



FELTON ROAD

Felton Road Vintage Summary 1997-2024

1997

The vineyard first started cropping in 1995 so for most of the Pinot Noir, this was its third harvest. (Apart from 25 cases bottled and labelled Felton Road from the 1995 vintage for an export trial to the UK, the 1995 and 1996 harvests were sold as grapes). The summer of 1996/7 was very cool with fresh snow falling in the mountains right through January. This also brought significant rain and vegetative growth. The harvest didn't start until April 20; still our latest to date. The wines have good acidity and a distinct herbal streak that has aged into a complex forest floor savoury character.

1998

Warmer than 1997 with low to moderate yields and a very good growing season. This was the third harvest for Block 3 which started on April 6. Depending on storage, some bottles of the 1998 Block 3 and all of the 1998 Felton Road Pinot Noir can be found to be a little "funky" with over the top complexity for some tasters; for others it can be found to be very complex and "most Burgundian", due to a Brettanomyces bloom in the bottle. Our bottles of the Block 3 at the winery drink very well and we are very pleased with the way the wine has developed; though wines that have been less meticulously stored have not fared so well.

1999

A very hot summer with many days over 30°C resulted in a very early harvest starting on March 27. Large crops probably helped balance this quick ripening. Interestingly, around April 15 (with only a little left to pick), 100mm of snow fell coating vineyards in the Gibbston area, with enough to dust the tanks in Bannockburn – an unusual sight - especially snow heavily laden on the bird nets. Due to the large crop and big berries we performed a saignée and made a Vin Gris from many of the Pinot Noir fermenters.

2000

2000 was a vintage that was dominated by the heavy rains in mid-November of 1999 that caused extreme flooding in the towns of Queenstown and Wanaka. This saturated the vineyard soils back when we did not have the cover crops to assist in diverting this excess moisture from the vines. December was dry and just when the vines were getting on top of the excess available moisture we had a very wet January (117mm). We did not irrigate at all during the 1999/2000 growing season. Surprisingly, we already had very small berries (berry size being already pre-determined), and the corresponding low to moderate yields resulted in wines with wonderful depth and concentration. Harvest started late on April 12. The 2000's are admired for their concentration and mouthfeel. They have a complex forest floor, mushroomy, and briary aroma and flavour profile with the rich texture on the palate being their hallmark.

2001

After the lower yielding 2000 vintage, 2001 was large and similar to 1999. Very hot, sunny and stable weather during the flowering in early-mid December gave us the most successful, fastest and most even flowering yet seen. A warm summer but with the heavier crops, harvest started on April 6. Due to the

large crop and berry size we performed a saignée making a Vin Gris from many of the Pinot Noir fermenters. The wines are elegant and racy with perhaps not the depth that we should normally achieve.

2002

2002 was an exceptional vintage that combined the best elements of the 2000 and 2001 vintages. Very cold winter temperatures in 2001 were followed by an unusually early and warm spring. The potential high quality started with a small fruit set of small berries: the perfect raw material for a great vintage. A moderately warm summer, without the heat spikes (and lows) we typically see, resulted in an early harvest starting on March 26. The fruit ripened quickly and was the most even and perfect we had yet seen. However (Pinot Noir is always going to have a however!), the rich, full, plush-ness of the 2002 Pinot Noir give emphasised their “New World” character. There is no doubt about the quality of the wines, but many Pinot Noir enthusiasts might prefer the focus and purity of the cooler vintages. These wines are certainly exceptional, whether they are great is another debate.

2003

What we would call a more typical growing season without the highs and lows. Cold weather throughout the spring resulted in slow spring growth yet fortunately free of any frost damage. The warm and settled December provided excellent conditions for a successful flowering resulting in a moderate to large crops. This was followed by a typical warm to hot February and March (very dry), which evened growth and ripening. An unusual series of frosts in early to mid-April slowed ripening allowing hang time without the usual rapid sugar accumulation we can sometimes experience. Harvest started on April 6. A saignée (Vin Gris) was performed to re-balance the skin to juice ratio. The 2003 vintage can be quite easily compared to 2001 and 1999. We have a tendency to under-rate these easier, larger vintages, possibly because they lack the challenges of the tricky years. We sometimes need to remember that most classic Burgundy vintages are warmer and larger ones. Whenever we look back at wines from these sorts of years (2001 is a very good example), we are always impressed by how they gather stature with a few years of bottle age.

