

TE MATA 'COLERAINE' 1982 – 2006

Saturday 3 May 2008

By Raymond Chan

An historical event for the New Zealand wine scene was conducted at the Hastings Opera House in Hawke's Bay on Saturday 3 May. There, Te Mata Estate celebrated 25 years of their flagship wine 'Coleraine', with a vertical tasting of every vintage of the wine made for over 200 friends and wine lovers. The 'Coleraine' label is an icon for the New Zealand wine industry, it being the longest continually produced premium wine in this country. It is the benchmark by which other Bordeaux-styled Hawke's Bay reds are judged, and in some ways is the yardstick for our whole industry to measure success.

Many people see 'Coleraine' as an indicator for New Zealand's wine progress, and place it in a standing with the world's finest examples of the style. The fact that it has remained a 'classical' expression of the Bordeaux varietals throughout its life is a testament to the confidence of the proprietors of Te Mata in the timelessness of its style and its ability for longevity and to develop interest and complexity with bottle-age. There is certainly no concession to fads and fashions, and in doing so, the wine keeps to parameters that ensure international understanding of the refined, elegant, ageworthy Bordeaux-style. Such wines are particularly suited to matching fine cuisine, and in that context, 'Coleraine' is truly a very successful wine. The foresight, vision and work of owners John and Wendy Buck, with Michael and June Morris is to be commended, as is the technical skill of winemaker Peter Cowley, supported by Phil Brodie and viticulturist Larry Morgans, and their teams.

The vertical tasting was one of several varied events that celebrated and showcased Te Mata Estate's established standing and its excellent range of high quality wines, including, of course, 'Coleraine'. Some of the features of the weekend of festivities included the serving of the 1981 Te Mata Cabernet Sauvignon, the precursor wine to 'Coleraine'. It was still very much alive and drinking well, though showing the leafiness that modern viticulture has now more easily negated. The introduction of 'Coleraine' with the following vintage was a step up from this wine. Attendees also had the opportunity of tasting barrel samples of the 2007 'Coleraine' as well as a freshly fermented 2008 Cabernet Sauvignon component, these showing glimpses of the continued quality to come. However, it was the vertical tasting of 'Coleraine' from the inaugural 1982 vintage to the current release 2006 that was the main billing.

The wines were tasted in four flights, from oldest to youngest. Following are my notes and scores on the wines. I have included technical, vintage and heat data provided in the information hand-outs from Te Mata Estate and from their website www.temata.co.nz

Flight One: 1982 – 1987

This flight of older wines, though varied in many aspects, all displayed the secondary and tertiary characters expected of wines two decades old and older. Interestingly, the 1983, 1985 and 1987 still had plenty of time ahead, whereas the 1984 and 1986 were in decline. All of the wines were in remarkably good condition, drinkable and the best showing balance, vitality and complexity. The variations are certainly vintage related, and to a lesser degree must indicate the learning of site, varieties and handling. The 1982 and 1983 have always been a fascinating pair to compare, each wine having its supporters. The richness and completeness of the 1982 was always a contrast to the ripeness and depth of the 1983. Again the wines split the tasters. An eye-opening group of wines proving the ageworthiness of the style and the quality possible.

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1982

13.5% alc, pH 3.52, TA 6.7 g/l. 94% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot, harvested between 7-12 April. Dry spring and warm weather until late March. Heavy rain and strong winds in early April, but very clean crops. Vintage heat summation: 1457 Growing Degree Days. Fruit solely from John and Wendy Buck's home 'Coleraine' vineyard. Deepish ruby red colour with garnet hues. This has a fine, concentrated nose, identifiably blackcurranty Cabernet Sauvignon, some volatility adding lift to the perfumes, liquorice, tobacco and cedar on bouquet adding mature complexities. Drying a little now, on palate, refined cedar notes, quite elegant in style, there is some volatility showing. Tannins are fine-grained, and add to the dryness of expression. This has aged with grace, and remaining bottles should be consumed. My score 17.5+/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1983

