

# Vintage 2017



## Gisborne

The spring weather in the Gisborne region was characterised by above average rainfall and temperatures. This mild start to the growing season was excellent for vine growth and ensured that all vineyards developed strong green canopies.

Flowering in Chardonnay was underway more than a week earlier than the last two seasons, however the duration of flowering to completion was extended. Weather over flowering was generally warm with light rainfall however the extended flowering period has resulted in variable fruit set resulting in fewer berries and plenty of 'hen and chicken' set - ie large and small berries on the same bunch. Other varieties including Pinot Gris have reduced berry numbers whereas Albariño looks to have more normal fruit set.

December and January were both very dry months and the season continued to be very warm. As a result the vines terminated any further canopy growth, shoots lignified early (turned brown and woody) and focused their energy on ripening the grapes. Disease pressure was very low and the grapes were in very high health. 50 mm of rain in early February freshened the vines up and provided perfect dose of water to get the vines through to harvest.

The Gisborne harvest started in late February and although there was period of rain in the following weeks this didn't prove problematic and the dry soils soaked up any moisture quickly. The grapes stayed very clean and healthy allowing us to hold fruit on the vine and harvest grapes with excellent levels of ripeness and flavour.

Wine quality from the vintage looks to be excellent with Chardonnay and Albariño looking particularly good and Pinot Gris also very strong.

## Hawkes Bay

Budburst got underway in mild conditions, however there was a cool week following which reduced shoot growth initially. Beyond this, Hawkes Bay experienced a mild spring and excellent growing conditions. All vineyards developed very even green canopies and good shoot extension in the lead up to flowering.

Flowering in Chardonnay was 3 to 4 days early. The weather was quite changeable over this period and depending on the exact timing of blocks appears to have impacted on the success of flowering resulting in variable bunch sizes across the vineyards. This along with a very proactive approach to early shoot thinning and yield management in general has resulted in very balanced levels of crop per vine and in some cases slightly lighter than average yields.

The start to 2017 saw extremely warm dry conditions in Hawkes Bay. High winds also dominated and in areas where additional water was required, irrigation was essential to ensure the vines have adequate water to maintain leaves and fruit without excessive stress.

In early February, we experienced two wet days with total rainfall of close to 30 mm. This rain was very well received and washed any dust off the vines. In late February and March more rain fell and judicious harvesting decisions were required to ensure the best outcomes



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The Chardonnay harvest went very well and some beautiful Chardonnay was hand picked. Chardonnay in barrel and tank is looking very strong and wines are intense whilst carrying an elegant line through the wines. The later ripening red varieties held on very strong and the incredible dry warm start to the year was reflected in darkly coloured, flavoursome fruit. Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc were resilient and already in barrel look to be a very strong suit for the year.

An early workshop style assessment of the wines in Hawkes Bay proved we have some excellent Chardonnay, Pinot Gris, and the Rose wines now bottled are possibly some of the most exciting we have seen. The Hawkes Bay reds need more time but will likely defy expectations thanks in large part to the record breaking summer.

## Marlborough

The 2016-17 growing season was one of variability. The regional climate data indicated the season to be above the long term average for Growing Degree days, a measure that records daily temperatures over the growing season. This painted a picture of a warmer season, however on the ground it has felt quite different.

Spring was relatively frost-free, which was a nice change from 2015. There was regular rainfall at the beginning of the growing season and elevated soil moisture levels meant canopies generally grew well. The rainfall was welcome after the previous two years of drought. As usual there was a lot of shoot thinning done in Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Riesling and Chardonnay, and some Sauvignon Blanc blocks showing early indications of high bunch numbers were thinned back prior to flowering also.

Conditions through December were mixed with some cold nights at the start and more overcast days than normal. However, a warm period through Sauvignon Blanc flowering meant that that variety set berries well. The other varieties are mixed with most estimated to be close to average bunch weights, with lots of ups and downs depending on the sub-region, variety and clone. There was significantly more “hen and chicken” in the Dijon clone Pinot Noirs and Clone 15/Mendoza Chardonnay than in previous years, which should result in naturally reduced yields.

The latter part of December and most of January felt very windy, with no let up from the dry north west winds, this meant that canopies had to work hard, drawing moisture from the soil, and growers/managers had to be very vigilant with their irrigation. It also felt like we had an abnormal number of cooler days and nights for January, with the last week having three nights that dropped below ten degrees. The high winds left many of us having to pick up rows that had blown over and repairing broken posts. This weather delayed the development of the berries and delayed the harvest.

Generally there was less Powdery Mildew in the vineyards after the high pressure of last year, and canopies were very healthy. Growers/Managers implemented a much more rigorous disease control programme, brought about by the increased pressure the region has come under.

Yield reductions were considerable and our yield management programme provided great dividends this season as cooler temperatures through March and into April saw delays in fruit ripening.

Pinot Noir was picked in optimal conditions and this year the berries started to shrivel which has definitely influence the already low yields. The vintage looks to be very strong for Pinot Noir with incredible concentration and already deliciously fine tannins.

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The Sauvignon Blanc harvest was later with some fruit picked at the end of March but things not really getting underway until April. The variable weather provided us with some challenges but our harvest team worked day and night and we are very happy with the condition of the fruit that arrived at the winery.

Following the conclusion of harvest our Winemaking teams have been extremely busy moving on with blending and bottling of the first wines of 2017. With the eagerly anticipated Early Release PB Sauvignon Blanc making its way down the bottling line, the remainder of our Sauvignon Blanc blends were confirmed over two blending sessions in Marlborough and we're happy to report that despite the weather challenges over the harvest period wines have come through very well. We can expect classic aromatics and moderate alcohols from the vintage.

## Nelson

Following on from what was a wet end to last season, Nelson got away to a good start. Spring was relatively free of cold nights. Rainfall was sufficient for good soil moisture levels and spring growth. Although temperatures were again mixed with the Christmas period being very unsettled, crop levels were average to slightly above average on the whole. Significant rainfall in January and then again in March meant that canopies remained healthily, and harvesting decisions were paramount to ensure nice clean fruit for the year.

## Waipara

Leading into Christmas the vineyards in Waipara were looking great, with good strong canopies and warm conditions in the latter part of December helping fruit set in the Sauvignon Blanc. The Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir fruit set was tempered by some mixed weather in early December. Late season rain provided some challenges however fruit was harvested very clean.

## Central Otago

The start to the season was unseasonably very cool with late flowering and a couple of frost events over spring. Flowering conditions were fine and yields look to be average or slightly down on last season. Early January - again relatively cool compared to previous season with some rain events. Harvest conditions were excellent and the Pinot Noir was picked at good levels of ripeness and in pristine condition.



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