

2016 VINTAGE REPORT

White Wine Quality: *Very Good to Excellent*

Red Wine Quality: *Very Good to Excellent*

Icewine: *Excellent*



An unusually hot spring led to an early and vigorous growing season. Cooler summer temperatures allowed the fruit to develop flavour complexity, moderate alcohol, balanced tannins and natural acidity in what is, by all accounts, an excellent vintage.

Okanagan Valley

The winter of 2015/2016 was good to grapegrowers in the Okanagan Valley who reported no extended periods of freezing temperatures and no bud damage.

“Overall, I think we’re looking at a beautiful vintage.” David Paterson, GM & Winemaker, Tantalus Vineyards

It was an atypical spring with extremely warm weather that provided more Growing Degree Days (GDD) in April than any other April in the last 19 years: 126.85 total monthly GDD [April] were reported in Osoyoos and 93.55 in Summerland. Temperatures were also up reaching the high 20s throughout the Valley, with Osoyoos recording a high of 29.8° C (Environment Canada Climate Summary April 2016).

Budbreak was the earliest on record, as much as six weeks early in some areas, and was followed by early flowering, about two weeks ahead of normal. This heat required diligence in the vineyards, especially with irrigation. The early start to the growing season caused some labour pressure later in the season as winery and vineyard needs competed with area orchards’ needs.

GDD remained ahead of any other year with temperatures reaching the mid to high 30s until the week of June 19 when the weather changed. GDD started to even out with 2015 and then dropped below for the rest of the season. Mean temperatures in July were in the low 20s. August brought hot, dry weather typical of the Okanagan Valley.

Because of the early heat, veraison came about two weeks early for some, but was reported as protracted. Unlike summers past, forest fires were not an issue for grapegrowers this year.

“Without the blistering high heat that sometimes occurs in July and August, the grapes had more time to mature and we are seeing phenomenal balance with low alcohol and balanced

acidity,” noted David Paterson, General Manager and Winemaker at Tantalus Vineyards. “Overall, I think we’re looking at a beautiful vintage.”

Harvest started early with reports of picking Ortega for sparkling wine on August 17 at Evolve Cellars in Summerland whose Christa-Lee McWatters Bond said, “Last year was the earliest we had ever seen it and this year we are a couple days earlier than last year.”

Harvest started early on the morning of September 6 for Quails’ Gate Winery, with picking of Maréchal Foch from the winery’s property on Boucherie Road in West Kelowna. Winemaker Nikki Callaway said this year’s harvest was seven to 10 days ahead of previous vintages. “I think it is an exciting vintage,” said Callaway. “It is always a positive when you start off the year with excellent fruit and good quality.”

Large, heavy red grapes and clusters were reported, especially for Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, while the white varieties were more consistent. The fruit up and down the Valley was remarkably clean. And although Naramata experienced 10 to 12 weeks of 60% humidity which meant the threat of powdery mildew, diligent viticulture practices saw clean fruit. According to Katie O’Kell of Serendipity Winery, they harvested “the cleanest fruit we have ever seen.”

In Oliver and Osoyoos, a few areas of the Valley floor experienced frost October 11/12 which caused leaf drop; however, most berries not yet picked were already ripe and not much crop was affected.

Early spring heat started off an excellent growing season which was slowed down by a cooler start to the summer and an extended fall season; it all adds up to an excellent 2016 vintage.

Similkameen Valley

Overall, the Similkameen Valley experienced similar conditions to the Okanagan Valley. With no extended freeze, the Similkameen Valley saw no kill over the winter.

“Similkameen Valley wineries will have another fantastic vintage to showcase. The alcohol is balanced and we will be able to express varietal character and our mineral terroir.” Charlie Baessler, Winemaker, Corcelettes Estate Winery

Here, budbreak and flowering also came early thanks to soaring spring temperatures. Again, vigilance in the vineyard was necessary. As Rhys Pender MW, wrote for *WineAlign* in September, “Growers who balance their vineyard and yield to the season, and harvest at optimum ripeness and balance will always make good wine, be it white, red, pink or orange.”

Following the same weather pattern as their neighbouring region to the east, July in the Similkameen Valley was one of the coolest on record over the past 20 years. A return to seasonal heat in August and September brought an excellent balance of

moderate alcohol, retention of natural acidity, ripe tannins and beautiful, concentrated flavours.

Over at Corcelettes Estate Winery in Keremeos, Winemaker Charlie Baessler reported: “Spring arrived quickly for us! We hustled to place shoots where they belonged as growth was rapid. The pace changed as the season cooled and temperatures fell. It was critical to monitor our progress and make the necessary crop load adjustments. Overall, Similkameen Valley wineries will have another fantastic vintage to showcase. The alcohol is balanced and we will be able to express varietal character and our mineral terroir.”

Fraser Valley

Budbreak in the Fraser Valley started in the first week of March, four weeks ahead of schedule. GDD in Langley was ahead of the 20-year average. Reports from the Fraser Valley saw more challenging conditions but although there were reduced crops and some disease pressure, a warm, dry August led to excellent grape development with beautiful flavours and balanced acids and sugars.