13.0% alc, pH 3.50, TA 6.5 g/l. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, harvested 14-19 April. Very warm and very dry season, windy spring and summer. 1398 GDD. Darkish, red, still some ruby hues, good depth, still relatively youthful in colour. Powerful, and dense nose with dark, ripe fruit aromas, intense and concentrated on bouquet. Powerful and full on palate, this shows a robust, almost rustic element in the make up. Tannins provide good structure and grip, and the wine displays sweetness on the back palate. Based on this showing, the wine is in good condition and its balance will allow it to hold for some time yet. 18.5/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1984

11.7% alc, pH 3.60, TA 5.9 g/l. 83% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 2% Cabernet Franc. harvested 6-28 April. Cooler than average season with regular, but excessive rainfall. 1314 GDD. Lighter edged garnet red with bricking. Not as youthful in appearance as the previous two wines. Fullish, aromatic nose with breadth, a little weedy and brackish in its expression, with a sour edge to the bouquet. Elegantly sized, this shows cooler, leafy, blackcurrant Cabernet Sauvignon fruit flavours. Softened, loose-knit, easy and mellowed out, this is has become a little short on flavour now. 16.0-/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1985

13.0% alc, pH 3.40, TA 6.5 g/l. 72% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, harvested 26 March-12 April. Great balance of rain and warmth throughout the growing season. 1557 GDD. Deepish garnet red colour with good heart, some youthful hues. Elegant, smaller-scale nose, this still has freshness of blackcurranty fruit and cedarwood. The expression is a touch cool, but this has perfume. Elegant on palate, this is still very fresh and lively. The proportion and balance are excellent, the tannins fine and giving good grip and structure. This has plenty of time to go. 18.5-/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1986

13.0% alc, pH 3.50, TA 5.8 g/l. 73% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, harvested 2-21 April. Warm season with average rainfall every month. Large berry size, but ripened to high sugar levels. 1474 GDD. 18 months in 60% new French barriques. Lighter, fading colour with bricky hues, lighter on edge. Less, ripe, cooler expression in bouquet, somewhat sappy and lacking. On the palate, the greener fruit character has come to the fore, sappy, curranty and cedar notes show, the palate is fading. Quite integrated and tannins resolved. However, this is on the decline now. 15.5-/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1987

12.5% alc, pH 3.50, TA 6.0 g/l. 78% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, harvested 3-24 April. Warm spring with a hot dry summer following and some heavy rain late March. Small berry size. 1419 GDD. Deepish garnet red colour with a little mahogany and bricking. Powerful nose, somewhat cool, brackish and raw. The blackcurrant fruit aromas have depth, however. Quite robust on the palate, this still shows structure and tannin grip. The fruit is a little coarse with its raw, brackish note, and the acidity seems pronounced. Still plenty of life here, but the wine lacks finesse. 17.0-/20

Flight Two: 1988 – 1995

A flight that showed the full potential and quality possible under the 'Coleraine' label, as well as the integrity of the Te Mata management in not releasing a wine that does not meet the standards required. While the 1988, and 1994 to a lesser extent, displayed less than fully ripened fruit characteristics, other attributes compensated for this deficiency, the freshness and vinosity of the former and the palate richness of the latter. The 1989 and 1990 have always been two vintages to compare together, as with 1982 and 1983. The 1991 was brilliant on this showing, the 1995 very close behind, as usual.

