



Caps Off to Central Otago's New Premium Bottler

CROMWELL, Central Otago, New Zealand, 4th July, 2008. Along with Central Otago's increasing reputation for producing world-class Pinot Noir, there is also an increasing need for premium packaging solutions. New player, Wine First, is positioning itself to meet producers' quality expectations.

Tim Williams and Mark Simmonds recognized the requirement for additional wine bottling facilities to meet the growing demand of the many new vineyards coming on stream as well as the maturing of established wineries' plantings. With backgrounds in engineering, bottling and the beverage industry, they believed they could combine their industry experience with clever plant design and automation to establish a premium bottling facility. It was important that the solution they offered required minimal labour and low critical volume that would allow the flexibility to meet fluctuating demands and be cost-effective on small runs of high-quality packaging.

One of the newest producers in the region, Misha's Vineyard, wanted to develop a relationship with a premium bottling company that could grow with them as their vineyard matured but were also were looking for some greater flexibility in labelling and bottling options. "We chose Wine First because they were able to handle our larger format wine label which requires very careful application in order to achieve a smooth finish" said Misha Wilkinson, Director of Misha's Vineyard.

Misha's Vineyard has been working with Adelaide-based design agency Tucker Creative and specialist printer Collotype Labels in designing and testing their distinctive label. "Our label size is probably at the limits of the bottle specifications but Wine First were confident they could meet our requirements, proved it on our blank label tests, and impressed us with their attention to detail through the entire process."

Wine First Ltd has established their facility in Cromwell, which is the centre of the rapidly developing wine producing area and situated in close proximity to many of the existing



wineries and also adjacent to two national freight forwarders. The building, plant selection, and ergonomic layout were designed to maximise operational efficiencies. The facility offers an advanced bottling plant with fast overhead packaging feeds and automated bottling handling, sophisticated labelling options, and a central supervisory control point as well as other quality control checks. In addition they manage the procurement and storage of dry goods using an automated inventory control, provide temperature controlled storage and complete distribution solutions.

Tim Williams has seventeen years of engineering experience working on major projects overseas and for the past four years has successfully designed, built, patented and sold a number of machines principally for the mining and beverage processing industries. His partner Mark Simmonds has spent thirteen years in the beverage business establishing beverage manufacturing company Benger Gold Juicing Company, where he created the products, designed and installed the bottling plant, as well as operating the facility.

“It’s not just our design and process-engineering knowledge that’s been important in setting up this plant, but also our commitment to be very hands-on in making the business operational” explains Simmonds. “Our goal was to provide a package that allowed customers to substantially improve their performance, flexibility in all aspects of bottling, and a very high speed line that could provide quick turnaround times and handle the increasing volume that’s coming from the region”.

Central Otago recorded the country’s highest percentage growth in wine producing hectares in 2006 with a 28% increase and followed this with the 2nd highest growth last year. The region’s success with Pinot Noir is driving this growth with the variety now accounting for 78% of planted hectares and attracting the country’s highest grape prices on a tonnage basis.

In three of the past eight years at the International Wine Challenge (IWC), it has been a Pinot Noir from Central Otago which has taken out the coveted International Pinot Noir



Trophy. Similar success has been attained at the Decanter World Wine Awards with both of shows attracting over 9,000 wines from around the world

With this international success putting the spotlight on wines from Central Otago, every aspect of the production and packaging process needs to be at uncompromising levels of quality.

Some of the specific advances in bottling that Wine First offers are:

- **Advanced Filling and Capping Technology.** An Italian MBF monobloc system provides electronically-controlled pneumatic valve filling and features exceptionally low oxygen absorption. It also delivers precise fill levels and quality closure application through its patented stainless steel capping head design.
- **Clean Skin Bottling.** A cost-effective option is available to enable bottling of wine without labels (clean skin) and then at a later stage, once markets and orders are known, reprocess the bottles through the labelling and packaging lines.
- **Labelling.** A top-of-the-line Krones rotary labeller equipped with German made Herma applicators provide a sophisticated labelling solution. With 15 heads, a large diameter rotary platform, and microprocessor controlled applicators, the Krones labeller ensures accurate label and smooth label positioning to give perfect results every time. Fullwrap, front and back, and neck wrap/spot label application can be all be completed in one pass.
- **In Line Dissolved Oxygen Meter.** An inline dissolved oxygen (DO) meter has been incorporated into the plant design. These DO recordings form a critical part of the supervisory/QA procedure and provide valuable feedback to the client.



- **Proprietary Process Solutions.** Through the development of proprietary industrial process solutions, Wine First has implemented systems and solutions normally the domain of much larger bottling lines. Wine First also manufactures all of its change parts and conveyor systems in-house which enables a lower set-up cost and a lower critical volume when setting up for a different packaging style. An example of this is the recent change to accommodate the application of 31.5mm screw closures, as well as Stelvin Lux and WAK closures.
- **Plant Speed.** At 6000 bottles per hour, the plant provides a fast turnaround time for producers often working within tight timeframes for bottling.
- **On-Site Laboratory Testing.** A laboratory testing facility assesses all wine prior to bottling to ensure wine is up to specification.
- **Tankering.** Double skinned insulated tankers are used to transport the wine to ensure the wine is bottled at optimum temperatures.

“When you’re building a new brand there are so many things you need to ensure you get right, and with packaging so important on super premium wines, there can’t be any compromises” said Wilkinson.

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* Statistics from *NZ Winegrowers Statistical Annual 2007*

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About Misha's Vineyard Wines Limited

Established in 2004 by Andy and Misha Wilkinson, Misha's Vineyard is situated on 57 hectares of Bendigo Station's most visually spectacular sites located on the north-west facing terraces overlooking Lake Dunstan. With 10 hectares planted in 2004, 12 hectares in 2005, and a further 4 hectares in 2007, Misha's Vineyard plans further planting as well as the construction of an underground wine cellar and winery. Currently two-thirds of the vineyard is planted in Pinot Noir, with the remainder comprising a selection of white varieties including Pinot Gris, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Gewürztraminer. The primary markets for Misha's Vineyard Wines will be Asia and the US with the full range of wines scheduled for launch in 2009.

About Wine First Ltd

Established by Tim Williams and Mark Simmonds in 2007, Wine First Ltd is centrally located in Cromwell, the heart of Central Otago's rapidly developing wine producing area. Combining smart plant design with a high level of automation, Wine First offers a premium but competitive bottling solution. Services include state-of-the-art bottling and labelling equipment, advanced quality control, procurement and storage options and a range of flexible solutions to meet clients' specific requirements. On-site laboratory testing and constant monitoring during production enables quality audits during the entire bottling process. Wine First can also apply the latest bottle closures including 31.5mm screw closures as well as Stelvin Lux and Wak.

Photos available in high resolution JPG format by request to Misha Wilkinson