

2014

Vintage Report



EST. 1905
ANTHONY JOSEPH
VIDAL
of HAWKES BAY

From one great vintage to the next

After the much-awaited and highly praised 2013 Hawkes Bay vintage, which has fully lived up to expectations, could Hawkes Bay follow up with another great vintage? The answer is a resounding yes! No matter where you are in the world of fine wine production strong back to back vintages is more a rarity than it is common.

Vineyard site and the seasonal conditions have the most significant impact on our wines at Vidal Estate, leaving their mark, ultimately determining the quality of the final wine. Here are a few simple seasonal facts that have contributed to the quality of our 2014 wines;

A settled and warm flowering period leading to good fertilisation, yields and even ripening.

- November and December were both very warm and the combined Growing Degree Days (GDD) for these months was up on the previous year.
- Rainfall over November was higher than usual largely due to a couple of heavy falls at the end of the month. However, December was very dry and significantly lower than norm with just 28mm falling.

The onset of water stress during fruit set to limit the swelling of young berries giving rise to good concentration at the time of harvest.

- High January temps lead to one of the hottest on record at 261 GDD.
- Rainfall over January was very low at less than half the norm, combining with the heat to create significant vineyard stress.

The completion of vegetative growth before veraison (colour change) as a result of water stress focusing the plant to start the maturation process of ripening the fruit, developing flavour, concentration and importantly phenolic ripeness giving the wine approachable texture.

In summary the 2013/2014 growing season was one of the warmest on record at 1528 GDD. A warmer year than the much heralded 2013 vintage. While rainfall over the growing season was higher than 2013 the key months of December, January, February and March were dry with just over ½ the normal rainfall.

Critically the warm and dry season set us up for early picking with all our vineyards harvested by early April prior to the cool and wet seasonal change.

Our ageing vineyards continue to be the cornerstone of our wines. We did little different this year but it is worth mentioning that our yield control practices, soil health and attention to detail in the vineyard and winery continue to drive our action.

There is no question that 2014 will deliver some great wines. Looking back I find myself repeating words of the 2013 vintage, ... a memorable summer, one of the driest and warmest on record and periods of coolness typical of Hawkes Bay giving rise to slow gradual ripening, accumulation of flavour and importantly the preservation of natural acidity. It's this natural acidity that gives our wines refreshment, definition, balance and elegance – all characters we aspire to and central to our wine style.

The 2014 season has left an indelible print on our wines. Our maturing vineyards and attention to detail on the land and within our winery completes the framework. These wines will age gracefully over time and continue our path in the pursuit of wine quality.

HATCH MANSFIELD 

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Marlborough

The higher than normal yields across the Marlborough vintage in 2014 has been widely reported. This largely natural occurrence and resulting quality implications will define those focused on quality vs those focused on quantity. 2014 was a year for strict yield control and this year we acted no different from other years. Without “green harvesting” the risks of flavour dilution and ability to get fruit ripe before the change of season is high.

The growing season was off to a very strong start with warm and settled weather in spring which continued through to the end of February. Conditions through flowering were excellent, contributing to the high yields, necessitating significant crop reduction over the Christmas and January period. Intermittent rainfall through summer allowed healthy growth through to veraison.




Following the record warm temperatures of February, cooler weather slowed down ripening allowing flavour accumulation and retention of acidity. Harvest was underway in the first week of March and from this point through to the second week of April conditions remained settled and dry. It was over this period that we had harvested all our vineyards. Once again good yield control allowed earlier picking than would have been the case if the vines were pushed to ripen higher crop loads. As it turned out cyclone Rita delivered a prolonged and significant period of rainfall that would have significantly affected fruit and subsequent wine quality. Such events are a timely reminder of the benefits of yield control when it comes to growing grapes in “marginal climates”. The financial cost of reduced yields though fruit removal can be significant from vineyard input and volume reduction perspectives. However, there is no question of the strong quality gains made through flavour concentration as well as the reduced risk of crop loss. Low but “balanced” yields give rise to earlier flavour development allowing the opportunity to pick before the cool and wet weather marches up from the South Pole.



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