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1988

12.5% alc, pH 3.50, TA 6.1 g/l. 75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, harvested 30 March-14 April. Warmer than average and dry until end of January. Cyclone Bola brought heavy rain in early March. Ripe, but with dilution. 1516 GDD. 17 months in 60% new French barriques. Very light colour, garnet hued with brick and mahogany. Very light bouquet, with cool, sappy and green fruit aromas, fully developed with mature cedary notes. On palate, this is green and sappy, showing unripe elements in the flavours. The wine is loose-knit and the acidity is prominent. However, there is still grip from the tannins, and while not particularly rich or concentrated, the wine has presence and length, carried a little by the acidity. The wine is still fresh and lively. 15.5/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1989

12.5% alc, pH 3.52, TA 6.6 g/l. 54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc, harvested 10-23 March. A dry year, cool in January. An early harvest. 1664 GDD. 20 months in 70% new French barriques. First year 'Coleraine' was not a single-vineyard wine. Deepish garnet red colour, a little lighter on edge, some youthful hues. Soft, fine and integrated bouquet, this is gentle and harmonious with balance and lovely fragrance. This is quite elegant on palate, with luscious and lively fresh blackcurrant flavours and soft chocolate notes. The good, balanced extraction provides supple grip and backbone, and along with the acidity gives good cut to the flavours. Well- concentrated, and attractive for its elegance. 18.0+/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1990

12.0% alc, pH 3.40, TA 6.0 g/l. 54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 36% Merlot, 10% Cabernet Franc, harvested 6-27 April. One of the warmest vintages, normal rainfall, average berry sizes, though Merlot larger than normal. 1702 GDD. 19 months in French barriques. Garnet hued red with depth to the colour, though a touch of light bricking on edge. Reasonably rich and full nose, showing some complex savoury aromas, a little funky, animal-like Brettanomyces, but all part of the whole. Fullish bodied with breadth to the body. Ripe dark fruit flavours, quite openly structured, but the tannin firmness is still present. There is good concentration and depth in a robust way. The meaty, gamey elements are beginning to come to the fore. Not quite as fresh as the 1989, however, but there is interest and ripeness with size here. 18.0/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1991

13.0% alc, pH 3.55, TA 6.0 g/l. 59% Cabernet Sauvignon, 29% Merlot, 12% Cabernet Franc, harvested 10-26 April. Early season with the quickest flowering and prolonged settled weather, and one heavy rainfall on 9/10 April. 1557 GDD. 19 months in 75% new French barriques. Very dark, deep, black hued red colour, almost impenetrable. Great purity and intensity on the nose. This has powerful, but refined blackcurrant fruit that opens out in the glass with sweetness and ripeness and finesse. On the palate, powerfully intense and concentrated, the pure refined fruit expression is the highlight. Blackcurrants, cedarwood, blackberries, rich, dense and layered. The wine is still tightly bound, with beautifully fine-grained tannins, providing a supple, but firm backbone and great length. Great proportion, this is pretty well perfect, and will live another decade easily. 20.0/20

1992 – Not Made

Ash from the Mt Pinatubo eruption in June 1991 caused a reduction in sunlight reaching the Earth's surface and therefore cooler temperatures. 1190 GDD.

1993 – Not Made

Cooler temperatures from the Mt Pinatubo eruption persisted. 1118 GDD

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1994

12.5% alc, pH 3.60, TA 5.8 g/l. 74% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Merlot, 17% Cabernet Franc harvested 3-12 April. Cool November and December, the season falling behind, but warming up from Christmas. Below average rainfall. 1326 GDD. 20 months in new and used French barriques. Garnet-ruby red colour, this is lighter on edge, but with some purple hues. The bouquet shows some herbaceous aromas, green with a little sappiness to the blackcurranty fruit. The fruit aromas are generally primary and quite fresh still. On the palate, this shows better ripeness than the bouquet. Riper currant flavours, with good richness allied to the freshness and acidity. Fine-grained tannins give good supporting structure. An elegant wine overall, and attractively classical in the Bordeaux-style. 17.5+/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1995

