

Our intrepid field reporters weigh in on Vintage 2007...

Hawkes Bay (Liam McElhinney, Trinity Hill)

With post vintage holidays out of the way, Hawkes Bay winemakers can now reflect on the wines from the 2007 season and truly assess the quality levels achieved. The general consensus is that the overall volume and quality of the 2007 harvest was excellent. After one of the coolest Decembers on record, Hawkes Bay experienced one of the longest, driest autumns, which allowed wineries to pick on flavor and acid balance, rather than weather patterns and disease pressure. White varieties such as Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Chardonnay show great expression of fruit whilst retaining balanced acidity and lovely concentration. The best wines exhibit classic purity of varietal fruit and deliver vibrant flavors and great texture. Hawkes Bays red wines from 2007 may turn out to rival those of the outstanding 1998 vintage. Long, dry autumn days allowed the vines to produce fruit with excellent concentration and full ripe tannins. Many parcels were harvested in pristine condition which allowed minimal intervention in the winery. Pinot Noir and Tempranillo are bursting with bright red fruits and wonderful length, Syrah is showing classic spice and game characters, with Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon exhibiting rich dark fruit aromas and tight elegant structure. As the wines continue to evolve in barrel, we are starting to see that the 2007 reds have a depth and complexity to them which is the result of such a fantastic season. Very exciting indeed!!

Nelson (Mike Brown, Waimea Estates/Spinyback)

This season started off with a cold spring and low levels of fruit set, and summer was a late starter with cool windy weather around Christmas and New Year. By February we were in summer proper with lots of hot and sunny days, and almost no rain leading to very dry conditions in the vineyards. Autumn continued very much in this vein with a glorious Indian summer and our first fruit was harvested in late March. Due to lower crop levels and a late but warm season, this year's fruit has excellent concentration and flavours.

Marlborough (Steve Bird, Bird Wines)

I have often voiced my opinion that a statistical assessment of weather conditions in New Zealand can, more often than not, be misleading as the long run averages are essentially comprised of two extremes, absolutely appalling and absolutely outstanding (from a wine growing perspective). Climatic conditions in Marlborough for the 2007 vintage have gone a long way to support this belief and can probably be best described as a game of two halves. The season got off to its normal start with the early flowering varieties such as Gewurztraminer, Pinot Gris, and Pinot Noir emerging from bud in time to cause a few sleepless nights for the growers with frost fighting duties to contend with. Frost has become a climatic anomaly of paramount importance in Marlborough as the increased area under vines has required the use of land that was once considered too risky for commercial grape production. 2007 saw a large part of Marlborough's Awatere valley suffer significant damage and loss of crop due to a frost event that the locals described as extremely rare. With fear of frosts behind us, we were looking forward to the warmth of late November/December and a good flowering... it never came. Instead we were faced with the coldest December in living memory with an average temperature of just 12 degrees C. The consequences were a significant reduction in crop due to poor flowering. December turned to January and finally summer arrived and it stayed almost to the end of May. What a get out of jail free card that was -- beautiful warm clear days and calm cool nights with almost no rain to speak of. The vines looked fantastic, the fruit ripened with consummate ease, and the flavours developed a level of intensity and persistence seldom seen even in New Zealand. There it is in a nut shell, the first half was a disaster in the making, and the second half was the fabled "Indian Summer".

Waipara (Belinda Gould, Muddy Water)

2007 was probably the easiest harvest I have ever been involved with. Good weather, beautiful clean fruit and a great team. On the down side we had smaller crops than expected. The whites were especially exciting this year -- the first crop of Chardonnay from the new vineyard we planted in 2004 and the most beautiful Riesling fruit I have ever seen.

Central Otago (Matt Connell, Olssens)

Vintage 2007 in Central Otago was influenced by two weather-related factors: poor fruit set due to cool weather over spring (hen and chicken set), and some frost damage. The fruit quality was generally good although high summer temps saw sugar climb while winemakers waited for physiological ripeness. This may result in wines with slightly elevated alcohols but these will be matched by concentration and typical Central Otago fruit forward characters. The wines from 07 are already showing nice tannin structure, concentration and complexity similar to 2005. Tonnages were down by up to 40% across some vineyards but this was influenced a lot by clonal selection in each vineyard which determined when flowering was occurring. Geographic location also played a role. Overall I am very happy with the wines from 2007 as it was a challenging vintage.