

Three sixty, with Geoff Thorpe Refresh and reconnect

Another very challenging year in the wine industry is coming to a close – certainly a year many of us are likely to look back upon as a time of endurance, rather than enjoyment.

But with Christmas and the summer holidays just around the corner, a little enjoyment can't be far behind. Is it just me, or has there been a very subtle windshift in the industry in the last few weeks?

Sure, this spring has not been the kindest here in Gisborne – we came out of the wettest winter in living memory, had a very dry September, 300 mm of rain in 30 hours in October, then a very cold and cloudy November (the mean overnight minimum 6C below average!). Nonetheless, as the days brightened and the order book for grafting started to swell, so too has my sense of having “come through” the seemingly endless trials set down this year by Mother Nature, the moribund marketplace, and the grim imperative to further scale down operations.

In difficult times, we tend not to look beyond our immediate concerns. The battle requires eyes straight ahead – with no chance to focus on the horizon and what might lie in store. The trouble is, it's all too easy to miss what already surrounds us – amazing family, friends, and the stunning raw beauty of our homeland.

Over the last week I have managed to squeeze in two school trips: the first, a climb to the summit of Mount Hikurangi (~1,800M) with 14 Year 7 students (Form 1), their teacher and half a dozen parents. We started the climb at 3 am and endured strong winds, showers and penetrating cold, but everyone made it to the top. It was a shame we didn't get the much-anticipated sunrise, but my son Jack did get to blow out the candles on his 12th birthday cake in the shelter of a rock face!

A few days later, I joined the same class (22 kids this time) to mountain bike the old Motu Road. It was three days of absolute wilderness, total simplicity (sleeping in shearing sheds and tents), and well out of range of mobile reception – bliss!

I returned home physically weary from these few days of “adventure,” but I also found a renewed inner calm and strength – essential qualities whilst navigating



stormy seas. At the same time, I was firmly reminded of how little time and money it takes for us Kiwis to be able to reconnect with the most important aspects of our lives – family, friends, our health, and the wilderness.

So here's my Christmas recipe:

1. Pack a picnic (don't forget the wine and coffee!).
2. Collect your whanau and some good friends.
3. Leave all your troubles on the doorstep.
4. Head off for the day to rediscover a favourite place where the beauty of our natural world will take your breath away.
5. Swim, play Frisbee or soccer, bushwalk, fly kites, eat, enjoy a cold beer or wine, snooze in the shade.
6. Sing songs all the way back home (that's if the kids can stay awake!).

In other parts of the world, it costs a king's ransom to enjoy what we so often take for granted. So let's all get into it, and have a really merry Christmas.

Best wishes,

Geoff and Anna and all the Riversun whanau.