

2019 VINTAGE REPORT

For wine regions across British Columbia, an overall cooler 2019 vintage compared to recent years, punctuated by sunlight and clear skies resulted in wines with juicy and vibrant fruit, crisp acidity, balanced alcohol levels and ripe tannins in the red wines, all with the freshness synonymous with BC wine.

OKANAGAN VALLEY

The winter of 2018/2019 started as an interesting one in the Okanagan Valley. Winter temperatures never reached levels that should cause bud damage, however, an unseasonably warm January, with temperatures over 10°C, followed by a cold February caused disruption of flow to the buds resulting in some isolated vine and bud damage lowering the overall yield. This previously unheard of set of conditions serves as a stark reminder that climate change continues to bring new challenges to global viticulture.

A cool month of April saw a slow start to the season, but things warmed up towards the end of the month. In Osoyoos, May and June were the second hottest of the last two decades. As a result, budbreak and flowering happened within the usual timeframe, providing a favourable start to the season.

Vigour levels in the spring were standard thanks to reduced amounts of snowmelt, and the vintage continued to a moderate, smoke-free summer with July and August seeing average temperatures with none of the heat spikes that can temporarily shut down vine growth.

Extra judicious vineyard management was required though, as the peculiar winter conditions in some vineyards meant that primary, secondary and tertiary buds experienced budbreak at different times resulting in the vines being at various stages of their annual growth cycle. Significant green harvesting and additional canopy management was required.

A smoke-free year meant bright sunlight and the growing season continued at a steady rate with vines in good condition,

progressing according to schedule to what appeared to be a slightly warm vintage.

September started warm and dry with many of the earlier ripening varieties harvested in perfect condition and right on schedule for expected harvest dates. The second week of September saw the weather change, becoming cooler with small amounts of rainfall slowing ripening and drawing out the harvest for later ripening grape varieties. This resulted in slightly lower sugar levels in the grapes than would be expected but allowed plenty of time for the tannins to develop.

“That hard work has paid off with lighter, fresher styles of wine that we are happy to embrace.”

Heidi Noble
JoieFarm Winery

The start of October saw the return to more typical dry conditions and moderate temperatures continued ripening until Thanksgiving weekend when an early frost saw many of the vineyards lose their leaves signalling the end of the growing season. Certain sites avoided the frost, allowing the clusters to hang into late October.

The 2019 vintage was similar to recent years in growing degree days (GDD) but felt cooler as many of the GDD came earlier in the season. Osoyoos recorded 1598 GDD and Summerland 1348 GDD for 2019.

“2019 was a challenging year for sure,” said Heidi Noble of JoieFarm Winery. “Cooler weather, September rain and an early frost, not to mention the wasps, bears and some

winter damage were all out of the ordinary for the Okanagan. It just meant we had to work a lot harder and more strategically this year. That hard work has paid off with lighter, fresher styles of wine that we are happy to embrace.”

SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY

Conditions in the Similkameen Valley were similar, as is usual, to those in the nearby south Okanagan. Some vineyards suffered similar winter damage but otherwise, the season was smoke-free with moderate temperatures throughout the season. Overall, it was a cooler vintage, with Cawston recording 1456 GDD, 72 less than the five-year average and 63 less than the 10-year average. The wines have moderate alcohol levels, crisp, refreshing acidity, bright fruit and elegance with many showing the trademark Similkameen Valley minerality.

“From early on in 2019 we did some aggressive and persistent green thinning, and this was ultimately our best call,” said Charlie Baessler of Corcelettes Estate Winery in the Similkameen Valley. “This gave us low yields of quality fruit that maximized the growing season. There was excellent grape chemistry when the early frost hit October 8th and 9th so we could harvest at our leisure in the beautiful sunny weather that followed.”

OTHER INTERIOR REGIONS

The rest of the BC interior regions experienced similar patterns with a generally warm start to the season, average budbreak and flowering before a cooler late summer making for a moderate to cool vintage.

