



Mal's Vintage Report 2010

Black Frost on 17 October 2009 plus Hail Damage on 14 December 2009 equals no grapes for picking in 2010. Bummer! The 2011 vintage will be better.

Cheers, Mal



Mal's Vintage Report 2009

Off to a flying start on 1 July 2008 pruning the Old Block (Old Savina). We worked at a pace and were interrupted only by attendance at the EKKKA, with all pruning completed by 23 September. As usual, we pruned with the aim of cropping two tonnes to the acre which results in 1100-1300 litres of wine depending on the wine style. All large pruning wounds were painted with pruning wound paint to prevent cankers. The weather was average for Winter - mostly fine with the lowest temperature -6C. There was a little sleet and snow in July.

Budburst started on 20 September 2008 and was slightly uneven which meant some adjustment to the spray schedule. Spring was generally cool with some very small hail in October.

Our biggest project for the season was to prepare an acre of the Millennium Block for grafting from shiraz (Arabia, Fandango and Pickpocket) to an Italian white variety called fiano. First the vines were cut off at the trunk about 25cm from the ground and above the graft. Considerable difficulty was encountered in developing new shoots suitable for grafting due to strong Spring winds breaking shoots before they could strengthen. Where possible the strongest new shoot was kept and when large enough, in December and January, a fiano bud was grafted into the new cane. The new grafts were also irrigated twice weekly to ensure rapid growth during the season. We went over the new fiano block once a week to train the new vines up and onto the cordon wire and to trim off unwanted extra shoots. The result is pleasing with a success rate greater than 90%. We are hoping to have a small crop in 2010 to make our first white wine.

Lel is interested in biodynamics and I'm interested in some aspects of biodynamics. So, during Spring and Summer, we spread the biodynamic Combined Soil Preparation throughout the vineyard with the aim of increasing soil bacteria and fungi, microbial activity, and thus the uptake of nutrients by the vines. We'll continue with this next season and monitor improvements.

Spring and Summer proceeded well until hail around golf ball size on Christmas Day. It came from the east and damaged most of the bunches on that side, leaving most of the western side intact. We spent three weeks performing the laborious job of dropping all the damaged fruit because the damaged berries do not ripen properly and are more susceptible to disease. We estimate that we lost about 40% of the crop in blocks running north-south (the Tempranillo and Millennium Blocks) and less than 10% in the Old Block which runs roughly south-east to north-west. There was also damage to new shoots and canes in both the fiano and graciano blocks, setting back growth by a few weeks.

It was a cool summer with satisfactory rainfall, although rain around picking time always induces anxiety at the end of the season. With the continual training of the fiano and graciano, it made for a long and busy season. It is so much easier with the old vines who know how to behave themselves!

Our picking days were 18 March (tempranillo) and 21 April (Old Block). Picking went smoothly and the quality of the grapes was very good, and like expectant parents, we can't wait to see the end result.

Our Italian Stone Pines are now seven years old and have yet to bear fruit. They are growing well but there is no sign of any nuts. The only problem encountered has been the eradication of woolly pine aphid. Maybe next season they will bear or they'll get a stern talking to!

One good side to the season was that there were few vine and stalk eating moths, few fruit fly, and the birds, whilst always a problem, were not as abundant. The season finished with beautiful Autumn colours in the vines and more than six inches of rain at a good time in May to top up the ground water and the dam (just as it did last year!).

Cheers, Mal



Mal's Vintage Report 2008

What a season! A snapshot of the conditions:

- *A very cold 2007 Winter getting down to -9C.*
- *A dry Spring with constant east-nor east winds that continued all season.*
- *A very wet Summer with too much rain at the wrong time in January and February including 177mm in a 24 hour period in January - felt like we were in Tully!*
- *A cool Summer with not one day reaching 30C.*
- *A reasonable Autumn and picking season although a few early frosts at the end of March and April saw early leaf drop so we missed most of the beautiful autumnal colours.*

The challenging conditions (one can think of other words but this is a family website) meant that the spray schedule required precision to avoid diseases such as botrytis, powdery and downy mildew.

