

2020 VINTAGE REPORT

The 2020 vintage will be remembered at Waipara West as the one that nearly did not happen.

Our first concern was that the season started early - in fact the earliest on record - and thus could be exposed to inclement spring weather. Luckily, October was a kind month with mild temperatures and average rainfall, so the vines stretched out their shoots in relative peace. Then the hottest November on record struck like a double-edged sword creating perfect flowering conditions while sending fragile water levels in the gravel terraces plummeting. Irrigation became the topic on everyone lips and after only receiving 2.5mm of rain over a hot and windy six-week period mid-summer drought was declared. For two six-day episodes irrigation water needed to be feebly rationed around the blocks and loss of crop due to canopy loss became a reality. Timely rain in the headwaters of the Waipara River in mid-February averted disaster. The influence of the early start to the season and November's record heat proved to be the saving grace for the vintage. It brought fruit maturity forward by at least two weeks aligning the worst of the drought with a more favourable period of fruit development making the skins rich in tannins and softening acid levels.

Picking started two weeks into the coldest March since 2012. This reprieve in the hot and dry weather really set up the picking season ahead by slowing the rate of ripening. We picked for a week under a cloud of uncertainty as Covid-19 swept through the country, one thing was clear, compromising wine quality to get the crop picked in a hurry was not an option. We literally took it day by day in the beginning knowing that the government could pull the pin at any moment. We then took the government restrictions seriously knowing what was on the line and the fact that we could continue our passion under such conditions really gave us a steely determination to make a great job of it.

Fruit condition this vintage was impeccable with next to no pest and disease incidence and only the odd bit of shrivel to contend with. Lower acids and modest sugar levels made picking decisions easy and the bulk of the fruit was snipped from the vines over a three-week period ending in early April. With a customary break before the Cabernet's turned blue/black and soft, harvest finished at the end of April. From a winemakers perspective, one gauge of a great vintage is how much was learnt during the process. The weather and fruit condition really must play ball in order for you to try something new.

The diversity of Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc batches we managed to create, each with a different technique or variables involved was truly exciting. Conversely the making of the Chardonnay and Riesling have had an effortless feel to it as we applied the experience of previous vintages. Pinot Noir is currently the stand-out variety in the cellar showing a blend of vibrancy and concentration not seen for several seasons. However, the Cabernet Franc currently fermenting in vat is already showing many of the same traits that have made it such a favourite in years gone by.

So relief and gratitude for now, worthy of celebration in years to come.