



2020 VINTAGE REPORT

SUMMARY

Overall, the 2020 vintage can be summarized as a moderate year with growing degree days close to the long-term average and with wines showing excellent balance of vibrant, natural acidity, moderate alcohol levels, excellent flavour concentration and ripe tannins making for elegant, fresh and balanced wines.



OKANAGAN VALLEY

The 2020 year started off with a mostly mild winter although some regions and higher elevation vineyard sites in the interior saw temperatures fall below -20C which caused bud damage in some vines. Most producers in the Okanagan Valley reported a slightly late budbreak, with below average temperatures throughout the spring and with more rainfall than usual resulting in later flowering than the long-term average.

In the Okanagan Valley, and the other interior regions, the cooler and damper weather around flowering had the effect of significantly lowering the yield with many producers reporting yields down by 25-30%. The Similkameen Valley, however, seemed to escape some of this damaging weather pattern with many producers reporting a full and healthy crop.

The cooler spring continued to have an impact with a late and drawn out veraison following the late flowering before the reliable Okanagan warm, sunny summer weather kicked in allowing for grapes to catch up and resume more regular ripening patterns. There were very few of the 35-40C heat spikes that sometimes shut down the vines meaning the grapes continued ripening unabated throughout the warm, dry months of July, August and September.

The ideal summer weather continued on into the fall with a long growing season with warm, sunny weather, temperatures in the high 20's C, and very little rainfall continuing up to Canadian Thanksgiving on the weekend of October 10-12. It is often the late summer and fall weather that makes an Okanagan vintage and 2020 was no exception with August, September and October amongst the warmest in the last 20 years until a snowstorm and then cold temperatures hit suddenly in the last

week of October. Most vineyards had already been harvested by this point with only a few of the late ripening grapes still on the vine.

After early picking for sparkling wine in late August, the main harvest for still wine kicked off around mid-September finishing at the end of October. As is often the case, the lower quantity from spring weather resulted in small yields of very high-quality fruit with producers reporting that overall sugar levels were slightly lower than normal, there were excellent levels of natural acidity and flavour and tannin levels were exceptional.

Osoyoos recorded 1616 GDD and Summerland 1341 GDD for 2020.

Many grape varieties were touted by winemakers as being standouts for the vintage with David Paterson, General Manager and Winemaker, particularly excited about the potential of 2020 Pinot Noir. "It's the best Pinot Noir I've seen in 12 years in the Okanagan. The tannins are beautiful, concentration unreal and the aromatics off the chart. A small quantity but delicious vintage."

The 2020 wines should also age well. Severine Pinte, Viticulturist and Winemaker for Le Vieux Pin and LaStella wineries pointed out "the quality of fruit was excellent. The wines are very balanced and healthy with low VA, nice pH levels with great natural acidity and nice ripe tannins." Having all the elements for ageing was echoed by Karen Gillis, Vineyard Operations Manager for Andrew Peller, stating "the wines are more balanced with great acidity and structure. They have balance, complexity and freshness that should age beautifully."



SIMILKAMEEN VALLEY

In 2020, the Similkameen Valley had its similarities to the neighbouring Okanagan vintage as is typical but with one notable difference. Many growers in the Similkameen were lucky enough to avoid the unfortunate timing of wet weather that saw disruption of flowering in the spring and as a result did not experience any crop reduction, maybe due to a slightly earlier budbreak and the vines being further ahead in their growth cycle. After flowering, conditions were similar to the Okanagan with little to no winter damage, warm and sunny months of August, September and October and an overall growing degree day accumulation of 1417 GDD, 63 less than the five-year average and 94 less than

the 10-year average. The wines have moderate alcohol levels, crisp natural acidity, intense flavours with ripe tannins in the red wines.

