

# 2017 VINTAGE REPORT

White Wine Quality: Excellent

Red Wine Quality: Excellent

Icewine: Very Good

*A cold Canadian winter, unusually wet spring, and dry summer contributed to a well-balanced and quite normal growing season. This compared to previous years where above average temperatures saw early seasonal starts. Compared to 2016, in 2017 Okanagan Valley wineries experienced a later budbreak by two to three weeks, with an earlier harvest by three weeks. Slightly lower yields and phenomenal fruit quality delivered an excellent 2017 vintage, characterized by high flavour concentration, moderate alcohol, balanced tannins, complexity and natural acidity.*

## OKANAGAN VALLEY

In winter 2016/17, the Okanagan region saw extended periods of freezing temperatures in some areas and a lot of moisture in the air and soils. Unprotected areas and ridges exposed to higher winds and lower temperatures received some winter bud damage, while protected areas did not.

Compared to previous years, spring 2017 was extremely wet throughout southern BC, with precipitation for most areas in the order of 150 to 250 per cent of normal (BC River Forecast Centre). The cool and wet weather delayed onset of the snow melt and spring run-off, which were well above normal in the Okanagan, and included record or near-record seasonal flow with some flooding (BC River Forecast Centre).

A very wet and cold spring saw budbreak delayed generally two to three weeks later than in 2016, and up to a month later in some areas. Once the heat hit, vigorous growth formed very dense canopies, forcing viticulturists to manage shoot thinning, positioning and spraying all at the same time.

Okanagan Valley's summer dry weather began in June and precipitation was extremely limited. In August, Summerland experienced the second hottest temperatures on recent record (Environment Canada). These hot conditions delivered continued vigorous growth allowing healthy flavour development.

Although 2017 was the worst wildfire season on record for BC, the fires were not

in grapegrowing areas and none occurred in early summer. Also, rather than sitting low in valley, smoke blanketed the sun coverage. This positively impacted the growing season by slowing down the periods for grape ripening and flavour development, and providing some reprieve for the grapes by reducing the searing temperatures. No ash was observed on grapes for the 2017 vintage.

As compared to the 10-year historical growing degree days (GDD) record, 2017 was above average for both Summerland and Osoyoos (BCWGC 2017), with Osoyoos recording 1598 GDD and Summerland recording 1416 GDD. Annual GDD reporting by the BC Wine Grape Council began in 1998.

For a number of Okanagan vineyards, the timing of veraison was later than average and some logistical pressure occurred as many grape varieties were ready for harvest at the same time.

"At Pent  te we grow 19 varieties. Once veraison started we found a much closer gap between the starting dates of white and red varieties. It seemed as if the whole vineyard was going through veraison at the same time as opposed to other years when everything seemed much more spread out." – Richard Charnock, Assistant Winemaker, Pent  te Winery.

Harvest timelines for many Okanagan vineyards varied with reported harvest start dates ranging from September to mid-

October, ending in late October or early November. While the harvest started a little later for most vineyards (when compared to recent years) it finished later than in 2015/16, and is consistent with the average timing of harvest over a ten-year period.

*"I was wondering when it was going to stop. We had three vintages in a row that were larger yielding"*

**Heidi Noble**  
Owner / Winemaker,  
JoieFarm Winery

On average in 2017, Okanagan vineyards saw smaller berry size, clusters and juice yields, compared with the past three vintages. Heidi Noble, Owner/Winemaker, JoieFarm Winery said "I was wondering when it was going to stop. We had three vintages in a row that were larger yielding."

"My most sensitive variety did the best – Viognier. But Merlot and Riesling were both down. I anticipate it was a response to carrying three years of excess crop." – Melissa Smits, Lead Winemaker, Intersection Estate Winery.

"Cluster number was around the same but berry size and cluster size seemed smaller. The overall quality was really amazing, though just a smaller yield." – David Paterson, Winemaker, Tantalus Vineyards.

Among specific grapes, Rhône varieties were slightly down in yield along with Pinot Noir, Merlot, Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc, and Cabernet Sauvignon. A high yield of Gewürztraminer was reported. However, a few Okanagan Valley vineyards saw normal to high yields, particularly in the Skaha Bench area near Penticton.

