

# “THE 2007 WHITES TREND TOWARD A LEANER STYLE – MORE TYPICAL OKANAGAN, WHILE THE REDS ARE MORE ELEGANT...”

◦ John Simes, Winemaker Mission Hill Family Estate Winery

## Vintage 2007

- With excerpts taken from the 2007 Winemaker & Viticulturalists' Forum hosted by the BCWI

- ✓ White wine quality: very good to excellent
- ✓ Red wine quality: very good, with Pinot Noir & Syrah standing out
- ✓ Icewine quality: difficult vintage however good quality

2007 was truly a viticulturalist's vintage with more than one winemaker commenting that it proved to be a difficult year for BC's winegrowers when compared to the "really easy" vintage of 2006. Rain, cold weather and more rain starting in the third week of September challenged vintners to choose their harvest windows carefully. Vintners who had been patient and exercised good vineyard management and farming practices throughout the year had the luxury of waiting for a dry weather window to harvest. These growers report very good to excellent whites, and very good reds, with Pinot Noir and Syrah standing out. John Simes, winemaker for Mission Hill Family Estate Winery, states that the 2007 whites trend toward "a leaner style – more typical Okanagan," while the reds are more elegant with the Syrah excellent and the Pinot Noir the "best they've ever done."

It was a crushing quick winter, and as the 2006 harvest was just complete there was concern for winter tender varieties such as Merlot and Syrah, says Howard Soon, winemaker for Sandhill Wines. The 2007 vintage had a difficult start with temperatures reaching -15°C to -24°C during the winter's first of many cold snaps in late 2006/early 2007. Concerns for cane and bud damage

were significant as vintners noted topographical damage to Chardonnay and Merlot, challenging vintners to pay extra attention to their upcoming vineyard programs.

Few, if any, vines were lost over the winter; however bud damage losses varied from 10 – 20% of the forecasted yields. Mission Hill Family Estate Winery changed their pruning program as a direct result – carrying out less bud and shoot thinning than in previous years. Spring arrived a week later than usual, with April 21st the last frost night of the season. Pascal Madevon, winemaker for Osoyoos Larose Estate Winery, in the Southern Okanagan notes that although bud burst was a little late, the impact was not significant. Precipitation, on the other hand, was. Although rain was light in April and normal in May, June brought heavy rains – 50% more than the last decade's average precipitation. Golden Mile Cellar's winemaker Michael Bartier highlights that, "despite rain in June, blossoming, pollination and berry set were very even. There were even balanced clusters however fewer of them due to November's bud damage."

Similar to 2006, July brought intense summer heat to the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys. Unlike 2006 however it also brought more rain. 50% more than the past decade's average as with the previous month. The threat of disease poised by the combination of warm temperature and rain were addressed by good canopy management. August brought cooler and drier temperatures with veraison taking place 4 – 10 days ahead of schedule when compared to previous years. All of August and the first two weeks of September provided perfect ripening conditions with good fruit set, however smaller berries. Senka Tennant, winemaker

## Vintage 2007 (cont.)

for Black Hills Estate Winery says, "the weather was significant for its consistency. As there were no spikes in temperature the plants never shut down so the sugars were astronomical."

In 2007 harvest began early - 7 - 15 days earlier for technical maturity. According to Howard Soon, "the extraordinary heat meant that the fruit was in great condition, especially among earlier ripeners: Chardonnay, Merlot and Pinot Noir." Then the rain started mid-September, bringing cooler temperatures and forcing vintners to carefully adjust harvesting so that fruit could be picked in good condition. Overall harvest was very solid despite interruption by rain, as it never got so cold that grapes stopped ripening. New plantings coming into production maintained tonnage yields, with the 2007 crop coming in at 19,777 tons, down slightly (3%) from the previous year.

Growing conditions were very similar in the Fraser Valley, Vancouver and the Gulf Islands with vintners challenged most by the somewhat wetter weather in these viticultural regions. John Kelly of Glenterra

Vineyards says that like the Okanagan and Similkameen, good vineyard management was key to a successful harvest. Overall it was a cooler year than previous and much more thinning was required. In the Fraser Valley, winemaker Brad Cooper of Langley's Township 7 Vineyards & Winery, notes that vintners here were challenged with the huge rainfall the valley experienced.

The 2007 Icewine harvest caused many sleepless nights for winemakers as temperatures dipped below zero teasing vintners into their clothes and vineyards to verify temperatures and to make the call to pickers. As Randy Picton, winemaker for Nk'Mip Cellars explains, "there were so many nearly cold enough pick dates!" Thus the harvest happened in fits and starts, with the mercury reaching -8°C and below in the second and last weeks of December 2007 and again during the first and third weeks of January 2008. Picton notes that although 2007 was a difficult vintage for Icewine, the final quality is good.



Photo: Suzanne Gebert