2004

We called this season the coldest yet, and it was; for the 2005 was yet to come. Very late spring frosts in mid and late November caused extensive damage across Central Otago but was limited on our vineyards to vines in the lower lying Block 2 (only a small amount of Pinot Noir and mostly Chardonnay and Riesling). But cool seasons suit us, as we have a warm north facing site and the manpower in the vineyard to cosset grapes through the hard times. A wet February did not result in increased berry size and the dry and warm finish to the season gave small berries and wines of excellent intensity and higher acidities. Harvest started on April 13. Yields averaged about 5 tonnes per hectare for Pinot Noir with small berries, always the sign of a highly concentrated vintage. The cool weather seems to have brought about an almost crystalline purity to the fruit in this vintage; a very true expression of Pinot Noir flavours. The tight focus makes it more a Pinot connoisseur’s wine over some of the warmer vintages.

2005

The 2005 vintage is a classic example of the character that comes from a childhood of victory over adversity. It was a trying and frustrating season with a very cool spring which continued right through to difficult weather during December. This is the critical flowering and fruit set month, but our diverse range of clones and rootstocks paid dividends in terms of the variation between flowering dates. The end result was a crop averaging just 20hl/ha (3 tonnes per hectare): around half of our usual cropping level. This proved a blessing in disguise as even in the chilling temperatures, our warm north facing sites and

meticulous viticulture helped optimise ripeness of this small crop. This year could be one of our longest maturing wines we have yet made: our first “Vin de Gard”. The wines have plenty of stuffing, deep and concentrated with chewy tannins that will appeal to some but perhaps lacking the elegance and finesse we normally see. Quite different from our normal style with the vintage making a strong statement.

2006

Our earliest starting date yet of March 17 after a particularly hot and dry summer (many days over 30°C with temperatures peaking at 39°C). The hot dry weather through flowering resulted in large berries and large crops leading us to saignée almost all tanks and produce a Vin Gris. 2006 made perfumed and elegant wines with a wonderful natural balance. Perhaps not the fruit intensity or depth of the brooding 2005's, but wines that can best be compared to the elegant 2001's and 2003's. Somewhat of a landmark vintage for us being our 10th vintage and also the first where 100% of our vineyards were being farmed organically and biodynamically.

2007

The 2007 vintage was strongly affected by the cool spring weather with many frost events which fortunately we were able to successfully fight. While we can fight frosts, we can't do anything about the cool weather during flowering and the very cool December of 2006 affected the fruit set and resulted in a smaller than average crop (around 25% down). Some very warm temperatures in early February resulted in signs of vine stress around the region but again the moderating platform provided by the organic and biodynamic viticultural programme minimised the affect on our vineyards. A warm and dry March combined with the lighter than normal crops and warmer than usual night time temperatures, meant the fruit ripened easier and earlier than expected after such a cool start to the season. Harvest began at the end of March of small berried bunches with excellent ripeness. The 2007 Pinot Noirs are wines of unmatched concentration and rich complexity without losing any purity or finesse. They combine the ripeness of the 06's with the concentration of the 05's adding a certain extra magic that is unique to this vintage. In short we see them as landmark wines. 2007 was also a great vintage for Chardonnay and Riesling: intense flavours from the smaller crops and also crisp acidities adding to their vibrancy and minerality.

2008

The season started with good soil moistures after a relatively wet spring. Warm, stable and sunny weather during flowering resulted in a successful fruit set with moderate to large crops. Above average and well-spaced rainfall throughout the summer months led to healthy canopies with a much decreased dependence on irrigation, and in parts of our vineyards with heavier soils, no irrigation for the whole growing season. Cool night time temperatures leading up to the harvest slowed the ripening so that harvest proceeded over a 4 week period commencing on March 25. The harvest period was very dry and the fruit was in very good condition. Thankfully, vintage was completed by April 23 after which the weather turned very cold with unseasonal snow in the vineyards and heavy rain at the end of April. Larger berries and heavier bunch weights along with the prolonged growing season contributed to bright and focussed wines without excess weight. The wines possess fine and elegant tannins and are similar in structure to the 2006 and 2003's.

