The Other Climate-Change Story

Polished by Warming: New World Wine's New Appeal

The same five regions — how rising temperatures reshaped quality and flavour



INTRODUCTION

Warming has another face

The previous deck followed the risks climate change brings and the adaptations it forces. But warming has another side. For regions that were simply too cool for grapes to ripen fully, it has become a tailwind, carrying fruit to full ripeness and drawing out richer flavour.



Regions that were too cool

In many cool New World regions, grapes failed to ripen fully in some years, leaving wines green and hard.



Closing in on “just right”

Rising temperatures are moving more regions into the sweet spot where full ripeness and fresh acidity meet.



Rising acclaim and attention

Better quality is starting to show in international reviews, and regions that were unknown are suddenly in the spotlight.

HOW QUALITY IMPROVES

Why “warmer” can mean better

Ripe grapes need sugar, acid, tannin and aroma compounds in balance. Where it is too cold, many regions reached harvest before that balance arrived.



Too cold

Green and hard

Sugar never quite climbs, and the wine turns hard and tight, with notes of cut grass and unripe acidity.

Just right

Ideal balance

Sugar, acid and tannin all arrive together: complex, deep wines with both fruit and freshness.



Too hot

Heavy and flat

Acidity drops and the fruit turns one-dimensional, risking the delicacy that only cool regions give.

What “riper” actually tastes like

Before turning to the regions themselves, here is what “riper fruit” concretely does to the taste of a wine.

Green notes → ripe fruit

The cut-grass and green-pepper notes of unripe fruit fade, and ripe berry and cherry aromas come forward.

Hard tannin → smooth tannin

Tannin ripens, the rough edge on the palate softens, and the texture moves closer to silk.

