

Marlborough Vintage Review 2009

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Following hard on the heels of the large 2008 vintage, 2009 in Marlborough promised to be as big, if not bigger. This is because at harvest the number of bunches per shoot is determined by temperatures in the period shortly after flowering in the previous season (some 15 months before harvest). Higher (or lower) temperatures at that time will result in greater (or lesser) bunch numbers and these largely determine the potential yield. This potential is then converted into reality by conditions at flowering (some four months before harvest) as these temperatures determine the proportion of flowers that set fruit.

The very wet winter of 2008, meant the vines entered budburst in optimum condition, which was followed by near perfect conditions across the region at flowering. Crops were large, and this was exacerbated by the wettest February in 70 years helped build potential for larger berry sizes. Those damp conditions also created one of the highest incidences of botrytis seen in the province in a number of years. Due to both the high crops and the threat of disease, a great deal of fruit thinning and canopy management was undertaken.

There were fears the vintage would continue to be impacted by poor weather but by early March it turned, just in time to save the vintage from potential disaster. Long hot days, cool nights and no significant rainfall, ensured the fruit was allowed to ripen at leisure. By the time it got to harvest, growers and winemakers were excited by the intensity of flavour. Being allowed to pick whenever winemakers and viticulturists wanted, without the threat of rain, was the aspect most will remember from vintage 2009.

Pinot Noir yields were slightly lower than in previous years, with smaller berries leading towards an increase in colour and riper flavours. Sauvignon Blanc yields were managed carefully and the fruit was described as having intense flavours with typical cool climate pungency. One of the highlights of 2009 was the number of botrytised and late harvest wines, which the perfect autumn conditions created.