2012 Barossa Vintage Report

Barossa Valley
Ideal weather conditions were experienced in the lead up to the 2012 vintage. Mean minimum temperatures in August were 2.5°C above average leading to early budburst (ie. budburst for Shiraz was recorded in late August).

In September, below average mean minimum temperatures slowed bud development, leading to mite damage in Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. Below average maximum temperatures in spring and early summer (albeit average to below average rainfall) were conducive to healthy canopy growth and good flavour development. Overall, there was a cool start to the season, followed by a cool January. The exception was a burst of warm weather around New Year which coincided with the start of veraison, resulting in some burning of Pinot Noir, Frontignac and Riesling.

Warmer weather followed late January which, whilst ripening the fruit beautifully, also led to much weight loss and therefore contributed to the already lower yields in most varieties. Bunches were very small and there were fewer berries per bunch due to the cool overcast conditions during fruit initiation, particularly in Cabernet Sauvignon.

The cool overcast conditions in spring and early summer led to some Powdery Mildew. Similarly, rain in early October led to early primary infections of Downy Mildew. However, these were not significant and the heat at New Year, along with vigilant spray regimes, helped eradicate this.

A rain event at the end of January freshened up the canopy, and there was evidence of minor splitting, however this healed up quickly with the warmer weather.

In the Barossa Valley, the majority of whites had been picked by late February. Overall, the quality of whites was very good, however white yields were average to well below average (down 10-30%), particularly Chardonnay.

Early red varieties started to come off in the first week of February (a month earlier than 2011), with the majority of Shiraz harvested by late March. A second rain event at the end of February pushed back Baumés and slowed down the harvest (which, up until this point, had been progressing very rapidly). Only slight splitting occurred, and again healed up with the subsequent warm weather. The later varieties such as Mataro were harvested well into April.

Cool conditions helped along by low crops, led to great varietal expression in whites and reds - with reds exuding brilliant colour.

Overall, the quality of reds was exceptional. Shiraz yields were lower than average by around 25%, with Grenache yields down around 10%. Cabernet Sauvignon yields were well below average (down 20-40%).

Eden Valley
Winter rains were below average and water catchment into the local dams was consequently reduced after the two average winters of 2010 and 2011. Soil profiles were in most cases nearing the full point by end of August, with budburst starting one to two weeks earlier than the late 2011 season - closer to the long term average.
A similar but reduced rainfall pattern through spring led to Downy Mildew primary infections starting up in the young shoots, reminiscent of 2011. Canopies grew large with strong lateral growth due to the regular rainfall pattern through to the end of December, requiring more frequent spray coverage than the regular 14 day period. Overcast conditions through most of summer meant Powdery Mildew also had to be carefully managed. Cooler and wetter conditions in the last week of November led to poor set in the mid-flowering varieties such as Shiraz and Tempranillo.

As in the Barossa Valley, picking began approximately one month earlier than 2011, but a second rain event at the end of February pushed back Baumés and slowed down the harvest.

The earlier varieties, Riesling and Semillon, and the later Cabernet Sauvignon set well and provided well balanced crops.

Milder summer conditions and cool nights helped develop great flavours and good sugar to acid ratios, particularly in Riesling which was picked late February to early March.

Following the rain in late February, later varieties such as Shiraz ripened in drier, cooler conditions through March to early April, providing some excellent flavours and tannin maturity.

Riesling yields were mixed, with some wineries reporting normal crops, some average – and others down by up to 20%. Quality is excellent, with lovely natural acidity and fine but intense flavours. Chardonnay yields were also mixed - ranging from average to 20% down. The wines are complex and layered, again showing great natural acidity.

Viognier yields were 30% down on average, hence the grapes ripened quickly; in many cases retaining more natural acidity than you would expect from the variety. Flavours are intense and varietal.

Shiraz yields ranged from average to 25% down, with strong wines of very intense colours, fragrant aromas and fine tannins due to the cool nights. The last of the cooler sites were harvested in mid April. Yields were above average for Merlot; average for Semillon, Cabernet Sauvignon, Nebbiolo and Tempranillo, and below average for Gewürztraminer and Barbera.

Riesling, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon were outstanding in 2012, with flavour development and acids progressing smoothly due to the cool, overcast conditions in spring and early summer.

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