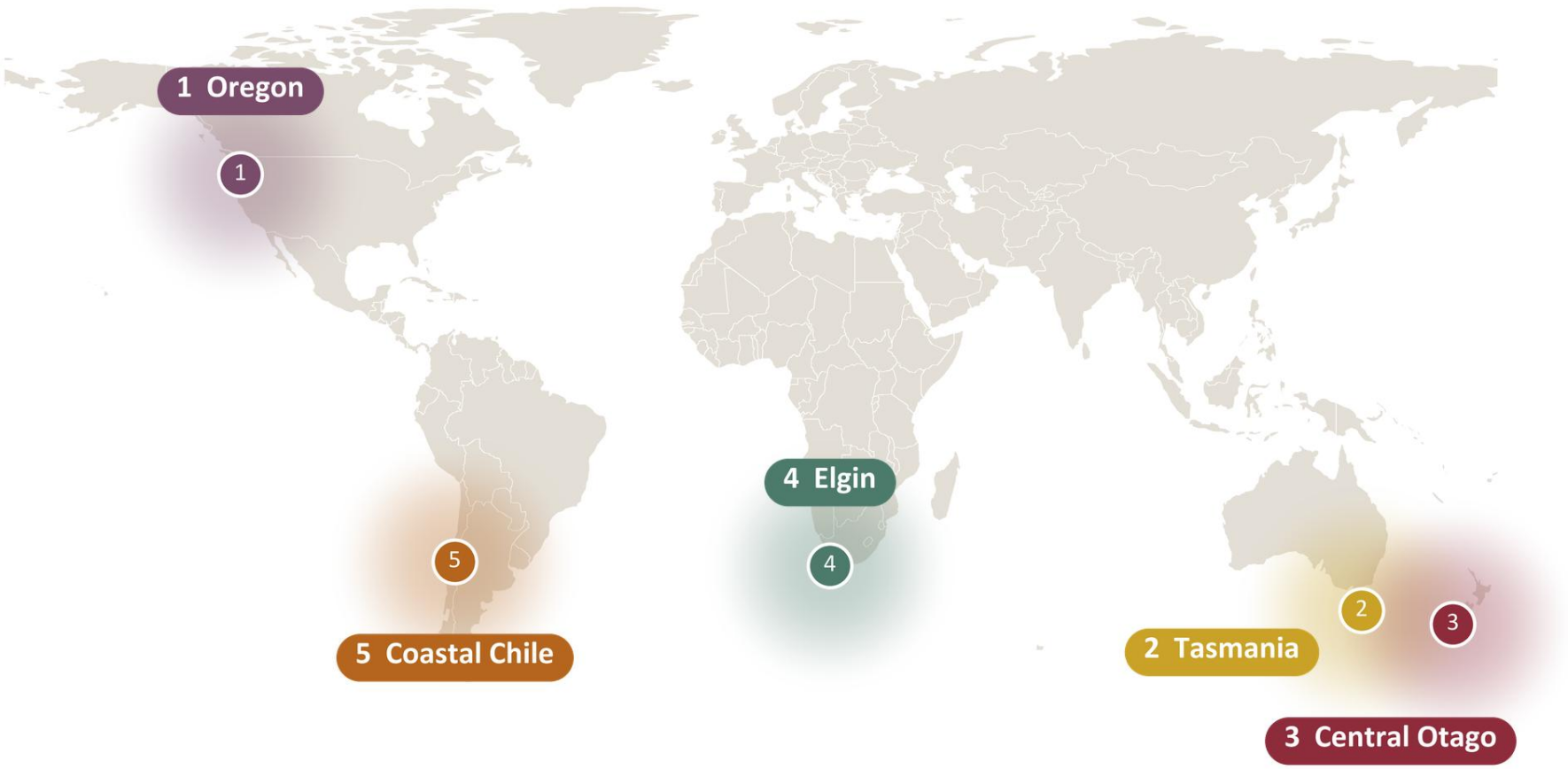
Acid-led → balanced with body

Fruit concentration builds, so the wine offers weight and depth as well as acidity.

Pale colour → deep, vivid colour

More skin pigment (anthocyanin) accumulates, and the colour in the glass tends to deepen and brighten.

Five areas that came out “winners” of climate change



1 Oregon, USA

Willamette Valley Pinot Noir

2 Tasmania, Australia

Sparkling & Pinot Noir

3 Central Otago, New Zealand

Refined Pinot Noir

4 Elgin and beyond, South Africa

A cool “little Burgundy”

5 Coastal Chile & Patagonia

Sea fog and altitude: a new frontier

REGION 01 — OREGON, USA

From “unreliable” to “golden age” — the Willamette Valley

Its cool climate left the Willamette Valley with plenty of green, hard vintages. Recent warming is bringing Pinot Noir the ripeness it always wanted.

The cool vintages of the past

Cool years such as 2011 and 2016 were sharp and elegant, but marked by green, hard tannin and high acidity.

Recent warm standout years

2014 and 2015 were called deep-coloured and “opulent”, and 2021 added balance between ripeness and acidity.

But there is caution about going too far

Researchers warn that “on this path Oregon Pinot starts to resemble California Pinot”. Growing-season temperatures may rise more than 3°C by the end of the century.

2021

A recent standout vintage, praised for balancing full ripeness with acidity. The green, hard character of the old cool years is receding, and richly fruited vintages are becoming more common.

REGION 02 — TASMANIA, AUSTRALIA

The continent’s last cool corner becomes a home of sparkling

While mainland Australia struggles with heat, the island state of Tasmania is, if anything, moving closer to an ideal cool climate.

15.6°C

Tasmania’s mean January temperature — the lowest of Australia’s major wine regions, and the key to its delicate, pure style.

Clear fruit and high acidity

The “purity” it is praised for comes from naturally high acidity and restrained sugar: delicate, yet with powerful concentration of fruit.

The Champagne houses are watching

Louis Roederer and Domaine Chandon, part of the Moët & Chandon group, are among the great houses securing Tasmanian fruit.

By 2050, like today’s Coonawarra

University of Tasmania research projects the state’s climate approaching that of today’s Coonawarra, South Australia, by 2050.

REGION 03 — CENTRAL OTAGO, NEW ZEALAND

From “prize fighter” to “ballerina”

The world’s southernmost Pinot Noir region has changed style dramatically in twenty years. What was powerful and rough has grown delicate and graceful.

In the early 2000s, a “prize fighter”

Critics described the wines of the day as “a prize fighter rather than a ballerina”: heavy extraction and craggy tannin.

Now, “energy and refinement”

Recent wines show delicate fruit with floral, herbal and mineral notes. Gentler extraction techniques helped drive the shift.

Better viticulture helped too

More sophisticated canopy management for a changing climate, and new clones, have both contributed to the more refined style.

20 years

How long it took Central Otago Pinot Noir to move from a powerful, rugged style to a delicate, elegant one.

REGION 04 — ELGIN & HEMEL-EN-AARDE, SOUTH AFRICA

Why “South Africa’s little Burgundy” keeps getting brighter

Elgin Valley, the country’s coolest region, and Hemel-en-Aarde on the coast. As warming punishes inland regions, the relative value of these cool refuges keeps rising.



250–500m

The altitude of the Elgin Valley. Cool sea breezes and cloud-covered summers nurture slow ripening and concentrated aromatics.



The sea breeze of Hemel-en-Aarde

Just 1–2km from Walker Bay, close enough to hold onto firm natural acidity while the fruit reaches physiological ripeness.



Delicacy that the reviews keep noting

The Pinot Noir wins praise for complex raspberry, cherry and forest-floor aromas and a smooth texture.



Change is reaching the refuges too

In 2026 the Western Cape recorded its earliest harvest on record. Warming is steadily reaching even the cool regions.

