

London, 31 March 2026

To whom it may concern

I have been writing about Central Otago ever since I worked a harvest there in 2009, at the beginning of my writing career.

I am London-based and have written/am writing as a freelancer for both the trade and consumer press. The UK is one of the key export markets for New Zealand wines.

In my writing, I have traced the emergence of distinct wine subregions and focused on the developments outside the big Sauvignon Blanc industry in Marlborough, often through the lens of Pinot Noir.

Since wine is an agricultural product overlaid with ancient traditions and cultural significance, it speaks of the land and its origin, of the place and people who made it. This is what makes wine the polar opposite of, say, Coca-Cola. Because wine can be kept and aged and is not perishable like fresh produce, it holds a special place in farming and culture, it is, in a way, the acme of agricultural produce that even after years in bottle speaks of soil and place.

People who drink wine look for exactly these expressions in wine.

New Zealand in general, and Central Otago in particular, holds huge attraction for the rest of the world: primarily as a place of remote, pristine, astonishing and visceral beauty, unspoiled by and far removed from the industrial pollution that we encounter here in Europe. This pristine beauty, and New Zealand's early adoption of sustainability principles, are key to the wines.

There is an intensity, a beauty in New Zealand, that is unmatched and rare in more densely populated parts of the world. Its very attraction is that it comes from such unspoilt landscapes.

Putting a vast goldmine in the middle of it destroys not only this beautiful image, it also destroys the landscape itself. It destroys what is irreplaceable. It robs it of purity and rapes yet another part of pristine earth to leave it violated and poisonous.

The arguments made in favour of the mine are based on economic facts – and they are true enough. Everybody needs to make a living, find a decent and secure job that allows for a dignified life. The arrival of the mine clearly offers economic profits far beyond those available to farming – but at what real cost?

There already are numerous industrialised wastelands, metropolises, deserts and desolate dust-bowls – we do not need another one.

And please think for a moment about that mirage of “growth” that is cited, even fetishised, all the time. It is about the growth of profits, sure, but where do they go? Where are the taxes paid? Where is the actual money spent, and on what, by whom? Who creams off most? Those who spout loudest about “economic realities” should acknowledge the full picture of those realities: that food gets more expensive yet farmers still do not get fair prices. Who runs these crooked systems? The same “realists” with their MBAs who have never even grown one thing that they could eat, nurtured it from sowing or planting to harvest, yet they expect to eat every day while looking down on farmers.

But I digress.

Raping pristine landscape in such proximity to three small towns, in the middle of one of the most beautiful and untouched landscapes and within a unique wine region, will create lasting pollution, traffic, noise, untold disruption and wreak destruction that is irreversible.

I was reminded of Central Otago this past Sunday, when reading this article in the Observer: <https://observer.co.uk/news/international/article/argentinas-mineral-rich-glaciers-on-menu-as-milei-seeks-to-melt-protections> Here are the crucial passages:

*“In 2015, more than a million litres of cyanide solution – used to extract gold from rocks – leaked into rivers near Barrick Gold’s periglacial mining site in Veladero, San Juan. The company was fined \$9.3m. More spills have happened there since, one caused by falling ice.*

*In 2013, Chilean authorities fined Barrick Gold more than \$16m for environmental offences at its Pascua Lama project on the border with Argentina. The country’s environment agency found arsenic and sulphates in the groundwater. Eventually the pit was closed.*

*More warnings come from Brazil, another of Argentina’s neighbours. Two years ago BHP and Vale paid £23bn in compensation after a 2015 disaster at a mining site killed 19 people and polluted the Doce River for 420 miles, all the way to the Atlantic.”*

The damage was done, pollution happened, the company was fined, the pit was closed. And now? Wasteland. And who profited? Certainly not the locals. These are the inescapable realities of mining, here portrayed in an example from Argentina, a country in which Santana Mining’s CEO Damian Spring has worked. And note, he is the CEO, he is an employee, not the owner. If anything goes wrong down the line, he and his colleagues will maybe have moved on or retired. Who is ultimately responsible when the inevitable happens? That will be hard to say. Any compensation payments will never reverse the damage, will never purify air or water. Never. Damian Spring’s linked-in profile shows that he has held numerous short-term positions, none exceeding six years. While that may be partly due to the nature of his consulting career, it is also clear that while Santana touts “inter-generational employment” and prosperity for the region, Mr Spring so far has never even stuck out a decade with one employer. I just leave that there.

