



Pinot noir harvest at Misha's Vineyard, Central Otago, New Zealand. Photography by Jim Hawkins

◀ grape quality was "very exciting" - from sauvignon blanc to merlot and syrah.

"That's the standout thing about this vintage. It's all things to all people," he said.

Warm weather at crucial times during the harvest, a lack of rain and, therefore, not a frost season which barely touched fruit led to grapes with great flavour harvested at the optimum time.

Black Bridge Estate's Xan Harding said 2007 was one "out of the box".

"Not only for whites but for reds. Every variety is going to shine."

And the flavour of the grapes this year was noticeably superior, he said.

Trinity Hill winemaker John Hancock agreed saying the grapes were "very good to outstanding".

"We were well looked after by the weather. The whites really look good, and the chardonnay and pinot noir look absolutely outstanding."

He said there was some more picking to do at Trinity Hill, with dessert varieties still on the vine.

Martinborough producers were hamstrung by a cold December that affected fruit set and meant lower than average yields.

Allan Johnson, Palliser Estate's chief winemaker and viticulturist, said yields overall were about two-thirds of normal, but pinot noir was worst hit.

"It's a very small harvest for pinot, we got dobered in December. Our pinot crop this year was down by about two thirds. There won't be a lot of our pinot around this year."

However, the grapes that were harvested were top-quality, he said. ▶

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"The wines are in really good condition and they are looking really good in the tank. The white varieties particularly are looking very strong."

The 2007 harvest on Waiheke Island is complete and the comments from winegrowers suggest that the '07 vintage will be the equal or better of '06, despite the challenges presented by extreme weather in the spring.

Cold winds in mid-late November affected fruit set in some varieties, either reducing the

total set or causing uneven set within the same block. Merlot, syrah and some malbec were influenced by the timing of these winds, but chardonnay (early) and cabernet (late) avoided the impact. The onset of veraison was comparatively late but the 10 weeks from mid-January were dry and hot, shortening the maturity period and resulting in harvest dates similar to 2006.

Heavy rainfall in the last week of March saw 120 to 185mm recorded over a 48-hour period. Only very ripe fruit appears to have

been affected by this rain as the island contour and hard ground conditions help to avoid take up by vines. Botrytis is seldom an issue on the island.

Overall, reports suggest that chardonnay and cabernet cropped and ripened extremely well, merlot less so. Some cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc was still hanging in the last week of April, achieving good phenolic and sugar ripeness levels, albeit at low levels of acidity. Sudden drops in TA have been a feature of the season and required monitoring. There are now 10 syrah producers on the island and those who avoided the cold winds - or who had a spread of clones - are very pleased with the colour and varietal flavour of their fruit.

No accurate measure of total yields is yet available, but new plantings should compensate for the lower yields in some varieties.

"An exceptional year for chardonnay and the early reds. Merlot tonnage was down. Our first pickings from new plantings of vognier, pinot gris and syrah are showing great promise," Neil Culley of Cable Bay said.

David Evans of Passage Rock said: "Good temperatures through veraison delivered ripe flavours in all varieties and good colour in the reds. Our first pinot gris is very pleasing as is the vognier. Merlot was way down in yield but syrah and cabernet sauvignon are both of excellent quality. A very good vintage."

"Mid-season varieties, pinot gris and sauvignon blanc, required careful bunch selection following rain but early chardonnay was excellent and the late cabernet francs, petit verdot and cabernet sauvignon are concentrated and ripe, the equal of '06," Matt Lay of Man O'War Vineyard reported.

Martin Mackenzie of Stonyridge Vineyard said: "Malbec has been a stand out, as good as any recent season. Tannin ripeness is noticeable in the late varieties, making the fourth good season in a row for our cabernet-based reds though some yields, particularly merlot, were affected."

Auckland's other wine-producing areas also had a good year.

Kumeu River owner Michael Brajkovich said the vintage was "pretty superb" despite some potentially damaging rain and

climate critical to success

By BIRGER NORDMARK

Laying the groundwork for a new vineyard is a challenging task for anyone; for a person well-experienced in viticulture or someone starting out.

In either case, particularly if the vineyard project is to be designed to work on a commercial scale – one of the first matters to resolve is the purpose of the future grape crop.

How will it best be used? Will it predominantly be aimed at producing red varieties or white? Will it produce wine for a local boutique market or for the export market?

Are the grapes to be processed in a family-type winery or are they to be supplied on contract to a large winery? Will you establish your own winery on-site?

The answers will give important leads when it comes to evaluate alternative sites.

Site search

The New Zealand wine industry is described as being spread over 10 or 11 regions, depending on whether Waikato and Bay of Plenty are counted as one single region or two separate ones. The typical regional climate - the macroclimate - is classified as temperate maritime in all regions bar one. ▶



Misha's Vineyard, Central Otago

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evaluating a vineyard site is the level of soil acidity. Should it be high, it might require a substantial amount of lime to correct, which would increase the establishment costs.

Vineyard design

When a site has been chosen it is time to plan its layout, allocating appropriate space for the varieties to be planted and planning landscape features.

Orientation of the rows should normally be north to south to allow maximum sunlight to reach the grapevine canopies in daytime. In some circumstances such as on a north-facing slant it may be justified to run the rows east to west to help to control erosion.

The length of rows depends in part on the shape of the area of planting. Long rows up to the natural limit of 300 metres are suitable for management with mechanical equipment. The limitation of length is due to the magnitude of tension that must be transferred from the trellis wires to the end post anchors. Rows that are to be managed basically by manual labour may well stay at

of high water tables and other faults. Mottling – the alternating reddish brown and grey areas of the soil indicate that the soil is imperfectly or poorly drained. Should part of a site contain a submerged, impervious soil layer, it may be possible to break that up by forceful ripping equipment.

Should a site be considered suitable for

vineyard setup in all other aspects than drainage, it would in many cases be possible to solve that problem by laying drain tiles at suitable depths.

It should be remembered, however, that drain tiles are not a perfect substitute for naturally well-drained soil. The most important aspect of soil chemistry in

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