

2014 VINTAGE REPORT

White Wine Quality: Very Good to Excellent

Red Wine Quality: Very Good to Excellent

Icewine: Excellent

Consistency and quality are two words that have echoed throughout the 2014 vintage. Like any growing season, there are ups and downs as the seasons pass but vintage 2014 has been called a textbook year for almost every region in British Columbia.

With exemplary conditions throughout British Columbia, the 2014 vintage is proving to be fantastic all around. 2014 ranks as one of the warmest years on record according to the Pacific Agri-Food Research Centre in Summerland. What set the 2014 vintage apart from other warm years, notably 1998 and 2003, was the lack of heat spikes. The temperatures were steady and consistent, leading to a wonderfully balanced BC vintage.

A fairly dry spring meant growth was not vigorous but steady. With warm temperatures and about 50 mm of total rainfall, including one day with the most significant rainfall at 16 mm, budbreak was either slightly early or right on par for most wineries in the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys. Black Hills Estate Winery in Oliver reported bud break on April 17 and flowering June 4. Across the valley

in Oliver, Tinhorn Creek had almost identical dates but with late-ripening Petit Verdot flowering on June 18.

"It was a textbook Okanagan summer for the first time in many years," said Dwight Sick, Winemaker for Stag's Hollow Winery & Vineyard in Okanagan Falls. "Our Malbec, located on the east bench in Osoyoos faced some vine stress due to heat but did not shrivel."

Tantalus Vineyards Vineyard Manager Warwick Shaw noted that "2014 might be the best vintage of the early part of the century." Unlike 2013, the disease pressure was quite low this vintage and the aromatic and flavour development was unparalleled.

DJ Kearney noted in her recap of the 2014 vintage that, despite being one of the warmest summers on record, Mr. Shaw had pointed out that the

outcome is not what you expect from the hot weather of the 2014 growing season. Grape ripening actually slows down when the heat gets to 35°C, because vines shift into dormancy until temperatures drop, putting the brakes on brix (building sugars) and the plummeting of vital acids. This, combined with early bud burst, flowering and fertilization, steady summer heat, a cool September and long, warm October harvest window added up to some very singular conditions in 2014. It was dry too; between July and September in Kelowna just 11mm of rain fell, with even less in the South Okanagan.

"Throughout the Okanagan, the whites and rosés are showing beautiful aromatics, fresh flavours and the vibrant acidity that BC wines are so well known for. But it is the reds that may prove the show-stoppers,"

noted Kearney. September's cooler temperatures slowed down sugar development, but flavours and tannins kept maturing, while cool nights promoted sharply tuned acids. For reds, especially late ripening grapes like Cabernet Sauvignon, the conjunction of complete flavour and tannin development at lower alcohol levels will be a strong feature of this vintage. Troy Osborne, Vineyard Manager for Constellation Brands noted that "Cabernets and Pinot Noirs were exceptional," while Pascal Madevon from Culmina Family Estate Winery in Oliver stated, "the quality of the tannins is very round. Even just tasting the tank and barrel samples, the overall quality is incredible!"

"Cabernets and Pinot Noirs were exceptional."

TROY OSBORNE
Constellation Brands

In the Similkameen Valley, Master of Wine Rhys Pender, owner of Little Farm Winery said keeping up to watering was often a challenge in the heat, but that "2014 was an excellent vintage. There was enough heat to be able to pick at optimum ripeness.

It was quite early. We were all done mid-September with harvest. Even though the heat units, harvest dates and numbers were similar to 2013, the wines taste very different. There seems to be more intense fruitiness in the wines naturally from 2014."

In the Fraser Valley, a mild spring was followed by a long, warm summer. Less precipitation than average meant less disease and pest pressure than in previous years. Patrick Murphy, Winemaker at Vista D'Oro Farms & Winery, said it was another good year, particularly for Maréchal Foch and Pinot Gris. "For Pinot Gris it was my best year ever."

It was a good vintage for both Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands, as well. At Averill Creek Vineyard, budbreak took place May 5 with flowering on June 15 while Marcel Mercier of Garry Oaks Winery on Salt Spring Island reported budbreak in the third week of April and flowering the third week of June, said spring temperatures and rainfall were average. Consistent with other regions summer daytime temperatures were higher, averaging around 25°C. Veraison came in the third week of August. Both the fruit set and development were excellent.

"Yield was excellent in both quality and quantity," according to Mercier, adding that standouts were Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer and Zweigelt.

Andy Johnston from Averill Creek stated that "it was the best vintage in the last ten years."

Layne Craig at 40 Knots Estate Winery says fruit development was accelerated at his Vancouver Island property as a result of a steady heat, noting his Siegrebbe, Gamay Noir, and Chardonnay are "awesome".

Wineries located in emerging regions around the province also reported a warm, dry year but were faced with more challenges than other regions.

In Kamloops, cold winter weather damaged red varieties and significantly impacted yield, reducing it by half in some cases. While temperatures and rainfall were on average through spring, Caleb Hanaghan at Harper's Trail Estate Winery said budbreak was 5-15 days behind normal. Summer offered normal, and slightly drier conditions and the warmth continued into the fall, with Gewürztraminer coming off the vine in the third week of September and finishing about a month later with Cabernet Franc. "Overall fruit quality was outstanding," he said, despite the winter damage.

In the Kootenay's, Baillie-Grohman Estate Winery says younger vines faced winter kill but mature vines were unscathed in 2014. Budbreak and flowering were normal and, while June was wet, it was warm and fruit

"It was the best vintage in the last 10 years."

ANDY JOHNSTON
Averill Creek

set was excellent. Much like the rest of the province, summer was hot. Veraison was late, taking place at the very end of August with harvest starting about six weeks later on October 12, and finishing October 21. "Warm fall nights resulted in botrytis pressure in the vineyard," says Vineyard Manager Petra Flaa. The quality of the fruit was fairly average especially compared with 2013, reported Flaa, adding that some lessons learned in 2014 will result in changes in the vineyard in 2015.

ICEWINE HARVEST: EARLY ONCE AGAIN

Early sub-zero temperatures brought the second earliest Icewine harvest on record. For Inniskillin Okanagan this was the earliest Icewine harvest on record. Winemaker Derek Kontkanen said his crew began picking Riesling at 3:00 AM when temperatures in their Oliver vineyard had reached -12.2°C on November 12. Based on the 40 tons of fruit they brought in, he

is expecting the quality of the wine to be very high. "It is a great way to cap off an excellent year," says Kontkanen. "Fruit quality was great for the table wines and I can see the great potential in the fruit harvested this morning."

Summerhill Pyramid Winery in Kelowna, which started harvest on November 12, says the early season for Icewine is simply an extension of what has been an amazing vintage. "Icewine is something we can do better here in the Okanagan than anywhere else on earth," says Ezra Cipes, CEO of Summerhill Pyramid Winery. "To make outstanding Icewine you need to start with outstanding grapes, and 2014 was one of the best Okanagan growing seasons ever. Now to have this cold snap so early in November, and harvest our Icewine grapes before the birds get them is making us all smile and sing around the winery. This is a blessed vintage."