

Vintage 2018



Following the challenging 2017 harvest hopes were high for a stellar 2018 season across New Zealand. Mother nature is of course influential in shaping New Zealand's harvest, keeping our Viticulture and Winemaking teams firmly on their toes, but this climatic 'edginess' is part of the magic that makes our wines unique and distinctive every year. Following a record summer for high temperatures, the harvest month of March experienced complex weather systems and rainfall through many key regions. The impact of this varied from region to region and variety to variety. The dust has well and truly settled from vintage 2018 and we are now in a great position to pass judgement on the quality of the wines.

Marlborough

We source Sauvignon Blanc fruit from vineyards that flourish throughout the Awatere, Wairau and Southern Valley's, providing a palette of flavour profiles and ripening windows, ultimately giving us the ability to craft world-class wines.

The record heat of summer was followed by an early and compressed vintage, but as the Sauvignon Blanc grapes began to arrive at the winery it quickly became evident that sugars and flavours were well ahead of 2017. This is true of the finished wines, with Sauvignon Blanc expressing energetic sub-regional characteristics with increased palate weight and concentration over the 2017 vintage. Our all-important flagship varietal filled our Marlborough winery with its incredible clean, ripe aromas over fermentation and we feel these qualities have been captured in bottle with some exceptional wines across the tiers which have already met great success with various accolades in New Zealand.

One of our earliest harvest dates of Chardonnay on record has resulted in great options for Reserve and Taylors Pass Single Vineyard. The wines will mature in barrel into the new year prior to blending and will continue to benefit in complexity and texture from time on yeast lees ('sur lie').

Pinot Gris across the Marlborough region was a particular highlight, reaching unprecedented levels of flavour and ripeness on the vine and producing numerous aromatic, concentrated and textural wines. The Seddon Single Vineyard label will be at its best in 2018.

Pinot Noir did face challenges as a result of the March rains. Here the emphasis was on pushing ripeness without sacrificing fruit quality. Highly anticipated assessments will take place in the coming weeks however, what is already evident is that there will be great options for producing the flagship Reserve and Single Vineyard wines from throughout the Valleys. The Taylor's Pass site in the Awatere Valley in particular has again provided some exceptional Pinot Noir.



HATCH MANSFIELD 

Hatch Mansfield Agencies Ltd · New Bank House · 1 Brockenhurst Road · Ascot · Berkshire SL5 9DJ

Tel 01344 871800 · Fax 01344 871871 · E-mail info@hatch.co.uk

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North Island (Hawkes Bay/Gisborne/East Coast)

The 2018 north island vintage took on additional significance with the commissioning of our brand new Hawkes Bay winery. Operations staff and contractors worked tirelessly around the clock as harvest fast approached and the official handover of the new site coincided with the first delivery of grapes! Building a new winery from the ground up has provided Villa Maria with the opportunity to invest in state-of-the-art winemaking equipment, and the quality benefits provided were immediately obvious in 2018, with reduced transport distance for the grapes, modern and gentle grape processing equipment, automated temperature-controlled tanks and barrel rooms, all positively influencing the outcome of the harvest. Excitingly, some of the early bottled Rosé and Pinot Gris wine produced at the new winery have already picked up trophies in New Zealand, a great sign of what's to come!

Following the heat of the summer a challenging period of early March weather placed pressure on early ripening Hawkes Bay Chardonnay which provided a great test for the new winery. Handpicking and whole bunch pressing, followed by fermentation with wild yeast has produced the most compelling wines of the vintage. Recent assessments of the wines in barrel has confirmed that all of the top labels will be produced including the Iconic Keltern Single Vineyard, and we anticipate the wines will be highly sought after once bottled next year.

The early March rain would also place pressure on early ripening Merlot sites, however as the grapes came in we were very happy with ripeness levels, flavours and the colours coming into the juice. The season was ideal for producing the increasingly popularity Rosé styles with beautifully light coloured, aromatic and fruit forward wines produced.

Once the early March weather was navigated an incredibly settled period of weather followed which allowed later sites and varieties particularly in the Gimblett Gravels to hang on and reap the rewards. Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah in particular will produce some of the vintages finest wines and should surpass the quality of the last three vintages. Our winemakers and viticulturists revelled in this incredibly warm, dry finish to the grape growing season. After the challenging 2017 vintage it is exciting to once again see Reserve quality red wines in barrel brimming with ripe fruit and tannins.



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VILLA MARIA
NEW ZEALAND

Vintage 2018

The star performers from the East Coast Gisborne region will once again be Chardonnay and Albariño for the Reserve and Cellar Selection labels respectively, both varieties showing wonderful fruit intensity.

Although challenging at times, the 2018 has been a highly successful harvest for Villa Maria and there will be something here for all our fans to enjoy!

Nick Picone
Group Chief Winemaker



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