

Vintage Report 2023

words + wine

With all the grapes in the winery and the last barrels filled, we can start to ask the question, “how was vintage 2023?”

I say “start to ask” because really, when is the best time to judge? And what are the criteria?

There’s a reason we age wine. Right after fermentation is done, we taste wine for knowledge, not for pleasure. The acids are spiky, the wines are cloudy, and the tannins in the reds are aggressive.

After 12 - 18 months of peaceful aging, the wines have undergone a transformation as extreme as that of caterpillar becoming a butterfly. Time lends softness and sophistication.

Even after going to bottle, wines grown from the ground up to age can sometimes remain standoffish for years, even decades. Conversely, some beautifully age-worthy vintages are pretty from the day they go into the bottle.

If the wines follow the weather patterns of 2023, then the best descriptor of this vintage will be “dynamic.” 2023 bounced between extremes of temperature and rainfall throughout the year.

The first quarter of the year was unusually cold and dry, but April brought us huge amounts of rain. Then the

tap turned off completely for most of the summer, which in spite of being dry was warm but not hot, with cool nighttime temperatures. Bloom went well and yields returned to average, which was nice after the abysmal numbers in 2022. We did have three days with high temps in August, so it was a relief when we got enough rain in late August to refresh the vines and tamp down the mountain wildfires. September queued us up for perfect harvest conditions. Temperatures were normal and rain held off until late in the month.

When I compare the northern Willamette Valley with other parts of world, we were fortunate. We logged 2372 growing degree days this year – higher than our average of 2000 growing degree days, but thanks to our cool nights, far less than Burgundy’s 2827.

Deciding when to start the pick was challenging this year. By early September the vines were already showing incredibly accelerated sugar accumulation. My initial estimate was that harvest would take 13 days: our amazing crew accomplished it in only eight.

With the grapes coming into the winery thick and fast, Julio and the four people on the winery production team somehow found room for everything to ferment at once. In spite of the warm weather,

fermentations went at a gentle pace.

With the bulk of the work of harvest work done, we can start to ask that question: how is 2023?

Initial signs are terrific: our picking crew brought everything in at just the right time, so alcohols are moderate. The flavors are vivid, but with plenty of acidity to avoid being cloying. Tannins are pronounced but not overly aggressive for a young wine.

What makes me the most excited, however, are the aromas and the finishes. Regardless of how prickly and dry the wines are in the mouth right now, the aromas are dynamic, blending fresh crunchy fruit and floral character with a fringe of riper aromas around the edges. Finishes are long and evolve slowly across the palate, offering a series of evolving impressions before fading. A year in barrel will bring the disparate components of the wine into more harmonious focus. We’ll blend and 12 to 18 months from now, put the wines in bottle. And then, who knows, with a decade or two of bottle age, we’ll finally be able to tell how the vintage turned out. But my prediction is that the wines of 2023 will be remembered as dynamic, just like the weather that influenced them.

Cheers,

Jason Lett