REGION 05 — COASTAL CHILE & ARGENTINE PATAGONIA / HIGH ALTITUDE

Sea fog and altitude open a new frontier

Armed with the cool of the Pacific's Humboldt Current and its morning fog, coastal Chile is emerging as a fine-wine region. In Argentina, altitude and southern latitude are opening new possibilities.

The cool of San Antonio & Casablanca

The chilling effect of the Humboldt Current and morning fog keeps these areas cool even as inland regions warm, giving both lively fruit and complexity.

Acidity born of Uco Valley altitude

In the high-altitude parts of Mendoza, Argentina (Gualtallary among them), the fresh acidity and striking floral aromas that altitude brings are widely admired.

Patagonia, the last frontier

In cool southern Patagonia, wines with clear acidity, pure fruit and lifted aromatics are beginning to appear.

45°S

The southern limit to which commercial planting is spreading in Argentine Patagonia (Chubut). Land long thought too difficult is now in the spotlight as a new wine region.

BEFORE AND AFTER

Five regions, before and after

Region	How it used to taste	How it tastes now	Why it changed
Oregon	Sharp and hard, green tannin	Ripe fruit balanced with body	Warmer growing season, fuller ripeness
Tasmania	Too cool; growing was a struggle	Clear fruit with delicate power	Warming made growing reliable, and it expanded
Central Otago	Rugged and powerful, coarse tannin	Floral aromas, delicate elegant texture	Steadier climate and better viticulture
Elgin & Hemel-en-Aarde	Too cool, so modestly rated	Raspberry aromas and silky texture win praise	As others struggle, relative value rises
Coastal Chile & Patagonia	Unplanted land at the limit of viticulture	A new style: lively acidity with complexity	New regions opened by sea fog and altitude

COMMON PATTERNS

What the five “winners” have in common

The cooling power of the sea

The Humboldt Current, sea breezes: the ocean softens the effect of warming and is the key to staying cool.

Altitude as the trump card

The higher the land, the cooler the air — and high ground is in the spotlight as new territory that offsets warming on the plains.

The coolness latitude brings

Land at higher latitudes, north and south, is newly offering the cool conditions that once made growing difficult.

The “just right” window is limited

If warming continues, many of these regions will eventually face the same problems as everyone else.

A NOTE OF CAUTION

How long will the “golden age” last?

Most of the regions here are benefiting while warming is still in its gentler phase. Among specialists, though, many doubt the benefit will last.



Oregon’s warning bell

Researchers warn that “on this path it becomes the new California”. Growing-season temperatures may rise more than 3°C by the end of the century.



South Africa’s early signal

Even the Western Cape, treated as a cool refuge, recorded its earliest harvest on record in 2026.



Seen worldwide

One estimate holds that 2°C of warming would leave 70% of the world’s wine regions facing worse growing conditions (see the previous deck, “New World Wine: The Front Line of Warming”).

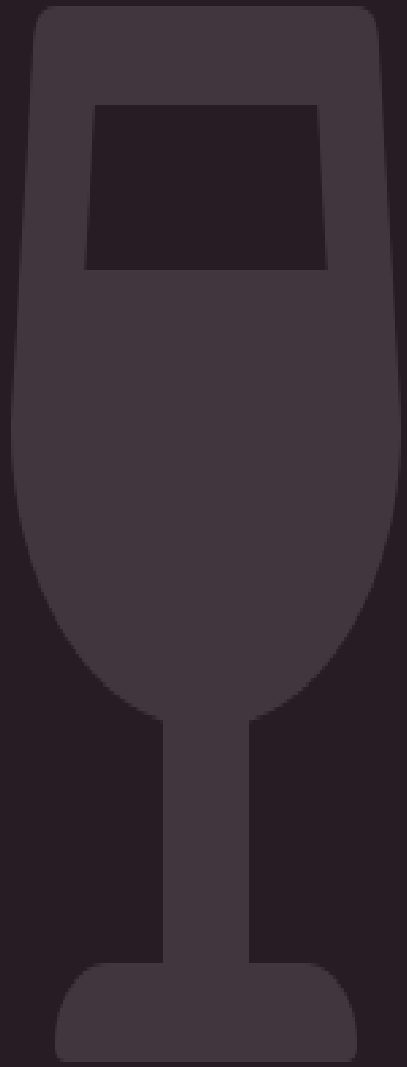
The “evolved glass” we can taste today may be only one chapter in the much larger story of climate change.

CLOSING

Tasting change itself

Climate change is not a uniform threat to wine. The same global shift brings hardship to one region and, to another, the gift of ripeness it never had. Next time you pick up a New World wine, try to sense the changing planet in the glass.

“A glass of wine is a letter written by that place’s climate, and only for this year.”



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This deck was prepared for a general audience using publicly available information.