

# 2017

Vintage Report



This was a growing season of two halves, and quite unlike any I have encountered in my 25 years as winemaker at Esk Valley. Initially Spring was cool and the season running slightly late until mid December when a period of prolonged heat and dry conditions pushed the Hawkes Bay region into drought. Conditions at flowering had been good and an even berry size and good bunch numbers looked promising. The longer the dry conditions continued the more records were broken, and by mid February the province was parched and had endured its driest January in 50 years. Things by now were looking positive for an exceptional harvest. Vineyards had been bunch thinned and netted, all we had to do was wait. The first sign things could change came on the 18th February the weekend of the annual Art Deco festival. Over 100mm of rain fell in a 24 hour period before the weather brightened again, leaving the province green in the lead up to harvest.

Harvest began under sunny skies in early March as always with our home block of Chardonnay, before Pinot Gris and our remaining Chardonnay blocks. The weather had changed by now. The continuous blue skies replaced with intermittent periods of rain and dry spells. Picking decisions were having to be made quickly as the weather offered its windows of opportunity. This was to be a very short harvest lasting a few days over four weeks, our shortest for many years, with the majority of our red grapes harvested between the 26th March and 3rd of April.

It seems as if this was a 'what could have been season?'. The perfect summer followed by a troublesome autumn, but as I have been saying since harvest, "you can see the summer in the wines". Low sugars at harvest have given the wines a freshness and elegance, and the summer warmth has provided riper flavours than the brix would suggest. From our indestructible Verdelho to our robust Cabernet this has been a remarkable harvest. Not one I want to repeat, but one which through quick decision making, quality viticulture and sheer hard work has allowed us to make wines of which we are proud.



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