Budburst was first observed on 19 September 2007, interestingly the same day as the previous two years. Although we sustained some early shoot damage from the strong winds, flowering and fruit set were good.

In late January we replanted 600 Graciano vines to replace those lost to early heavy frosts in the Autumn of 2006. The planting went well and the new vines, in banded pots, took off like rabbits (of which we also have plenty). Unfortunately, the early frosts in March stopped their progress, but we hope and think that the temperatures were not low enough to kill them again.

Our biggest setback this vintage was the loss of the Tempranillo. The heavy rain in January-February caused the berries to swell and the skins to split, resulting in the loss of nearly three tonnes of fruit with only 300kg being picked in the end. We think that the drought-resistant root stocks lapped up the water.

The heavy rains also recharged the dam. The spring is flowing again and the dam is still overflowing at this time (May 2008).

The cool Summer, rain and prospect of disease, made the decisions as to when to pick quite interesting. The baume and pH levels were good but the titratable acidity was high. This meant that flavour ripeness in the grapes took longer to develop.

Our first pick for the Pickpocket rose was on 20 March 2008, with the Old Block on 3 April, and the remainder of the Millennium Block on 10 April. Picking went well and we believe that the resultant wines will be of good quality.

Another aspect of the vintage that was good was reduced bird pressure and damage to the grapes. The rain created an abundance of food for them and a great deal less problem for us.

Now for pruning to start in July. Viva le Grape!



Mal's Vintage Report 2007

The start to this years vintage (Winter 2006) was less than impressive. Early low temperatures of -7.5C and frosts in May 2006 saw 600 of our 700 new (four months old) Graciano vines die. The young vines had not lignified (canes gone hard, brown and heading towards dormancy) before the cold struck. A minutes silence please. We will be replanting in November 2007.

Apart from the abnormally early cold start, the Winter was generally warm. Our pruning plan aimed at limiting the crop across all blocks to two tonnes to the acre.

Due to our attendance at the EKKA, pruning was completed later than usual and not finished until 20 September - just before budburst.

Flowerset and fruitset were both good. Spring was warmer than usual and the season brought constant E/NE winds. Although there was significant wind damage to the Millennium Block, the vines leapt off to a good start.

There was a late frost in mid November and light snow in a couple of areas of the Granite Belt. Whilst we had a minimal amount of damage, a few vineyards lost their whole crop for the season.

Rainfall recorded for the season was 408.5mm (16+ inches) resulting in a dry vintage. At least this meant less disease. The dry season proved the worth of having our vines on drought tolerant rootstocks with virtually no leaf loss. Even though we have significant dam water, we decided to use minimal irrigation to reduce the vigour of the vines. It worked well and the vintage proceeded without problems.

As the tempranillo ripens first, the whole block was netted this year (not the most fun job) in an effort to dissuade the birds. This was generally successful, particularly on the starlings and lorikeets. Some birds still manage to find their way in so we will keep working on our netting technique. Some new species were seen this year - black headed cuckoo shrikes, friar birds, grey butcher birds, and late in the season currawongs. This was possibly due to the drought and quite a number of vineyards picked early due to either a lack of leaf or a fear of rain.

The Summer was mild and windy but the drought (a green drought here) meant that veraison and picking were slightly earlier than usual. We picked a tonne of shiraz from the Millennium Block to go towards this years Pickpocket on 2 March at a lower baume and good acid. The rest of the rose will be bled from the second pick of the Millennium Block on 20 March, and the Old Block picked on 22 March. The Tempranillo Block was picked on 7 March.

A total of just over eight tonnes was picked and all of the fruit is of very good quality. So we think the wines will be better than ever and we look forward to sharing them with you.

The 2007 Pickpocket (rose) and Castanets (tempranillo) have been planned for bottling in July this year.



