



Welcome to the Mistletoe Winery Vintage / Autumn Newsletter 2015

2015 VINTAGE OVERVIEW

March 4th 2015. WOW! What a year!

Other than a short, but very hot, spell in November, the Hunter Valley experienced near perfect grape growing conditions through Spring and early Summer until the 3rd week of January. Then the weather cooled off, becoming quite mild and cloudy with quite a few very localised thunderstorms.

These storms eventually turned into persistent light rain. This rain coupled with high humidity, set up perfect conditions for the disease in the form of mildew and rot in the vineyards.

With it being such a benign season early on, a lot of growers had cut back on vineyard sprays and maintenance, saving some money, but consequently suffering quite large losses of grapes to disease.

At Mistletoe, having seen it all before, we kept our vineyard maintenance regime right up to the mark and suffered very minimal loss.

The only grapes we didn't harvest were a small percentage of our Semillon and White Muscat which did not meet the criteria we set for quality wine production.

These grapes had fungal problems that had arisen because of bird damage.

Very early on in our grape-growing life I once asked an industry old timer what should we do about damage to our grape crops that was caused by birds. His reply still resonates to this day...

"Plant 10% more and don't worry about it, you can't win against the little buggers!"

During the lead up to, and during harvest, we were on the internet following the weather on nearly an hourly basis and then out in the vineyard checking the grapes, willing them to reach the correct levels of ripeness so we could pick them and get them safely in the winery.

It can be a very intense and worrying time as you can lose a whole year's work in the vineyard with a hailstorm or prolonged rain.

It is a very special feeling to know that you have finished harvest and the wines are ticking through fermentation in the winery and are looking great.

Time to relax a little after many early mornings, long days and nights.

As always, we hand harvest all the grapes we source from the Hunter.

As it is mid-Summer the days can be very hot so we start picking at daylight which means we have to be out of bed by 5am at the latest to have the bins and tractors ready to go at 6am.

We oversee the pickers (depending on the block size we could have up to 30 people in a crew) with either myself or Rob, our son, working alongside the pickers and checking the grapes into the picking bins.

We do this to make sure that only the very best fruit makes it and we remove leaves etc. as we go because they can affect the flavour of the finished wine.

We try to finish by 12 midday as it is hard work and the pickers start to run out of puff as it gets into the warmest part of the day.

Most harvest crews are made up from students, backpackers, some locals who are permanent vineyard workers, and also some of the Greying Nomads who follow the fruit harvest circuit supplementing their retirement income.

There is usually a lot of humour and good natured banter going on with the foreign backpackers receiving on the job lessons in Australian etiquette, the intricacies of Australian swear words and slang, and being regaled with tall tales of snakes, spiders, Yowies and Drop Bears!

Hand picking grapes is constant, hard, hot and heavy work and much more expensive than machine harvesting. However, it is the only way to ensure only the best quality grapes end up in the winery. The grapes that we selectively hand harvested this year were in near perfect condition.

We keep hearing reports of grapes being harvested earlier because of changes to our climate. This year saw a vintage that was much later than what we have experienced in recent years. We commenced harvesting just

after Australia Day as opposed to mid - January in 2014.

Our last lot of Hunter grapes arrived into the winery on February 16th, the latest we have seen fruit into the winery since the mid 1990's.

The last lot of grapes received was the Shiraz from the Mistletoe Home Vineyard which was harvested in absolute prime condition. This will be an excellent wine when bottled as the Hunter Shiraz 2015 in mid-2016.

Unfortunately some of the grapes we source from our contract growers didn't get through, but we managed to supplement our needs with some very good grapes sourced from some older vineyards which appeared to suffer less problems than the newer plantings.

Overall, we have experienced a very good to excellent vintage which culminated with the arrival of our final delivery of grapes into the winery on March 2nd.

This last delivery was the Shiraz and Viognier grapes we bring from Young in SW NSW each year.

We also received some excellent Cabernet and Merlot from Young so all you devotees of our Cabernet Merlot can take comfort in this news.

The Hilltops (Young NSW) region has experienced what could be the best vintage ever for that area with just 200mm of rain falling over the region during the nearly 6 month long growing season.

Less rain means less disease, smaller but more intensely flavoured grapes, and lower cropping levels, all of which contribute to quality wine.

All the reds we have made from Hilltops in 2015 are standouts and will be worth seeking out when released mid - 2016.

Grape-growing is a continuous cycle so we are now preparing the vineyard to sow a green manure cover crop in the next few weeks.

This will be followed by pruning in June and July and the addition of composted cow manure in late Winter to boost the Spring growth in the vines.

WINEMAKING COMMENTS

The white wines we have made this year at Mistletoe all look to be excellent with the focus evenly balanced, quality wise, on Semillon, Chardonnay and our White Muscat.

All the grapes are handpicked and then whole bunch pressed yielding only the highest quality juice ready for fermentation.

The three Semillons are all made in separate stainless steel tanks without any oak influence.

We have made two Chardonnays this year, our standard Hunter Chardonnay and the Reserve.

These wines are made solely from Hunter grapes and were fermented, and matured, in excellent high quality French oak puncheons, which supplement and support the fruit flavours in the Chardonnay.

We managed to harvest enough White Muscat off our Home Vineyard to make plenty of our Mozcato and also some Petite Muscat, our very popular white port style.

As usual, we have again made three excellent Rosés from this vintage. They are the Petillant Sparkling Rosé, Barrel Fermented Rosé and the Hunter Rosé which was previously called The Rose.

Our only Hunter red from this vintage will be the Hunter Shiraz 2015 as all the other red blocks we were expecting were unfortunately lost to disease.

The Mistletoe motto is "Quality without Compromise" and any grapes that we feel will not meet that criteria are rejected in the vineyard prior to harvest. As a consumer you can take comfort that we shall never, ever, bottle a wine under the Mistletoe label that doesn't meet that standard.

"Early morning harvest Mistletoe 2015"

"We are quite often asked about the criteria that determines the vintage shown on wine labels. It is pretty straightforward really.

The vintage shown on the label is the year in which the grapes were harvested".