Vintners throughout the Okanagan Valley have described the quality of the 2017 vintage as phenomenal with crisp, fresh whites and elegant reds. Winemakers noted slightly lower alcohol levels, lower pH, and higher malic acids naturally occurred. Certainly, there will be less volume from the 2017 vintage, but overall the quality is excellent.

"Definitely some rock-stars for this vintage... it's going to be among one of the best vintages we've had in the last ten years..."

the balance and elegance...the alcohols are down, and the aromatics are up. pH is tight so we should see some good ageability... the tannins are already approachable." – Dwight Sick, Winemaker, Stag's Hollow Winery & Vineyard.

"The 2017 vintage was one of the better years that I've seen with regards to pH levels and acid balance. Malic acid levels were high but we were able to retain the natural acidity and balance in the wines without having to adjust too much." – Sandy Leier, Winemaker, Wayne Gretzky Okanagan.

"We are very excited about the 2017 vintage! Even though the climate and natural disasters made for some challenges we are very pleased with the quality of the Naramata Merlot and Pinot Blanc. A smaller crop provided in many cases for refined

flavours and aging ability for years to come." – Ginette Schirrmeyer, Tasting Room Manager, Lake Breeze Vineyards.

"The Bordeaux reds from the south Okanagan this year are the best I've seen. Lower alcohol, better balance... the tannin profiles and colours are off the charts! Just awesome." – Andrew Windsor, Winemaker, Tinhorn Creek Vineyards.

"Tannins in reds are rounder and softer. Pyrazine aromas aren't dropping off as quickly as other years. I think we are going to see excellent ageability in all of the reds, lower pH with a little higher acid, and good tannin structures." – Mason Spink, Winemaker, Dirty Laundry Vineyard.

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## SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY

Similar conditions to the Okanagan were reported for the Similkameen Valley with a cold winter contributing to some bud damage, slightly smaller clusters and juice yields when compared to the abnormally high yields in 2015 and 2016. Vines that were exposed on ridges with northern winds experienced greater bud damage.

Rhys Pender, Master of Wine and owner at Little Farm Winery puts the 2017 vintage into perspective saying, "The last few years have been pretty hot vintages. For 2017, yields are down a little but we are back to normal, if there is such a thing!"

"Two months of no rain and lots of sunshine produced exceptional flavours balanced with natural acids. In particular, I'm really excited about our Merlot." – George Hanson, Winemaker/Owner, Seven Stones Winery.

Varietals of note for the Similkameen Valley include Merlot, Riesling and Syrah. Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Sauvignon yields were noted as slightly down from previous years yet quality of fruit and juice is reportedly outstanding with remarkable flavour development.

*"Two months of no rain and lots of sunshine produced exceptional flavours balanced with natural acids..."*

**George Hanson**  
Winemaker / Owner,  
Seven Stones Winery

"I think it's going to be an excellent vintage. I'm happy with the wines we are seeing. 2016 was a terrific vintage and, of course, 2017 will be a little different. I predict less aromatic but bigger flavours in our 2017 wines." – John Weber, Winemaker/Owner, Orofino Vineyards.

## VANCOUVER ISLAND & GULF ISLANDS

The 2017 growing season in the wine islands got off to a slow start, and at mid-May it was showing as one of the coolest years of the past ten. This delayed budbreak and bloom by nearly a month compared to 2016. However, when the heat really kicked in and the rain stopped, bloom and fruit set took place in perfect conditions, leading to spectacular cluster development and fruit set in most varieties (Wine Islands Growers Association).

Great summer weather continued, with above-average temperatures and nearly zero precipitation in July and August. It was one of the driest summers on record for Vancouver Island (BC River Forecast Centre). As usual in the wine islands there were no issues with insect pests.

Veraison in late August was somewhat later than average, but the dry heat continued

into September and ripening was rapid.

Early varieties were harvested in late September, with nearly all grapes picked before a significant rainy period started on October 17 (Environment Canada).

Yields were high overall due to the excellent fruit set, with many vineyards setting their all-time records (Wine Islands Growers Association).

