

“ANYONE WHO THINKS THAT FARMING IS NOT EXCITING SHOULD HAVE LIVED THROUGH THE 2009 GROWING SEASON!”

◦ *Hagen Kruger, Winemaker, Wild Goose Vineyards & Winery*

Vintage 2009

- ✓ **White wine quality:**
Very good to excellent. Wines show intense aromatics. Great year for some Chardonnays, Pinot Gris and Sauvignon Blancs.
- ✓ **Red wine quality:**
Very good to excellent. Wines have excellent flavour profiles. Some Pinot Noirs, Cabernet Sauvignons and Syrahs outstanding.
- ✓ **Icewine quality:**
Very good.

2009 was an unusual year for winemakers and viticulturalists in British Columbia; from winter damage in January to late bud break in May, excellent fruit set in July and an early harvest in September and October. Unfortunately harvest was interrupted by an even earlier frost; Mother Nature was ever-changing throughout the year!

Record-Breaking Cold Snap and Late Bud Break

The Okanagan once again experienced a cold winter with a record-breaking cold snap in January 2009 when temperatures dropped to approximately minus 25°Celsius (-13°Fahrenheit) for several days. Despite the temperature plunge, winter damage was not as widespread as expected in most vineyards.

Cool conditions continued into April resulting in delayed bud break. This year, there was also a noted variance in growth. In some vineyards, bud break was as much as two weeks behind and, as Manfred Freese noted, “the spring growth was uneven regardless of where you were.”

Spectacular Spring

After bud break, Mother Nature began to cooperate. May temperatures were slightly cooler than normal, but June brought typical hot temperatures. Precipitation was slightly lower than historical averages.

These growing conditions allowed the grapes to catch up with flowering on target around the third week of June. “The warm, dry weather with less than normal precipitation provided the best conditions for (fruit) set in years,” remarked Valerie Tait, viticulturalist for Poplar Grove Winery in Naramata.

Dry, Warm Summer

July and August brought consistent warm, dry weather. With such dry conditions, winemakers and viticulturalists are able to tightly control the water distribution, resulting in smaller berries for a more concentrated flavour profile.

Unlike 2008, the summer of 2009 saw fewer days over 40°C (104°F). Although there were fewer extremes, the West Kelowna and Terrace Mountain fires in late July initially caused some concern for vineyards in the area, however, in the end, there was no cause for concern.

Harvest: Stunning September Weather, Harrowing October Frost

Early fall conditions were spectacular. As Brad Cooper, winemaker for Township 7 Vineyards & Winery noted, “September weather was exactly where it needed to be.” For most wineries in BC, the warmer than normal conditions resulted in an early start to the harvest, with the first grapes being picked in the South Okanagan on September 1st by Derek Kontkanen and his team from Jackson-Triggs Okanagan Estate.

Vintage 2009 (cont.)

All winemakers and viticulturalists were very thankful for the early start as a very early frost on the nights of October 9th to 12th saw temperatures dip between -6°C (21°F) and -14°C (7°F), depending on location. Winemaker Rob Summers of Hester Creek Estate Winery commented that, "If vintage wasn't so early, the frost would have been catastrophic." Because almost all fruit was ready to be picked when the frost hit, wineries did not experience detrimental affects from the frost; it merely stopped vine growth prematurely. The early harvest meant a condensed, busy pick with harvest taking only one month to complete for many wineries, including CedarCreek Estate Winery and Tinhorn Creek Vineyards.

Icewine

Icewine has been recognized as one of Canada's signature wines ever since the first vintage at Hainle Vineyards in 1974. This year, fourteen wineries expressed interest in picking the "liquid gold," and were delighted with an early December cold snap. The first of the wineries began to harvest in the early hours of December 7th at a chilly -11°C (12°F) with Tantalus Vineyards bringing in approximately 750 kilograms from their 30 year old Riesling vines. The picking continued at -11°C (12°F) on the morning of December 8th at

Summerhill Pyramid Organic Winery, Mission Hill Family Estate Winery (Naramata Vineyard), and Nk'Mip Cellars. In total, the fourteen wineries brought in approximately 232 tons of Icewine from Riesling, Vidal, Kerner, Pinot Noir, Cabernet Franc, Ehrenfelser, Pinot Blanc, Chardonnay, Muscat, Syrah and Zweigelt grapes.

Overall

Overall, despite the erratic conditions, the 2009 vintage looks to be one of premium quality. The natural crop thinning from winter damage lowered yields, and elevated the flavour profiles of the remaining grapes with the fruit quality noted as very good to excellent.

Conditions were ideal in the Okanagan for the cool climate varietals in the North with excellent acidity and freshness, as well as the warm climate varietals in the South that show great balance and structure. Some stand-outs to look for next year include Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir from the North, and Cabernet Sauvignon from the South Okanagan. In the Lower Mainland, it was a banner year for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Overall, both the white and red wines are showing very well. The whites are extremely fresh and vibrant, while the reds are showing great colour and complexity.