The **Thompson Valley** reported some winter damage from the cold temperatures

in February and then a cool to moderate season, colder than recent averages. Overall GDD was 1308 in Kamloops, 87 less than the five-year average of 1395.

"We're pleased with the wines we made," said Galen Barnhardt, Winemaker, Monte Creek Ranch Winery. "We focused on aromatic whites and produced a lot of bubble this year, which is well-suited for a cool 2019 vintage. Riesling and Chardonnay seem to be the standouts of the vintage at this stage."

"Wines with intense and lovely fruit flavours, good acidity and moderate levels of alcohol."

Haleen Pannekoek
Fort Berens Estate Winery

In the **Lillooet** region, GDD was 1537, cooler than recent years but comparable to 2018. Growing conditions followed similar to the Okanagan Valley with a moderate growing season, an early frost on October 9th, and, as Heleen Pannekoek of Fort Berens Estate Winery reports, "wines with intense and lovely fruit flavours, good acidity and moderate levels of alcohol."

The **Shuswap** was close to the long-term average of 1107 GDD in Salmon Arm with 2019 reporting 1069 GDD. Winter was said to be quite mild without winter damage, and while there was a little more rain in the summer, it was a reasonably average vintage in terms of vine growth. "With a slightly cooler summer we expected we might have some challenges regarding sugar levels," said Graydon Ratzlaff of Recline Ridge Vineyards & Winery in Tappen. "In the end harvest dates were right on average with many varieties coming in slightly riper than usual."

The weather station in Creston in the **Kootenay** region showed 1234 GDD, right on the long-term average of 1229, but reportedly feeling like a cooler vintage according to Bob Johnson of Baillie-Grohman Estate Winery in Creston. "The style of wine produced is lighter in 2019 with lower brix levels in most of the wines,

yet we still managed to hit 24 brix in the Pinot Noir. We've focused a few winemaking techniques to build more texture with the lower alcohol, but the wines show lovely fresh fruit flavours and crisp acidity."

COASTAL REGIONS

With the substantial moderating influence of the Pacific Ocean and the Strait of Georgia, the coastal vineyards always experience very different growing conditions than the interior regions. **Vancouver Island** and **Gulf Islands** GDD were both slightly cooler than the recent average with 1054 in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island and 996 on Saturna Island in the Gulf Islands. The Fraser Valley saw its coolest vintage since 2012 with 932 GDD recorded at the Langley Central weather station.

A relatively dry March led to an early budbreak with flowering following along slightly early as well. June and July were a little wetter but warm enough for ripening to progress at a rate similar to recent vintages. Around the second week of September, frequent rain events began, increasing disease pressure. Still, early October saw drier conditions return with most fruit harvested from the end of September through to the middle of October.

"Sparkling base wine is a definite standout..."

Chris Turyk
Marketing Director,
Unsworth Vineyards

The coastal regions are building a reputation for sparkling wines and Pinot Noir, and conditions were excellent for both in 2019.

"Sparkling base wine is a definite standout, and we look forward to continuing our quest for remarkable sparkling wine," said Chris Turyk, Marketing Director at Unsworth Vineyards. "A relatively early budbreak and high GDD resulted in good ripeness in Pinot Noir but not quite the ripeness or structure of 2018. The 2019s should be the classic, light, delicate, fruit-forward Pinot Noir that Vancouver Island has come to exhibit."

ICEWINE

The highly coveted and sometimes elusive Icewine had a brief harvesting window of the required -8°C in November, which allowed some cooler sites to harvest a small number of Icewine grapes. That temperature did not occur again until a heavy freeze on January 13 and 14, 2020.

In 2019, 19 wineries registered an estimated 478 metric tonnes of Icewine grapes off approximately 130 acres. The BC Wine Authority reported that 15 wineries had picked an approximate 205 metric tonnes making 2019 the second smallest harvest on record since the turn of the century.

SUMMARY

Overall, the 2019 vintage was a moderately cool vintage with wines showing juicy and vibrant fruit, crisp acidity, moderate alcohol levels and ripe tannins in the red wines, all with the freshness synonymous with BC wine.