13.0% alc, pH 3.62, TA 5.3 g/l. 59% Cabernet Sauvignon, 34% Merlot, 7% Cabernet Franc, harvested 3-13 April. Hot and dry growing season with drizzle from April, the bulk of the rain falling after the harvest. 1536 GDD. 19 months in new and used French oak. Blackish hue red, with good depth, the edge a little lighter. This has a full, rich and ripe bouquet, full of sweet, blackcurrants and blackberry fruit aromas. Secondary elements showing now. Very fulsome, almost robust. A wine of power, density and concentration on the palate, with full dark fruits, robustly expressed and well-matched by the sturdy structure. Power with richness for this wine, which while lacking the refinement of the 1991, has its character from the muscular componentry. This will live another decade easily. 19.5-/20

Flight Three: 1996 – 2001

A flight of wines that are the result of dealing with extremes and challenges, and successfully so. With the cooler vintages, an essential balance will allow harmonious development, though in a shorter term. Brettanomyces seems to be present in some of the wines, but again, its effects and expression has not taken away from the drinkability of the wines. The 1998 vintage with its extreme dryness and heat has resulted in an atypical wine for the 'Coleraine' style, delicious, but one that polarizes people's opinions. However, the 2000, is classic 'Coleraine' and recognized for what it is.

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1996

13.0% alc, pH 3.66, TA 5.8 g/l. 53% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 14% Cabernet Franc, harvested 9-24 April. Mixed growing season, initially warm and dry, heavy rain in January, less so in February and warmer, followed again by rain. A warm April however. 1491 GDD. 19 months in French oak. Dark hearted ruby red with a little garnet on edge. Fresh, ripe and lush bouquet with good blackcurrant fruit aromas and savoury complexities, all in balance. On the palate the structure predominates, the tannins giving a dryness. Blackcurrant flavours with toast-like char and savoury, meaty elements from a little brett showing and adding interest and complexities. Approaching its best drinking window, but will drink well over the next 5-7 years. 17.5+/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1997

13.0% alc, pH 3.75, TA 5.9 g/l. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, 15% Cabernet Franc, harvested 11-30 April. A drawn out flowering, warm and humid in February and March, then prolonged warm, dry weather. 1329 GDD. 21 months in new and used French barriques. Deepish ruby red, some garnet hues, not as dark as the 1996. Cooler fruited nose, a little leafiness and brackish, some smoky, toasty oak showing. Elegant, lighter-weighted wine, a little cooler in expression. The wine has some

cedary-savoury elements, but the acidity gives freshness and cut. Approachable now, with no hardness, rather light, but attractively so, with good proportion. One to drink earlier. 17.0/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1998

13.5% alc, pH 3.79, TA 5.6 g/l. 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc, harvested 26 March-18 April. Drought season. Large crop set required thinning and careful management to avoid dehydration. Fruit in wonderful condition. The hottest year experienced. 1757 GDD. 20 months in French barriques. Very dark, deep, black red colour, impenetrable. Great richness and power of ripe black berried fruits and plums, sweet-smelling, with sur-maturite, and a touch of portiness. The palate is the richest, sweetest and ripest expression of 'Coleraine' yet, the warmth and ripeness oozing in lusciously decadent, rich dark fruits and savoury, jammy nuances. The wine is luscious and plump, yet the massive tannin structure is detectable beneath the fruit layer. Still very youthful at this time and admirable for its sweetness and ripeness, though without the floral elegance that the Te Mata style is preferred to possess. 19.5/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 1999

13.5% alc, pH 3.71, TA 5.5 g/l. 51% Cabernet Sauvignon, 43% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc, harvested 24 March-8 April. Early harvest, reduced volumes, yields 60% of normal. Hot year with some heavy showers in January. 1626 GDD. 19 months in French barriques. Medium deep ruby red colour with garnet hues, lighter on edge. Cooler nose, not quite the ripeness of fruit, this has complex animal elements to the bouquet of currants and herbs. Well-sized on the palate, this has drying tannins and good structure. The fruit is savoury, with gamey animal flavours, showing some brettanomyces influence. Though without quite the richness and sweetness of the fruit, the freshness of the acidity enlivens the palate. 17.5-/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 2000

