

# Vintage Report 2015



The 2015 vintage has been very memorable, with fruit quality across all regions exceptional. The cool spring in the North Island resulted in a delayed harvest, however the Marlborough harvest which got underway on March 9<sup>th</sup> was the earliest on record.

The cool period pre-Christmas and dry weather through the summer in both the North and South islands resulted in considerably lower yields than in 2014. The upside of this is the enhanced flavours across all varieties which had all the winemakers smiling!

Read more below on the regional overviews.

## **Marlborough**

This season offered up many challenges, however the dry and relatively mild weather during the harvest period meant that fruit was brought into the winery in optimal condition.

We experienced all weather this season – a long frost season in spring, along with very strong winds which combined with cool flowering conditions in some areas this impacted the fruit set on all varieties but particularly Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc. The latter was down 10% on long term yield averages. Pinot Noir was down a third on targeted yields but all other varieties were at or slightly below desired targets.

Being a dry season, powdery mildew was a constant threat, growers and vineyard managers fought the perfect storm of dry, hot weather (with very warm nights) that lasted without any relief for over two months through to mid-February.

The dry weather that began in late May 2014 continued throughout the whole growing season and eventually restricted available irrigation water in some areas of the province. A few vineyards were forced survive without irrigated water for a couple of weeks, but the vast majority had sufficient water allocation or storage to make it through. Many vineyards applied record irrigation volumes this season, countering the unusually dry soil conditions and warm, windy weather.

While there were some weather threats over the harvest period none ended up significantly disrupting fruit flow in to the winery. This allowed measured harvest decisions and a relatively stress free vintage for growers, vineyard managers and winery staff.



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## Auckland

In Auckland the weather over flowering was very cool and wet. This meant a late flowering and a very light crop in some blocks of the Gewürztraminer. However, the Chardonnay set a good crop and still required fruit thinning.

The newly planted Chardonnay vines also had a light crop and are looking great. The Pinot Noir was harvested 10 days behind an average season however the fruit quality look fantastic.

## Hawkes Bay



The start to the 2014/2015 growing season was cool with the cumulative Growing Degree Days for September the second coolest for the past 5 years. While there were only a couple of frost events during spring, the cool growing conditions and high winds during October meant that the shoot growth was slower than normal. The canopies were slow to establish, slightly delaying many of the shoot positioning and leaf plucking operations.

The flowering conditions were good resulting in good fruit set for most varieties, especially the Bordeaux red varieties. Many of these blocks needed significant thinning to bring them back to target levels.

Sauvignon Blanc was the first variety to be harvested on March 10th. Cyclone Pam threatened on March 16th just as the Chardonnays were nearing optimal ripeness and so the decision was made to harvest many of these before the cyclone. The cyclone did not amount to much, with 45 mm of rainfall. Because of the dryer than average summer, the soils were able to absorb this rainfall and the vines were not adversely affected. Most of the remaining Chardonnay blocks that were held through the rain were harvested within the next 10 days. The main harvest finished on the 21st April, with the Ngakirikiri Grenache being the very last block to be harvested on April 29th.

The Hawkes Bay harvest yields were very close to target and were only 4% down, with slightly less Chardonnay, Syrah and Malbec being harvested.

There were some unusual quirks with this vintage, with the most unusual situation of harvesting Chardonnay, Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah on the same day. Highlights for the 2015 vintage will be Chardonnay, Merlot and Syrah.

## Gisborne

The season in Gisborne started very slowly with a very wet cool spring which delayed the season. The weather then improved over flowering which led to some above average crop levels in all varieties. So we were left with heavy crops and a season running around 10 to 14 days late, not an ideal scenario.



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After the powdery mildew issues of 2014 most growers were on the ball with extra leaf plucking and closer spray intervals so generally there was good control of this disease. Botrytis again was generally not an issue as we had a reasonably dry February March.

Harvest started on March 4th with some sparkling base Pinot Noir and finished with Viognier on April 9th.

Cyclone Pam put a spanner in the works, the forecast did not look great so we picked quite a few blocks of Pinot Gris that were tasting OK ahead of where we would have liked to. Although Pam didn't live up to the forecast, we got between 70 and 100mm over the flats, this set an already late harvest back a little more but the condition of the grapes held up well and harvest continued smoothly after that.

## **Nelson**

The unusually dry conditions experienced on the East Coast of the South Island spilled over in to the top of the south providing Nelson with a settled and reasonably warm growing season after a cool start. Rainfall throughout the season was lower than normal but regular rainfall in the hills surrounding the Tasman district kept irrigation water flowing. The cooler flowering had moderated fruit set on all varieties all came in lower than long term averages but Sauvignon Blanc did lift on estimate by 10% averaging 10.5 T/Ha across the district.

## **Waipara**

Waipara experienced a very cold start, with some damaging frosts in spring that significantly reduced the yield on the early varieties. A dry warm summer led to excellent fruit quality.

Harvest began late March and fruit quality was some of the highest we have seen with very low levels of disease across all varieties. The Sauvignon Blanc was harvested at night to retain freshness and acidity. Riesling quality was excellent with nice varietal flavours. Yields were down 30% mainly due to the frost issues in spring. The block was picked early at 20.5 Brix to retain acidity.

## **Central Otago**

Generally growing conditions in Central were very good. A cool October and November delayed canopy development. However, by mid December, Central Otago was experiencing some warm dry weather which resulted in an excellent flowering. Crop levels were well balanced with small bunches and similar yields to 2014. Hot, dry weather through January set up the season superbly. Rain fell during mid February which restored some well needed soil moisture. Harvest start around early April for most Pinot Noir blocks in the Cromwell Basin. Bannockburn looks slightly behind but well within the average range of early to mid April.

Rain during February enabled canopies to flourish during the dry warm March. A warm summer enabled berries to develop nice concentration of tannin and sugar levels. A southerly cold snap mid April with snow and sleet forced many growers to harvest around the Bannockburn, Cromwell basin. Quality of fruit was very good with nice brix levels in the mid 23s and moderate tannin levels. Picking the early ripening clone 6 and 777 were picked on April 14<sup>th</sup> followed by clones 115, 667 two days later.

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