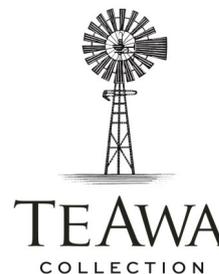


Vintage Report 2016



There are many reasons that I love winemaking, but perhaps the overarching factor is that no two seasons are ever the same. Winemaking is a dynamic process and one that you can guide, but never control. That sense of the unknown creates a wonderful tension between excitement and nervousness every time a new vintage rolls around. For me, every vintage has a signature, something that I remember that year by, a vintage ‘quirk’, so to speak.

For many months leading into the summer of 2015/2016, a strong El Nino weather pattern was forecast for Hawkes Bay. “The strongest El Nino since 1998” was the word from the boffins. Anyone who has followed Hawkes Bay vintages over the years will know that 1998 is a vintage of Red Winemaking folklore in New Zealand, one of the finest vintages in Hawkes Bay history. In New Zealand, an ‘El Nino’ weather system, generally means very dry, drought-like conditions for the East Coast of the country. Vignerons were rubbing their hands with glee, and local farmers were groaning at the prospect of another warm, dry Hawkes Bay summer.

Spring was cool but still dry, which carried on quite late into the season. This meant fruit set was good but not big and generally the vines carried nice balanced crop loads into the summer. All summer the consensus was “two weeks behind” the usual vineyard stages that occur over the growing season.

This theme continued into harvest which started for us at Te Awa on the 20th of March which is, no surprise, two weeks later than a typical Hawkes Bay harvest. Ironically for the “Strongest El Nino since 1998”, we had frequent periods of rain throughout the vintage which meant constant assessment of fruit condition and weather forecasts to ensure the grapes were harvested at optimum times.



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Because our whole livelihood is largely dictated to by the weather, so often it is the season's climatic conditions that provide the 'vintage quirk', or what separates the vintage from others gone before. The weather was certainly "quirky" but we harvested grapes in beautiful condition, with balanced acid and sugar levels and lovely flavour. However, in 2016 there was another interesting phenomenon by which I will always remember the vintage, and that is the performance of our indigenous yeast.

At Te Awa, we generally ferment the majority of our Chardonnay with the wild yeasts that exist around the vineyard and the winery. Select parcels of Syrah, Merlot, and Albariño, are all allowed to ferment naturally as well to encourage complexity and richness into the wines. It's an amazing process really, you put some Chardonnay juice into a barrel, or some Syrah grapes into a tank, wait a couple of days, and then the indigenous yeast takes over and converts the sweet grape juice to wine.

This natural process often requires a lot of nurturing of the yeast. Most years you are left with a few barrels or tanks where the wild yeast starts dying off early with some natural sugar still present in the wine. Therefore they don't finish the job. In 2016 however, every single barrel or tank of our natural ferments (and our inoculated ones too for that matter), fermented perfectly. Clean, even ferment kinetics with little or no nurturing required and the result is wines of lovely poise. The wines show the complexity and richness you would expect from natural fermentation, whilst still exhibiting fresh and lively flavours and balanced alcohol levels.

The role yeast plays in producing fine wine is often overshadowed by the influences of soil, climate, and winemaker. However in 2016, the indigenous yeast at Te Awa has been amazing.

Sure, winemakers will espouse many theories over why 2016 was such a perfect year for yeast performance. However the truth is, we don't really know exactly why our yeast was so happy this year, and next year will be completely different again. These are natural phenomena.

