

## Marlborough Vintage Review 2013

Tessa Nicholson

What a difference a year makes when it comes to vintage 2013. Whereas the previous year saw yields drop dramatically, in some cases by 35%, this year was the opposite.

Marlborough did not experience the severe drought conditions felt throughout much of New Zealand. Instead it basked in long, sunny days, with sunshine hours well up on the previous year.

At the beginning of the season, September and October, the temperatures throughout the region were cool. Enough to delay bud break when compared with many of the previous years. A number of frosts in small pockets of the region caused some variability when it came to bud break, but on the whole the region was looking forward hoping for a better flowering than in 2012. Those wishes were granted when in late November, the sun came out, the easterlies dropped away and temperatures began to rise.

December, which is the all-important period for flowering, was two degrees above the average. In the Wairau Valley this ensured almost perfect flowering and fruit set. However, the Awatere wasn't as fortunate, suffering cooler temperatures than its neighbour, resulting in lower fruit set and eventually lower yields.

With hours of sunshine and very little rain during the summer months, the fruit was able to ripen at its leisure with no threat of disease. However the long hours of sunshine were not matched with higher than average temperatures, which was a major bonus for the fruit.

Marlborough experiences strong diurnal differentiation and 2013 was the classic case of that. Daytime temperatures didn't reach levels that impacted on the required flavour and acidities required, and they were matched by cooler night-time temperatures that allowed those flavours to excel.

The conditions suited white varieties such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Gris perfectly. But Pinot Noir also thrived under the long drawn-out summer. Many winemakers in the region are claiming 2013 is one of the outstanding vintages of recent years. And thankfully, there will be plenty of wine to enjoy from this spectacular year.

Marlborough harvested 251,680 tonnes in 2013, nearly 75% of New Zealand's total production. There were substantial rises in yields for all varieties, with Sauvignon Blanc making up 210,077 tonnes of that total, Pinot Noir 17,000 and Chardonnay 3100.