Mal's Vintage Report 2006

General Climatic Conditions

Winter 2005 produced variable temperatures that were generally above average. Spring was also variable with a mixture of below average temperatures (min oC and maximums 27C).

Irrigation was applied twice in August on the Millennium and Tempranillo Blocks and none after that time due to rain. The old block is dry grown.

Good rain of 110mm was recorded in Spring which led to strong growth with lengthy internodes.

Unfortunately, very strong wind in October caused significant shoot damage to the Millennium Block. The planned crop of 4 tonnes was ultimately reduced to 1.8 tonnes. However, the quality of the fruit was good.

In Summer, very hot temperatures of up to 40C were recorded prior to and at veraison. Veraison was first noted on the Tempranillo Block on 24 December 2005. There was also good rain at veraison - very timely.

February 2006 brought more rain than desired. Along with bird pressure, disease and weed control were more difficult than usual.

New Planting

After many false starts, the Graciano Block was finally planted between 24 January and 28 January 2006. We were concerned that the banded pots were rather spindly and might not settle in before the end of the growing season. However, with only two deaths, the vines have performed well and are up and well along the cordon wine (must be the terroir!).

Picking 2006

Tempranillo Block: This early ripening variety was picked on 23 February 2006. The planned crop of 2 tonnes came in at 1.9 tonnes. Some juice has been bled off for Pickpocket 2006 (rose) and the remainder is currently in steel tank for Castanets 2006.

Millennium Block shiraz: This block was picked on 15 March 2006 and will produce the Arabia. Tonnage was down to 1.8 tonnes due to early season wind damage.

Old Block shiraz: The 25 year old (approx) vines were picked over 2 days on 30 March and 1 April 2006. The planned crop of 2 tonnes came in at 1.8 tonnes.

Picking was slightly earlier this year (except for the Old Block) due to generally warmer conditions. Post harvest rain (68mm to 6 April 2006) will ensure the vines are replenished before they shut down for Winter.

We're looking forward to sharing the wines from what has generally been a good vintage.



Vintage Reports 1997–2005

2005 *This was an excellent vintage. Our season was hot and mostly dry with good rain in Spring and during veraison - 100 mm of rain in each month of October, November, and December 2004. Minimal irrigation was applied - 2 days only for the Millennium and Tempranillo Blocks. Growing conditions were good and the warm season brought picking forward.*

Winter to budburst: temperature range -7C to 24C, rainfall 37.5 mm.

Budburst first observed in Old Block 24 September 2004.

Veraison first observed in Tempranillo Block 6 January 2005.

Budburst to end of vintage: temperature range 6C to 37C, rainfall 433 mm.

Picked Tempranillo Block 14 March; resulting wine Castanets 2005.

Picked Millennium Block 22 March.

Picked Old Block 1 April; resulting wine (500 litres) Pickpocket 2005.

2004 *Difficult season: early frosts, some very hot Spring temperatures, regular rain (including rain every day during one week), record heat for a period in Summer, very high winds, cool temperatures in autumn delaying ripening, and extreme bird pressure.*

Winter to budburst: temperature range -6C to 24C, rainfall 46.5 mm.

Budburst first observed in Millennium Block 12 September 2003.

Veraison first observed in Old Block 9 January 2004.

Budburst to end of vintage: temperature range 2.5C to 34C, rainfall 597 mm.

Lost entire crop on Tempranillo Block to birds.

Picked Millennium Block early to save it from birds 20 March; resulting wine Arabia 2004.

Picked Old Block 17 April.

2003 *Very hot and dry all season, except around picking. Hand-watered Old Block twice in January 2003 to keep vines going.*

Winter to budburst: rainfall 38 mm.

Budburst first observed in Old Block 27 September 2002.

Veraison first observed in Old Block 1 January 2003.

Budburst to end of vintage: temperature range 11C to 35C, rainfall 316.5 mm.

Sold grapes from Millennium Block.

Picked Old Block 29 March; resulting wine Old Savina 2003.

1997–2002 *Grapes sold to other wine producers.*