



2011 Vintage Report

White wine quality: Excellent. Wines show fresh fruit expression and vibrant acidity.

Red wine quality: Good to Excellent. Varying quality due to challenging growing season. Experience and forethought generally produced very good wines throughout the Province with balanced flavours, ripe fruit and lower alcohol.

Icewine quality: Very good.

Despite being one of the coolest summers on record, the 2011 BC grape harvest promises to be another excellent vintage for the Wines of British Columbia.

COOL SPRING DELAYS BUD BREAK

Spring 2011 was once again cool and damp. As noted at the December 2011 Winemakers and Viticulturalists' Seminar, overall there was less rainfall throughout the vintage, but it all came in the spring and early summer. Because of the cool, wet weather bud break was approximately two weeks later than normal throughout the Okanagan Valley and Similkameen Valley. As noted by Hooman Haftbaradaran, Winemaker & Estate Manager at Saturna Family Estate Winery, bud break was four weeks late on Saturna Island.

COOL SUMMER LEADS TO LATE FLOWERING, EARLY CROP THINNING

With the cool temperatures continuing into early summer, flowering also occurred quite late, as much as five weeks later than normal in most areas. Because of the late flowering and uneven fruit-set, many winemakers and viticulturalists were already starting the first round of crop thinning. At Tinhorn Creek Vineyard in Oliver, Winemaker/CEO Sandra Oldfield noted that 25% of their total blocks were dropped early.

Veraison also occurred 2 to 3 weeks behind, but August and September proved to be the saviours of the vintage. According to John Simes, Winemaker at Mission Hill Family Estate Winery, almost 50 per cent of the growing degree days happened between August 1 and October 1 when it was really needed.

A LATE START TO HARVEST

This year the first grapes were picked on September 15, the same date the 2010 BC harvest began. At the beginning of their harvest, Jackson-Triggs viticulture expert Frank Hellwig stated that "despite a cooler and wetter year, like 2010, the last three weeks of warm weather have really helped to advance veraison and kick start ripening." Most wineries did not begin their harvest until September 28 or later, some starting as late as Thanksgiving and continuing until early November.

Because the vintage had been late from the beginning, most wineries and grapegrowers took precautions early in the season to ensure a ripe crop and were rewarded with excellent fruit quality. The white wines are exceptional with vibrant acidity, pure fruit expression and great balance and the red wines (most of which won't be released until 2013) are also showing great promise. Sandra Oldfield went on to note that the quality of the red wines stems from phenolic ripeness occurring before the grapes reached optimal sugar levels, which allowed for winemakers to pick earlier and at lower sugar levels, which resulted in lower alcohol wines with no loss of flavour development.

"This marked one of the earliest starts to the Icwine harvest in BC, with the first grapes being picked on November 19, second only to the November 5 harvest in 2003. "

ICEWINE HARVEST

Mere days after completion of the grape harvest, the 2011 Icwine harvest began. This marked one of the earliest starts to the Icwine harvest in BC, with the first grapes being picked on November 19, second only to the November 5 harvest in 2003. Only a handful of wineries were able to start their Icwine harvest in November, however, as the cold-snap did not last.

The second round of Icwine picking began on January 10 as the overnight temperatures hovered between -9°C (15.8°F) and -12°C (10.4°F) and continued through the week. The BC Wine Authority reported that 22 wineries picked a total of approximately 655 tons of Icwine grapes.

OVERALL

Despite the nail-biting conditions for winemakers and viticulturalists, the 2011 vintage is showing some exceptional wines. Both the whites and reds are showing extremely well and this vintage should age particularly well because of the outstanding balance of fruit, acidity, tannins, and alcohol. Standout varietals this year include Pinot Gris, Gewürztraminer, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Syrah.

The overall crop* was up 28% from 2010, though, according to British Columbia Wine Institute Director and BC Grapegrowers' Association Past-President Manfred Freese of Sun Ridge Vineyard in Osoyoos, "In spite of the large tonnage increase over last year, the crop levels are actually simply returning to normal industry levels, yielding approximately 80% of the potential crop."

Excerpts taken from the Winemakers and Viticulturalists' Forum and the 2011 Vintage Media Preview.

** Participation in the crop survey is voluntary and unaudited, therefore the tonnages and prices reported may differ from actual industry results and are meant as a guide only.*

