



Exporter Profile

Heather Donachie, Spy Valley Wines

Heather Donachie is Export and Administration Manager at Spy Valley Wines in Blenheim and like many of her peers, moved into her exporting role by accident.



As a new employee in 2003, Spy Valley Wines was a much smaller company but over time the business has grown, the number of export markets has doubled and with it, Heather's job has also changed, which she describes as *"a fantastic way to learn"*.

Spy Valley Wines is a 380 acre family estate, owned by Bryan and Jan Johnson of Wellington - an ever-increasing luxury within the industry and Heather feels fortunate to be working on such a personal level with the owners in an atmosphere *"where everyone is appreciated and recognized"*. The name comes from the satellite listening station based in the Waihopai Valley and like most

New Zealand wine companies, 80% of Spy Valley wine is exported.

Marlborough's bountiful grape harvest this year (30% up on 2007) was the biggest production year for Spy Valley since its inception, producing 170 000 cases of wine which it exports to 25 countries, its biggest market being the UK. Marlborough's flagship wine is Sauvignon Blanc which makes up 75% of Spy Valley's production, although the company is especially renowned for its Aromatics and Pinot Noir, particularly popular with Spy Valley's *"potential market which is the contemporary stylish wine drinker, with a sense of humour"*.

Heather is responsible for administration, export logistics and management of Cellar Door, but the greater portion of her time is spent liaising with international distributors, logistics and exporting compliance.

Heather took up the challenge of the Diploma of International Trade *"mainly, so I can have a much better understanding of how international trade works, and the mechanics of different countries, their culture,*

needs and business trading". Almost half way through the programme, Heather has *"learnt a lot about the modus operandi of different countries/cultures, and the history of trade. It has also helped immensely with my geography! The downside has been finding the dedicated time for study"*.

Now that she has spent some years in the role, Heather believes the key skills and knowledge to succeed in International Trade require *"a task oriented person with an ability to work with every level of person from the truckies to the Managing Directors, an ability to see the bigger picture when dealing with international customers, a logical brain, having systems in place and lastly a head for acronyms!"*

Heather enjoys dealing with people from all backgrounds, *"Every country is different, and it keeps the brain stimulated. I also mostly enjoy the pressure of the job in getting product out the door and meeting the customer's expectations ... but being a reasonably isolated island nation, the challenge can be in making our distributors aware of the challenges we face at this end in meeting their deadlines and expectations"*.

Her advice to someone starting out in International Trade would be to find someone you can form a good working relationship with that really

understands the business, and *"bug the hell out of them to learn about it!"* Also, *"I think the Diploma would be very helpful for someone starting out or looking at a career in International Trade. But perhaps not until you have some understanding of International Trade"*.

Marlborough's record harvest of 2008 brought a mix of good and bad news for the industry. Wine



exporters have been able to increase their sales and satisfy some level of demand, but as Heather points out, the unexpected bounty could lead to *"the potential risk of some companies dumping juice at low prices and undervaluing the NZ product/brand"*.

Given that hindsight is a wonderful thing, does Heather have any regrets? *"Not going on to Higher Education at an earlier age. I think this would have increased my confidence and given me grounding for, shall we say a more solidified career"*.

With Heather set to get her qualifications in the not too distant future, what are her future ambitions? *"Still learning and living a balanced happy life. Oh, and laughing a lot"*- and who wouldn't be with a job like this.