

2018 VINTAGE REPORT

The 2018 vintage was a moderate vintage, cooler than the five-year average but in line with the long-term norms for most wine regions of British Columbia. The wines are elegant with restrained alcohol levels, crisp acidity and fresh, clean and intense fruit flavours that should age well.

OKANAGAN VALLEY

The winter of 2017/2018 was a mild one for British Columbia's vineyards with no reported cold temperature damage to buds or vines. The winter did leave its mark on the growing season though as high snowfall levels in the mountains resulted in large amounts of snowmelt and lots of water in the lakes, rivers and soils. Some flooding occurred in susceptible areas of the Okanagan Valley and Similkameen Valley.

A cool spring resulted in a slightly later than average bud break. The snow runoff resulted in high levels of soil moisture which meant that many vineyards didn't have to irrigate all spring but resulted in lots of natural vigour in the vines. The vigorous growth made for intensive canopy management and high powdery mildew risk meant growers were kept very busy during the spring.

By the time of flowering the vintage had caught up and was back close to average timing with warm temperatures and dry conditions allowing for ideal flowering conditions and the potential for a large crop. Keeping up with sprays for preventing powdery mildew and managing vigour were the key challenges throughout the late spring and into the beginning of summer.

June was moderate with the real heat coming in July when many days exceeded maximum temperatures of over 35C. Even with the hot weather, temperatures were not high enough for the vines to shut down allowing for continued fruit development. The moisture in the soil meant that cover crops stayed greener for longer than usual before dying off from the summer heat.

August was slightly cooler than July with daily maximum temperatures around

30 degrees mid-month before dropping towards the end of the month. A two to three-week period with smoke coming from wildfires caused extensive blocking of sunlight which slowed photosynthesis and delayed development with veraison occurring up to a week later than average in some areas. Vineyards in the south Okanagan Valley and Similkameen Valley saw more delays than vineyards further north resulting in harvest times for different vineyards and varieties differing from their normal pattern.

The cloud cover from the smoke did mean the vines were not subject to the intense summer sun and the usual heat stress resulting in berry size and cluster size being heavier than usual and contributing to a large crop. The smoke may also have had an interesting effect on other species as many growers noted there were none of the usual issues with starlings attacking the ripe grapes.

September was the coolest on record in many areas, extending the growing season and allowing for increased flavour development with slow sugar accumulation and the retention of crisp acidity from the mild days and cool nights.

The classic long, dry, sunny fall reappeared in October with warm, cloudless days finishing off the ripening period. A big diurnal temperature shift and nights reaching close to zero meant growers flirted with frost risk and wind machines were used in susceptible areas to protect the crop through its final journey.

The unique conditions this year resulted in a harvest spread out over a long period. Many of the earlier ripening varieties were

harvested at normal times whereas those vineyards in the south and some later varieties ended up being picked later than usual.

A typical growth pattern for later ripening red grapes in the Okanagan is for rapid sugar accumulation and then waiting for phenolic ripeness to catch up. The 2018 season saw a more gradual development of both elements together. The large clusters and healthy fruit without any shrivel resulted in a large, healthy crop for most growers and amongst most varieties. Fresh, crisp acidity, ripe tannins in the reds and elegant wines with lower alcohol levels are likely.

A cooler vintage than in recent years, growing degree days (GDD) for 2018 were between 70 to 135 cooler than the recent five-year average across the Okanagan Valley but closer to and slightly cooler than the longer term norms. Osoyoos recorded 1,575 GDD and Summerland 1,333 GDD for 2018.

"These wines will go down as classics"

David Paterson
Winemaker & General Manager,
Tantalus Vineyards

"Pristine fruit that had ample hang-time are the hallmark of our vintage," says David Paterson, Winemaker and General Manager at Tantalus Vineyards. "There was time to develop great flavor intensity while retaining lightning acidity. These wines will go down as classics I think. They have initial yumminess with amazing aging potential. A great vintage."

SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY

Overall weather conditions in the Similkameen Valley were, as usual, very similar to the south Okanagan with no winter damage reported and a slightly cooler year than recent vintages. In 2018 the Similkameen suffered both flooding in low lying areas with susceptible soils and then fires later in the summer. The smoke in the air delayed veraison and harvest and resulted in a long, moderate growing season producing elegant wines with moderate alcohol levels and crisp acidity. Growing Degree Days were 1,460 in Cawston, 110 less than the recent five-year average.

