

Villa Maria Group Vintage Report 2009: Hawkes Bay Reds lead the party!

The annual Villa Maria Vintage Party took place in very high spirits this year. Full of energy and enthusiasm following a successful harvesting season, the Villa Maria talent competition proved to be a big hit with an expert judging panel headed up by Auckland Elvis and DJ Lizard.

Overall, the 2009 vintage has been fantastic, with Hawkes Bay reds seemingly leading the pack. According to Esk winemaker Gordon Russell: “The darker the stains on our hands, the better the red wine harvest. As the photo (of Cellar hand Mark Amundsen) suggests this has been a great harvest!”

The Winemakers views:

VM Group Winemaker, Alastair Maling MW, reports:

“Perfect flowering and bud burst positioned New Zealand for an excellent 2009 vintage. A hot, dry summer, particularly in the North Island, meant that fruit ripeness was on a par with the 1998 vintage giving the expectation of an early harvest. Thankfully, this hot weather eased and slowed up the ripening process. In my opinion, 2009 will generate higher quality fruit than obtained from the 2008 vintage. Yields are in check and in line with what the wineries have set. Fortuitously, the restricted yields have enabled the crops to fully ripen in a cooler than normal growing season.”

Villa Maria Marlborough Winemaker, George Geris, reports:

“2009 was a great vintage which we are lucky to have experienced. We will be proud of the wines we have produced for many years to come. The vines were kept healthy due to intermittent rain through February. The skies cleared towards the end of February and a perfect March and April followed with not a drop of rain, just day after day of brilliant sunshine, clear Marlborough skies and crisp cool nights. The fruit from most varieties was harvested in perfect condition and optimal ripeness from beautifully balanced vines.

Sauvignon Blanc grapes were pristine with beautiful intense aromatics, lovely concentration, a weighty palate and great Marlborough acid. You can taste the sunshine! *Pinot Gris* was also picked in great condition, with lovely perfume, concentration, balance and poise. 2009 is a classic *Riesling* vintage with lovely delicate floral aromatics combined with concentration and weight, brilliant acid and structure. This has also been one of the best ever *Chardonnay* vintages which we expect to produce some complex and textured wines. *Pinot Noir* provided the challenge of the season with the February rain inducing botrytis in several vineyards. The affected fruit was cut to the ground during February and March leaving healthy, concentrated bunches behind. The best of the wines are excellent.



Alastair Maling MW



George Geris

Esk Winemaker, Gordon Russell, reports from Hawkes Bay:

“In years to come this will be regarded as one of Hawkes Bay’s great red wine harvests. My favourite phrase during this harvest was that ‘the wines speak of the fine summer’. And what a summer it was. Near record temperatures and little rain, meant high growing degree units. Coupled with settled and warm weather at flowering and veraison, the 2009 harvest always had the potential to shine. Inclement weather in mid March as harvest was about to begin forced our hand with some early white vineyards, this has resulted in wines which are very pure and fragrant. As we progressed into harvest the sunshine returned allowing the other varieties to reach perfect ripeness. This has been arguably our best ever year for *Cabernet Sauvignon* and will form a great backbone to our *Merlot* based wines. The Gimblett Gravels fruit was once again fantastic. If I had to choose favourites it would be difficult, but at the moment it would have to be parcels of *Cabernet Sauvignon* and *Syrah* from the Gimblett Gravels vineyards and of course ‘The Terraces’.”



Vidal Winemaker, Hugh Crichton, reports from Hawkes Bay and Marlborough:

Hawkes Bay: Overall the 2009 vintage in Hawkes Bay is being heralded as great with some commentators claiming it to be the finest vintage in 22 years. A settled flowering period was followed by an even and successful budburst, resulting in reduced fruit variability at harvest. The 2009 Hawkes Bay summer was long with periods of sustained and intense heat. A brief spell of humidity in late February to early March had some effect on the quality of early whites, but was largely limited by open canopies and drying breezes. The 2009 season will be remembered for the long dry spell during the critical ripening period of early March to the end of April, allowing later ripening whites and reds to be harvested at optimum flavour, balance and concentration without having to consider weather conditions. A hallmark of the year was fine acid levels providing tension and focus to the developing wines. This, combined with mature tannins and flavour ripeness have provided a good basis for the production of some fine wines which should stand the test of time, and continue the upward progress of quality coming from this region. It should be noted that the majority of Vidal’s reds are grown in the naturally low yielding Gimblett Gravels, where our *Syrah*, *Cabernet Sauvignon* and *Merlot* vineyards delivered fruit of outstanding quality.



Marlborough: This year the Marlborough region has produced wines of very good quality, showing intensity and purity of flavour. Like Hawkes Bay, the season has delivered fruit with elevated natural acidity giving real definition and length to the palate. Careful yield control has ensured flavour concentration, allowing us to pick early in the season when weather patterns were more settled. Typically the *Rieslings* are showing intense lime and citrus flavour profiles, with the *Sauvignon Blanc* displaying attractive passion-fruit – both underpinned with a fine streak of acidity.