



2014 Vintage Weather Journal

Following one of the driest calendar years on record, the drought largely defined the 2014 winegrowing season. A dry winter, a mild mannered spring and a warm summer prompted the vines to nurture concentrated grapes, and ultimately led up to a very early harvest.

After an unusually arid winter with intense frosts throughout December, February spring rains provided a bit of relief. Though we could have used more, this precipitation was enough to relax a little bit, while budbreak pushed a few weeks earlier than normal. Additional rain in early April fell just in time to soak into the surrounding countryside, bringing seasonal precipitation levels from very low to below average. Here in West County, a warm spring full of increasing sunlit hours paved the way for successful flowering and a healthy fruit set. In Anderson Valley a few Pinot Noir blocks experienced hard winter stress, ultimately resulting in reduced yields.

The accelerated dry season growing conditions continued through most of the summer months. Several 3-day heat spells of 90+ degrees, and thus plenty of sunshine, were peppered throughout June and July. Signs of veraison were already visible by the middle of July. According to the Sonoma County Winegrowers weather tracking, the Growing Degree Days eventually surpassed those of 2013 (season-to-date) by the start of August. During the last few weeks of August we enjoyed two weeks of cool mornings with plenty of fog. These cooler weather patterns enabled even ripening and more hang time to develop deeper flavors. Harvest still came early.

Harvest began August 23rd, five days earlier than 2013, with Pinot Noir from the Alberigi vineyard. Sections of Laguna and blocks of the Hallberg Ranch quickly followed. The fruit ripened early, and it ripened all at once. October began with a lengthy high-pressure system that brought temperatures well into the 90's for 5 straight days. We made the call to bring in the rest of what was still hanging before any chance of dessication could compromise fruit quality. All of our grapes (Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, Riesling, Zinfandel) were in fermenters by the first week of October, and the fruit looked exceptional with clean, turgid, baby clusters.

Following suit, 2014 is another solid vintage. The lack of available water seemed to have stressed the vines just enough to nurture a balanced crop load, and the wines from 2014 exhibit engaging density with strong aromatics and heightened vibrancy.