LAST CHANCE' PINOT NOIR 2021, \$120

From an elevated site in Earnscleugh, this wine more than matches the beauty of its birthplace with drama in the glass. Red and black berries, wild herb and dried flowers explode from the glass; the palate ripples with dark, fleshy fruit and tapers to a sustained finished shaped by gravelly tannins.

12.5% alcohol, 96 points



WILLOW BRIDGE G1-10 GEOGRAPHE CHARDONNAY 2023

Sea-breeze salinity on the nose mingles with citrus fruit and lemon sherbet. More sherbet follows on the palate plus grapefruit notes and savoury oak. The finish is savoury, the palate nicely weighted. **13.3% alcohol, \$35**

LENTON BRAE MARGARET RIVER SEMILLON SAUVIGNON BLANC 2024

Classic Margaret River blend, made for summertime drinking. Juicy tropical fruit, lime curd and garden herbs on the nose. There's a rainwater softness on the palate with lemony acidity carrying forth to a refreshing finish. 91 points, Halliday Wine Companion. **13% alcohol, \$24**

WEST CAPE HOWE MOUNT BARKER RIESLING 2024

Fresh aromas of green apple and zesty lime; subtle hints of white flowers and wet stone. Tart citrus and stone fruits drive the medium-bodied palate, balanced by a refreshing acidity. Champion riesling, National Cool Climate Wine Show. **12% alcohol, \$22**

THE AUSTRALIAN WINE CLUB SUPER SIX OFFER

Two bottles of each wine above for \$21.99 a bottle. **SAVE \$30.**