The winemakers I know in Central Otago have lived and worked there for decades. They may not have been born there, but they have made it their home and they care about it. They have built sustainable, small businesses and adopted organic and biodynamic farming principles, hold themselves to high standards, lest a spraying of glyphosate will destroy the microbial life in a foot of topsoil. And here now are gung-ho industrialists who want to move in with giant machinery promising an “environmentally responsible, economically sustainable mining project” that includes cyanide solution, a vast pit excavated with heaviest vehicles creating noise, dust and dirt, destroying natural habitats and wrecking a delicate natural balance – just think.

Central Otago has emerged as a recognised and key new world region for fine Pinot Noir. In my 2023 monograph on Pinot Noir for the International Wine and Food Society, I wrote:

*“The steep growth in plantings shows that Pinot Noir is a key variety for New Zealand. In contrast to Sauvignon Blanc, which has been the catalyst, motor and cash cow of the modern New Zealand wine industry, Pinot Noir has been the grape that first revealed and now illustrates the fine wine potential of New Zealand. [...]*

*“[...] What has transpired since is proof positive that New Zealand is a most splendid home for Pinot Noir because the grape expresses subtle differences in site, soil and aspect. Crucially, these differences are no longer hidden by winemaking decisions or overripeness. Nuance and depth rather than power are the watchwords now. The Maori term of turangawaewae – literally translated as ‘a place to stand’ – has been adopted to speak about this sense of place among New Zealand’s winemakers. And the regional crystallisation has continued: in Marlborough there are clear differences between the warmer Wairau Valley and the cooler Awatere Valley, between clay and gravel sites, in Central Otago there are clear differences between Bannockburn, Gibbston Valley*

*and Wanaka; the savouriness of Martinborough really shines while Nelson and North Canterbury bring finesse and elegance in equal measure. With maturing vine age and an ever-increasing focus on place, New Zealand will continue to be a mecca for Pinot lovers: all the wines seem to reflect both the beauty and the thrill of New Zealand's gorgeous and pristine landscape."*

Wine is a luxury product rather than an alimentary necessity, and while the wine world goes through a contraction and adjustment phase after rampant growth in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is one of the few things that remains real in an increasingly manipulated and fake world. The work that goes into growing and making it is real, too. In the vast majority of cases, it is honest and sustainable. By contrast, mining by large corporations is not.

Central Otago wines are prized because they come from a pristine and pure countryside. The structure of the wine industry, the climate and the grape varieties that are prevalent in Central Otago have meant and still mean that Central Otago wines are not cheap. Crucially, however, their pricing means that they are accessible to global wine lovers. Central Otago wines speak to a more involved consumer with more discretionary spend, to the kind of consumer who cares about purity and authenticity. While the wine world goes through structural adjustment and change, it is well documented that the older Boomer consumers who cared about blockbuster reds with high ratings fall away and are replaced by a possibly smaller but different new generation of wine lovers who care about environmental credentials. The wine industry think tank Areni Global's Report *The New Fine Wine Consumer* highlights some salient points:

*"Access is about more than the ability to pay. [...] Younger buyers [...] need an environment that's transparent, or they disengage. Younger consumers also pursue formal wine education at more than double the rate of older cohorts, not only to improve their knowledge, but also so they don't have to rely on gatekeepers.*

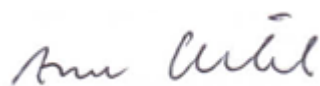
*Age group 26-30: travel and tastings: In the 26-30-year-old age group, travel experiences, wine tastings and encounters with winemakers became more important than friends, family and online content. Trade professionals like sommeliers and merchant also became more important. Meeting and speaking to professionals, and not just peer groups, is now important.*

*Age group:31-40: In these age groups [...] travel experiences remain instrumental for around 30% of this age category*

A quick google search on the future of wine tourism throws up:

*"Wine travel (enotourism) has evolved from a niche activity into a roughly US\$100+ billion global industry, growing rapidly at an approximate 13% CAGR, projected to reach over US\$330 billion by 2034. This growth is driven by a shift toward experiential, sustainable, and educational "story-driven" travel, particularly popular among Millennials and Gen Z."*

This is where the future lies. Not in mining. An open-cast goldmine is not only an eyesore, it is a dangerous and irreversible source of water and air pollution, relying on acutely toxic cyanide solution that sours, possibly even poisons any taste anyone might have for wine from the area. I truly hope it will not go ahead.



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