"Fruit set was excellent, with crop yields slightly above average"

Mike Clark
Winemaker,
Clos du Soleil Winery

"The 2018 vintage in the Similkameen Valley was full of worries and sleepless nights, but we are extremely pleased with the end results, commented Mike Clark, Winemaker of Clos du Soleil Winery. "Fruit set was excellent, with crop yields slightly above average. August was unseasonably cool, as wild fires raged throughout the province. Our fears about potential negative impacts of this were misplaced – October weather, up until early November was gorgeous allowing for slow even ripening of our fruit. Whites were harvested quite early with beautiful flavours and bright acidity. Reds were harvested very late this year, with classical structure and ripe flavours. A year of [winemaker] stress, but great results in the end!"

"The growing season was good to excellent," says John Weber, Winemaker and Co-owner of Orofino Winery. "The season was pretty constant in sunshine and moderate heat units. After the smoke cloud lifted, we enjoyed the most beautiful September and October with weeks of clear blue skies and 20C+ days, finishing the season well with lots of promise for later reds."

COASTAL REGIONS

The maritime climate of **Vancouver Island**, the **Gulf Islands** and the **Fraser Valley** is always completely different than the interior vineyards and 2018 was no exception. On Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands the GDD was practically right on the long-term average with 1,093 GDD in the Cowichan Valley and 1,003 GDD on Saturna Island. In the Fraser Valley it was a warmer year than average with 1,043 GDD at the weather station Langley Central.

On the Islands, bud break occurred around the long-term average in early May. Some rain in June affected the flowering process and lowered yields slightly. The smoke from the forest fires also reached the coastal regions and affected the amount of sunlight exposure for a few weeks but a long, warm, dry fall made for ideal harvest conditions. Overall quantity is down from recent vintages but quality high in 2018.

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Chris Turyk
Sommelier, General Manager
Unsworth Vineyards

"Sugar ripeness was generally good, some blocks were as ripe as I've ever seen," says Chris Turyk, Sommelier and Assistant General Manager of Unsworth Vineyards.

"The acids came in higher than expected given the brix, so you can expect another vibrant island vintage. Overall I'm excited for the wines to come – bright acid, full flavour development without some of the surprising potential alcohols we've had in recent years."

OTHER INTERIOR REGIONS

The other interior regions of BC saw similar patterns to the Okanagan Valley and Similkameen Valley with cooler overall temperatures and mild smoke cover blocking sunlight and making for a delayed, moderate growing year

The **Thompson Valley** region had a mild winter with no reported cold temperature damage. 2018 was cooler than recent vintages with 1,293 GDD in Kamloops, 137 lower than the five-year average of 1,430.

In the **Shuswap** GDD was just 1,006, 149 lower than the five-year average and similar to the vintages of 2010 and 2011.

In the **Kootenay** region it was a moderate vintage with 1,288 GDD in Creston, slightly above the long-term average.

On the vintage in Creston, Bob Johnson of Baillie-Grohman Estate Winery commented, "Our 2018 harvest was delayed due to high acids which took longer to drop than normal. The weather held and allowed us to let the grapes hang to get ripe fruit with good acid and flavour levels. Overall volumes were slightly lower from 2017 but we are looking at high quality wines with little need for intervention in the winery."

Lillooet saw its coolest vintage, the 1,539 GDD similar to the 2012 and 2013 vintages. Rolf de Bruin of Fort Berens Estate Winery said this was the longest harvest they've had starting on September 12 and not finishing until November 2.

ICEWINE

A mild start to the 2018/2019 winter meant only one short opportunity in early December occurred to pick Icewine and not again until early February. In 2018, 20 wineries registered with the BC Wine Authority to pick an estimated 707 standard tons of Icewine grapes, off an estimated 168 acres.

The last Icewine grapes were picked on February 6, 2019 with low yields and some botrytis noted. The BC Wine Authority reported 17 wineries picked Icewine totaling 274 standard tons. This is the lowest production of Icewine in BC since 2009. The 2018 vintage Icewine will be a rare and special commodity.

SUMMARY

Overall the 2018 vintage is one of freshness and elegance with slightly cooler temperatures in most regions making wines of vibrant acidity, lower alcohol and intense fruit character. High quality was ensured by the trademark long, sunny Okanagan fall with warm days to ripen the fruit balanced with cool nights to maintain the characteristic crisp BC acidity.