"This was the fourth beautiful summer in a row for the Wine Islands – perhaps cool years like 2011 are a thing of the past? Winemakers have reported well-balanced juices and musts going into fermentation and great aromas coming out, so we're all looking forward to bottling this vintage!" – Lamont Brooks, Wine Islands Growers Association and Symphony Vineyard.

"I think our yields were larger than normal

*"Winemakers have reported well-balanced juices and musts going into fermentation and great aromas coming out, so we're all looking forward to bottling this vintage!"*

**Lamont Brooks**  
Wine Islands Growers Association

pretty much across the board...good survival from budbreak and weather advantages. We are quite excited about our Pinot Gris... seems to be really nice this year...lots of fruit for our Pinot Noir." – Tim Turyk, Owner, Unsworth Vineyards.

## OTHER REGIONS

The 2016/17 winter for BC's other wine regions was cold resulting in bud damage for some vineyards. Regardless, no vine death was reported.

*"The quality is above normal. I'm getting really nice flavours from our whites."*

**Bob Johnson**  
Owner,  
Baillie-Grohman Estate Winery

Spring was wet but vines and vineyards were not adversely impacted due to proactive measures from vineyard managers. Spring brought wet conditions, excellent for new cover crops and perfect timing for new vine growth.

"We had a good blanketing of snow until late Spring. Vines were in good shape, no serious issues. It felt like a hotter summer than normal." – Bob Johnson, Owner, Baillie-Grohman Estate Winery, Creston.

Budbreak in the Kootenays arrived in early May, and for the Lillooet and Kamloops wine regions mid to late April. Starts were considered normal by local vineyards compared to previous early flowering and budbreak. The harvest ended in mid to late October for most vineyards in BC's other interior regions.

In Kamloops, Caleb Hanaghan, Assistant Winemaker, Harper's Trail Estate Winery said "It was a hot summer. No ash on the grapes but I believe it could have been brutally hot if we didn't have some of the smoke coverage. The fire smoke actually served us a little by blocking some solar radiation and cooling what would have otherwise been excessively hot days. Our yield was down due to a cold winter and some bud loss, but the quality of the fruit was phenomenal."

"In September, Lillooet had a few days of smoke but the winds changed in our favour and ultimately we saw no impact from the smoke." Rolf de Bruin, Winemaker, Fort Berens Estate Winery, Lillooet.

Smaller clusters and berries resulted in a lower juice yield for some vineyards, while others experienced larger yields, depending on the varietal. Where yields were down, the concentration of fruit flavours was noted as impressive across the board. Vineyard managers and winemakers reported excellent quality.

"Our standouts are always our Rieslings. The terroir here for the Rieslings is just phenomenal. I think our Pinot Noir will be pretty spectacular as well." – Caleb Hanaghan, Assistant Winemaker, Harper's Trail Estate Winery, Kamloops.

"The quality is above normal. I'm getting really nice flavours from our whites. Our reds, while not as big, will have a lot of elegance and blending potential." Bob Johnson, Owner, Baillie-Grohman Estate Winery, Creston.

"Our La Crescent varietal is looking promising. It is showing bountiful aromatics, crystalline acidity and has an exuberant mouth feel." – Galen Barnhardt, Winemaker, Monte Creek Estate Winery, Kamloops.

## ICEWINE

Icewine harvest started on November 6, making 2017 the earliest icewine harvest in the last ten years. In 2017, 24 wineries registered with the BC Wine Authority to pick an estimated 704 standard tons of icewine grapes, off an estimated 162 acres.

The last icewine grapes were picked on January 3, 2018. The BC Wine Authority reported 22 wineries picked icewine totaling 523 standard tons on 165 acres. This is 121 tons less than last year's total harvest, but a superb vintage for quality.

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## SUMMARY

2017 vineyard yields were impacted by natural weather events, particularly in the Okanagan Valley and other interior BC wine regions. However, quality of juice is excellent and we expect to see an increase in demand for 100% BC and BC VQA Wine.

"I think we can describe 2017 as an elegant vintage right across the board." – Michael Bartier, Winemaker/Owner, Bartier Bros. Vineyard and Winery

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**Michael Bartier**  
Winemaker / Owner  
Bartier Bros. Vineyard and Winery