John Weber, owner and winemaker at Orofino, was one producer who did see lower yields but excellent quality. "The quantity of crop was quite low and it took us a little by surprise as the vineyard looked particularly healthy throughout the season. Weights across the board were lower than average. But the quality of the vintage was excellent. Low yields but excellent quality. I am seeing exceptional aromatics especially on our Rieslings and Gamay. Excellent potential!"

OTHER INTERIOR BC REGIONS

The rest of the BC Interior regions had similar weather with a cooler and damper start to the season before the warm, sunny summer kicked in to provide ideal ripening conditions and an overall slightly cooler than average vintage.

The **Thompson Valley** had a cold winter and reported some winter damage in a number of varieties before moving on to a season similar to that in the Okanagan. Overall, it was a moderate season with a warm summer and long fall with GDD of 1329, slightly lower than the five-year average of 1381.

Sébastien Hotte, Winemaker/Vineyard Manager at Harper's Trail Winery reported "a nice summer without any heat spikes with a long fall extending the growing season by a few weeks which assisted

in reaching a good level of ripeness. The wines are showing good acidity with a bright profile."

In the **Lillooet** region, GDD was 1564, the warmest in the past three years and only slightly lower than the five-year average of 1598. Weather conditions were very similar to the patterns in the Okanagan with a small amount of winter damage to some buds and lower yields due to the spring weather before a warm, sunny summer and a long fall made for a successful vintage.

Heleen Pannekoek of Fort Berens winery in Lillooet reflected on similar conditions to those of the Okanagan. "Overall, the year started off cool and turned to really nice and warm late-summer. Veraison was late, but we still managed to start our harvest mid-September and finished October



27th, slightly earlier than normal." The cool, damp spring also resulted in a lower yield in Lillooet. "The crop load was very low, due to smaller bunches and fewer bunches, but the wines have good flavour, moderate alcohol levels (which is nice!), and a somewhat lower acidity than we are used to in some of the wines."

In the **Shuswap** temperatures were close to the long-term average with 1074 GDD in Salmon Arm (average 1105 GDD).

Creston in the **Kootenay** region reported GDD of 1253, slightly above the long-term average, although the spring was very cool and wet which delayed flowering, veraison and resulted in grapes harvested with lower alcohol, crisp acidity and lots of freshness. "We had to drop fruit to achieve ripeness this year but warm weather from late July allowed us to make a smaller crop of bright, fresh wines with lower alcohol, lighter body and crisp acidity," said Wes Johnson, winemaker at Baillie-Grohman Estate Winery.

COASTAL REGIONS

The coastal regions of **Fraser Valley**, **Vancouver Island** and the **Gulf Islands** always experience a very different vintage than those of the interior thanks to the moderating influence of the Pacific Ocean and the Strait of Georgia

In 2020 **Vancouver Island** and **Gulf Islands** GDD were both slightly cooler than the five-year average with 1048 GDD in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island and 940 GDD on Saturna Island in the Gulf Islands. The **Fraser Valley** vintage was close to its average with 945 GDD recorded at the Langley Central weather station.

Bailey Williamson, Winemaker at Blue Grouse, gave his take on the vintage in the Cowichan Valley. "Budbreak was in the usual timeframe and then a cooler and rainy June made for spotty flowering before the warmth of July and August. Overall, 2020 was a cooler season. I am happy with the wines, in the typical fresh, light style that makes Island wines so pleasing with food – natural acidity, balance and slightly lower alcohols. The Pinot Noir looks to be maturing beautifully in barrel with focused fruit and precise acidity."

ICEWINE

The first Icewine pick did not occur until December 23rd when a brief cold snap allowed a very small harvest in the Summerland area. Then there was a long wait until the end of January with further harvests around January 23 and 24 in Keremeos and West Kelowna with the final pick on February 11th, 2021.

In 2020, 14 wineries had registered an estimated 300 tonnes of grapes left on the vine for Icewine from approximately 75 acres of vineyard. Seven producers ended up harvesting just 75 tonnes, the smallest Icewine crop in the last 20 years.