Andrew Etsell, General Manager and Viticulturist at Singletree Winery in Abbotsford, reported their harvest began August 25 with Siegerrebe. This was their earliest start to harvest on record and Etsell says, “...the 2016 vintage will offer incredible fruit which in turn will make some great quality wine.”

Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands

Lamont Brooks of the Wine Islands Growers Association, provided a climate summary for 2016 and reports that, “Overall, 2016 was an excellent year, characterized by an unusually warm April and May, which got the vines off to a very fast start.”

With more GDDs than is typical, budbreak, flowering and veraison started early.

Harvest on Vancouver Island was also earlier than normal, with early ripening whites such as Ortega and Siegerrebe being picked early to mid September, red hybrids such as Maréchal Foch in late September and Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir in late September to early October. Nearly all harvesting was complete before the arrival of heavy rains the second week of October.

“Fantastic. Although yields were lower than in the past two years, we had the best harvest parameters (Brix, TA, pH) we have ever seen in most varieties, especially Pinot Gris.” Lamont Brooks, Symphony Vineyard

September was a bit cooler than average and October was significantly cooler than the past two years. Reporting on the overall fruit quality at his Symphony Vineyard in Saanich, Brooks says it was, “Fantastic. Although yields were lower than in the past two years, we had the best harvest parameters (Brix, TA, pH) we have ever seen in most varieties, especially Pinot Gris.”

Emerging Regions

Outside BC's designated geographical indications (GIs), the growing season was similar to the interior regions, with few minor differences. Monte Creek Ranch Winery reported budbreak in late April – the earliest ever recorded in the Thompson region. A warm spring but relatively cool summer put the harvest about a week behind last year, but still about three weeks earlier than is normal. Their first day of crush was August 22 with Marquette (for Rosé) whereas Harper's Trail Winery reported their first crush on August 31 of Gewürztraminer.

In its own harvest report, Monte Creek stated, "A bit of tough weather during flowering has resulted in a little bit lighter crop for our Monte Creek Ranch vineyards. However, the bright side of a light crop is that we got more concentrated and flavourful fruit."

Nearby in the Shuswap, Graydon Ratzlaff of Recline Ridge Vineyards and Winery reported very little winter kill, with a late April budbreak and late May flowering. Spring temperatures in April and May were above normal. Veraison came in late June and the overall fruit development was good. Harvest started in early September and ended in late October.

Growers in Grand Forks experienced no winter kill and saw average temperatures throughout the spring and summer. The fall harvest started September 18 and brought milder temperatures and some rain.

Icewine Harvest

Twenty-three wineries registered with the BC Wine Authority to pick an estimated 896 standard tons of Icewine grapes on an estimated 205 acres in 2016. At the time of this report, 18 wineries had started harvest and an estimated 600 tons had been picked, 224 more tons than last year's total harvest.

Harvest started December 6, 10 days later than in 2015. The first grapes were picked in West Kelowna with temperatures ranging between -8° and -9° C by Kalala Organic Estate Winery which brought in 1.5 tons of Chardonnay, 3.5 tons of Riesling and four tons of Zweigelt. They resumed picking for Merlot and Cabernet Franc on December 8, 14 and 16. Based on the 33 tons of grapes brought in, Winemaker Karnail Sidhu expects 10,000 to 12,000 litres of Icewine for their 2016 vintage.

For Inniskillin Okanagan Vineyards, the early harvest secured an average to larger crop than in past years. Viticulturist Troy Osborne said his crew began picking Riesling on the morning of December 8, and finished the morning of December 9. With temperatures averaging -12° C, Osborne was pleased with the concentration of the fruit brought in which averaged 42 Brix. "The grapes went through a couple of freeze thaw periods before picking which gives the flavour characteristics we want for Icewine."

Red Rooster Winery began picking Riesling at 1:00 AM on December 8 when temperatures in the Naramata Bench vineyard reached -9° C bringing in fruit at 40 Brix. They picked again for Riesling and Cabernet Franc on December 13 at -10° C, finishing harvest at 44 Brix. Although a fair bit of their crop this year was lost due to extreme winds, Winemaker Karen Gillis says the

overall quality of the grapes is very good. "With days of cold weather, the berries were quite frozen, so although yields were average, what came out of the frozen marbles was a sticky delectable treat.... or it will be when I'm done with it."

Grapes harvested for Icewine in 2016 include: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Ehrenfelser, Gewürztraminer, Kerner, Merlot, Oraniensteiner, Petit Verdot, Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, Riesling, Roussanne, Syrah, Vidal, Viognier and Zweigelt.

Conclusion

The growing season started early and unusually hot with many people predicting the hottest vintage on record.

However, with one of the coolest Julys experienced in the last 20 years, it was not to be. The coolness slowed things

down, allowing flavours to develop and preserving the natural acidity for which BC wine is known. The 2016 vintage will showcase some of the best BC has to offer. Some of the standout varietals: Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Gamay.

"2016, it's going to be the year." Tony Stewart, Proprietor & CEO, Quails' Gate Winery