13.0% alc, pH 3.81, TA 5.3 g/l. 52% Cabernet Sauvignon, 29% Merlot, 19% Cabernet Franc, harvested 5-19 April. Very dry growing season with small berries. Normal heat levels. 1424 GDD. 19 months in French oak. Dark, deep, ruby red with youthful purple hues. The nose is initially shy, but opens up to reveal freshness and perfumed fruit aromas of ripe blackcurrants red berries and plums. Beautifully interwoven components give complexity to the bouquet. A medium-weighted, elegant wine that is restrained at present. Lovely ripe, but fresh fruit flavours, with sweetness to the blackcurrants. The tannins are extremely fine-grained and the suppleness allows accessibility. Air time allows greater expression. Very long on the finish. The sheer elegance and balance of the wine will enable aging another decade. 19.0-/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 2001

13.5% alc, pH 3.70, TA 5.4 g/l. 55% Cabernet Sauvignon, 29% Merlot, 16% Cabernet Franc, harvested 9-21 April. Cool spring and flowering leading to small crops. Dry, but cooler than average year. 1358 GDD. 21 months in French oak. Dark, deep ruby red, almost impenetrable colour. Bright and fresh with ripe blackcurrant and plum aromas, plump with a sweetness of fruit on bouquet. Full-bodied and quite firmly structured, this has strong blackcurrant flavours, with a little herb spiciness showing the coolness of the vintage. The wine has breadth on the palate and is solid, with a robustness. The tannins are a little dominant, however, and the finish is of medium length. Drink within the first decade. 18.0-/20

Flight Four: 2002 – 2006

The final flight was a perfect culmination for the tasting. Consistency of high quality was the essence of this group of wines. With time, the vines and vineyards have matured as has the winemaking team. Top vintages have contributed to this quality as well, but these five wines are all excellent and very

representative of the 'Coleraine' style of elegance, while allowing individuality from the different vintage come through. All of the wines have a good future ahead of them, and there is every reason to believe they will age as well, if not better than their predecessors. As with many pairs of 'Coleraine' wines, the 2005 and 2006 will be intriguing to follow over time, as exceptional examples.

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 2002

14.0% alc, pH 3.70, TA 5.3 g/l. 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 39% Merlot, 36% Cabernet Franc, harvested 25 March-22 April. The second longest harvest for Te Mata. An early and warm spring with damp December and January, followed by a cool February. But a long, warm and dry autumn allowing long hang time. 1425 GDD. 20 months in French oak. Dark, deep, ruby red colour, excellent heart. Full and fat on the nose, this is rich and very complex with dark plum and berry fruit aromas with plenty of dense meaty, gamey aromas. The palate is fat and broad, with a full tannin profile. The dryness of structure gives a firmness, and there is power to the wine. Tannins are fine-textured, with the complex animal and savoury plum-berry flavours behind. The flavours are forward, secondary and showing development signs. At this stage the Brett influence is at an acceptable balance, but this may probably change over the next 3-5 years. Complex, savoury and full drinking now. 18.0-/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 2003

13.5% alc, pH 3.69, TA 5.7 g/l. 50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 50% Merlot, harvested 15 April-1 May. Small crops due to a frosty spring generally in N.Z., but generally normal for Te Mata with a dry summer and heat a little below average. 1360 GDD. 20 months in French oak. Very dark, deep, purple hued ruby red, with good heart. Fresh, ripe nose with blackcurranty Cabernet Sauvignon, dried herbs and plums with liquorice. The bouquet is tight and dense, quite concentrated, a touch shy, even. Very fine-textured on the palate, the wine is a little narrowed and lean at present, with tightness of structure showing. The fruit expression is bright and fresh, excellent currant flavours to the fore, with some earthiness complexing the wine. Good cut from the acidity. This should age well in the medium term plus. 18.0/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 2004

