

# 2020

## Vintage Report



### Drought season delivers exceptional harvest

Global pandemic aside, it has been an incredible harvest throughout New Zealand, and it would be hard to ask for more from 2020. Whilst the vintage will be synonymous for the COVID-19 outbreak and lockdown protocols that followed, as an essential business we were privileged to continue to harvest and capitalise on a season that delivered one of the all-time great New Zealand vintages.

### Marlborough

Our key region experienced a cooler period coming off the back of flowering, tempering yields across the region to compensate for an excellent berry set. From December through to April, Blenheim received just 43mm of rain, the lowest rainfall total on record for this period for 79 years! Whilst the 2019/20 season was above the long-term average Growing Degree Days (GDDs), it was considerably cooler than the last two vintages. Mother nature created the perfect backdrop for what would unfold as a sensational Marlborough harvest! Our signature Sauvignon Blanc wines will be at their zingy best, with intensely concentrated aromatics and flavours emerging from both the main Wairau and Awatere Valleys. Pinot Gris and Riesling benefited from the cooler, dry season to maintain pristine condition whilst slowly developing their intense aromatics and flavours, and Pinot Noir wines display excellent colour, abundant perfume and sweet textures on the back of perfectly ripened tannins.

### Hawkes Bay

With a few hurdles in spring including frost and hailstorms Hawkes Bay was off to a nervous start. Unfortunately, the hail did impact on some of our growers, but our company vineyards came through relatively unscathed. Once spring was navigated the weather settled and a sensational harvest ensued. We can now reflect on seasonal data that indicates the Hawkes Bay 2019/20 growing season was slightly cooler than the last 4 seasons at 1362 GDD's but still above the long-term average 1303 GDDs, and considerably drier to the point of drought, reminding me of another great Hawkes Bay vintage, 2013. Like Gisborne, the Chardonnay harvest was off to a record early start on the 27th February, a good 2-3 weeks ahead of schedule. The Keltern vineyard Chardonnay harvest was completed by the 2nd March, setting further records! Fruit in pristine condition allowed for efficient handpicking, and our winemaking would capitalise by whole bunch pressing and fermenting a higher percentage of fruit with indigenous yeast to create compelling wines. I'm so impressed with how the wines have retained a beautiful balance of acidity and freshness given their concentration of flavour. As the season progressed superb Rosé allocated fruit hinted of the quality that would come from the reds and as the dry weather continued, the combination of cooler evening temperatures and warm sun-filled days encouraged complete maturity of anthocyanins, flavours and tannins, ensuring the resulting red wines would possess incredible colour and depth of flavour. We have produced arguably the deepest coloured red wines of any vintage, with superb examples of Merlot, Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Syrah now beginning their maturation in barrel. There are some true classics in the making here!

### Auckland

The 2020 vintage can be described as one of the best we have seen in Auckland with near perfect warm and dry conditions for ripening fruit without weather pressure. Following an excellent start to the season with uniform bud burst and flowering, our national harvest commenced early on the 10th February with the first pick from our Auckland vineyard, CL95 Chardonnay for sparkling wine base. The majority of our Ihumatao vineyard is planted in Chardonnay with the main harvest between the 21st February and the 9th of March. Additionally the first crop of Albariño provides an exciting glimpse of the future potential for this variety in our Auckland vineyard.

### Gisborne

Our earliest Gisborne vintage to date, with some Chardonnay vineyards harvested a full two weeks ahead of average. Warm and settled weather over the late Spring flowering period produced healthy yields and clean bunches, and the fruit would maintain exceptional condition all the way through to the end of the season. Harvest commenced with Sparkling base and lighter-alcohol targeted fruit on the 18th February which is typical timing, however the majority of the region's Chardonnay was harvested much earlier in context of the season, with the north facing slopes of the McDiarmid Hill vineyard experiencing a record early harvest on the 28th February and the region's last fruit coming off by the 16th March. Excellent Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer wines have been produced but undoubtedly the shining stars from our Gisborne vineyards are once again Chardonnay and Albariño. An exciting line up of Albariño parcels form collectively the strongest set we have seen since our initial 2014 vintage, featuring bright aromatics, intense citrus and saline flavours and tangy acidity.

### Nick Picone,

Villa Maria Group Chief Winemaker



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