14.0% alc, pH 3.61, TA 5.7 g/l. 39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot, 16% Cabernet Franc, harvested 29 March-26 April. Mild and dry to December, then hot and generally dry, settled and warm weather till harvest. 1272 GDD. 20 months in predominantly new French oak. Dark, deep ruby red with some garnet hues on edge. Fresh and bright bouquet, with beautiful aromatics. Good ripeness of fruit, with dark berries, cherry fruit and plums showing. The wine is one of elegance, lusciousness, freshness and aromatic expression. Lovely cherry and raspberry Cabernet Franc fruit shows, the flavours luscious and sumptuous. Tannins are very fine, and the acidity adds to the elegance of the wine. This should age well. 19.0-/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 2005

13.5% alc, pH 3.49, ta 5.9 g/l. 37% Cabernet Sauvignon, 45% Merlot, 18% Cabernet Franc, harvested 29 March-22 April. Hot, settled, dry summer. The smallest berries on record. 1448 GDD. 20 months in new and seasoned French oak. Dark, deep ruby red with purple hues, very youthful, a little lighter on edge. Very full and rich on nose, with nuanced lush fruit aromas. The aromas open up to reveal layers of complex aromatics in the riper spectrum, with a little meaty interest. On the palate, the plump black fruits speak of Merlot, and the wine is full and rich. There is considerable power, size and depth, the tannin extraction serious and solid. A full wine, with the rounded richness allowing some accessibility that the 2006 does not show yet. 19.0+/20

Te Mata 'Coleraine' 2006

13.5% alc, pH 3.56, TA 5.7 g/l. 43% Cabernet Sauvignon, 49% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc, harvested 3-22 April. Warm and dry growing season, slightly lower than average yield. 1479 GDD. 20 months in predominantly new French oak. Very dark, deep, purple hued ruby red, dense, almost impenetrable,

youthful in appearance. The bouquet is one of fragrance, tight and intense, and promising much more than its simpler dimensions at present show. The florals are gorgeous, quite exotic, with perfumes and scents. These come through on the palate, and are the feature of the flavour profile. Florals, roses red and black currants, plums and berries show. The extraction is very serious and very fine, contributing to the tightness of the wine. This is a beautifully fine-grained 'Coleraine' that will show finesse, fragrance and elegance. 19.5-/20

Summary

This was a remarkable tasting, one which it was a privilege to experience. The consistency of style of 'Coleraine' is a feature that came through strongly. Te Mata's preference for the classical style of Bordeaux blends, that possess elegance and fragrance certainly has benefits in ageworthiness and the development of complexity. Wines of immediate richness, size, alcohol, extraction and oak more often than not, mature much more quickly, and do not offer the same degree of food matching ability. Interestingly, the cooler vintages respond well with this style, as can be seen from this tasting. Te Mata's effort in the hot and dry 1998 vintage is superb in my mind, but the wine style is not desirable from the Te Mata perspective. It is a credit to Te Mata that they have stayed true to their initial philosophies, especially in the present climate of the proliferation of 'instant gratification' wines. The Te Mata 'Coleraine' style requires patience and cellaring, but the complexities that develop and the enjoyment window is prolonged. Experienced wine lovers know this, and many new wine drinkers need to learn and discover this for themselves.

The other important trend was the subtle and continuous improvement in the wines over time. This is to be expected, but it is not always achieved, as it is tempting to immediately follow so-called innovations in viticulture and winemaking. The gradual 'tweaking' of 'Coleraine' has been barely perceptible, but with an overview as afforded by this tasting, it becomes a little more obvious. Better canopy management, the introduction of superior clonal material and rootstock, as well as more refined and sophisticated maceration and extraction regimes have seen cleaner, healthier fruit and wine that can handle adverse conditions. Extreme temperatures, frosts, inclement weather and winery health issues are all handled better by better quality fruit. This has happened with 'Coleraine'

Te Mata 'Coleraine' has never been better. It deserves its place as one of the icon wines of this country, and as such it can stand tall among the world's fine wines.