2009

The season started with a normal spring, neither hot nor cool with normal rainfall. There were the usual occasional frost events that were able to be successfully fought. Good weather over flowering resulted in an excellent fruit set. The summer was on the cool side and then February which is normally our

warmest and most stable month, was unseasonably cool and wet (although wet for us is still only 48mm but falling on six occasions). In recognition of the cooler summer and then the cool February we were determined to keep crop levels down, so crop thinned more aggressively than normal. Also in recognition of the wet February, we leaf plucked exposing the fruit which is not usual for us. March was a return to normal warm and stable weather and the vines ripened very smoothly and holding great canopy despite the challenges in the weather. 2009 was, for the third season in a row, an early pick for us compared to most other wineries. Picking started on April 2 and was completed on April 22. Fruit quality was near perfect: small berries and bunches and considering the wet February, virtually no disease anywhere (a good advert for organics). Quantity was almost exactly on target averaging about 5-5.5 t/ha for Pinot Noir. The wines show beautiful aromatics and a purity of fruit expression that is quite thrilling: these are some of the prettiest young wines we have ever seen and should have the potential to match the great 2007's.

2010

The season started slowly after a cool and wet winter. There were some frosts throughout the spring but nothing severe that couldn't be fought and no damage was sustained. Excellent weather during flowering and with a little green harvest in some blocks, resulted in perfect crop loads and a very even bunch maturity. January was cool and wet but then February and March balanced this with warm and very dry weather. The vines were in very healthy condition with harvest commencing on March 30 and concluding on April 23. There was nothing extraordinary about the growing season and it can be regarded as a very fine year. Slightly lower sugar levels at harvest (important to keep alcohols from climbing too high) and stable acidities were a very pleasing aspect of the 2010 vintage.

2011

The growing season for vintage 2011 was most unusual. The spring was the warmest and most stable to date, leading into a warm and early summer. There were no significant spring frosts due to warmer and more stable weather and an absence of the usual cold southerly blasts we can experience throughout the spring. Flowering was very early, fast and successful, which resulted in solid crops across all varieties. We were relieved to see things cool down in January which set the pattern for a cooler and wetter mid-season. The description "wetter" must be read with respect to our normal very low rainfall, so still not a lot of rain. However, the increased frequency of light rain events was enough to create a challenge for producers who were not alert to mildew problems. Interestingly, the last four vintages (2008-2011) had growing season rainfalls within 10% of the average. The weather settled for a flawless and warm Indian summer during harvest. There was no rain and the harvest started very early on March 21 and finished on April 14. The grapes ripened in warmer temperatures, resulting in a harvest that was fast paced with grapes maturing quickly: a race against time which is unusual for us. Yields were generally at or slightly above our target yields.

2012

The spring started with warm temperatures and dry soils which encouraged even and strong early season growth. However, cooler and wetter weather set in for the remainder of spring. From early December the weather changed and was unusually settled and very warm through to mid-January with most days above 30 °C. This was in stark contrast to the weather the rest of the country was experiencing due to the strong La Nina influence of more northerly and easterly weather systems, which Central Otago escapes due to our southern and mountainous location. Flowering occurred in early December and was fast and successful. The later part of the summer was punctuated by almost weekly cool southerly weather systems which moderated ripening and were somewhat welcomed after such a hot mid-summer period. Rain associated with some of these weather events meant vine mid-rows were green, vine canopies were

healthy, but without excessive vigour, and little requirement for supplemental irrigation. Somewhat surprising was that berry size remained small and with relatively small bunches. As a consequence, yields were around 25-30% down with Riesling and Chardonnay but only marginally down in the Pinot Noir. A distinctive feature of the 2012 vintage was the huge diurnal temperature swings in the 10 days immediately prior to harvest: daytime temperatures of 27-29 °C with evenings dropping below 4 °C. The weather over harvest was warm and stable with a very orderly flow of fruit to the winery. Harvest commenced with Chardonnay on March 26 and finished on April 13.

The Rieslings and Chardonnays are outstanding with the Pinot Noirs regarded as the finest we have made; being very floral, balanced and finesse driven wines.

2013

The season started slowly after a very cold winter with normal soil moistures. October temperatures were moderate; however we experienced a period of cool weather through early November punctuated by four cold frosts. A severe frost on November 3 caused widespread damage throughout Central Otago. Fortunately our vineyards only suffered sporadic shoot damage in lower lying areas away from slopes or frost protection systems (overall damage was less than 2%).

December finally warmed, and along with very little rainfall provided excellent conditions for flowering and a strong and even fruit set. January was warm but unusually marked with five cold southerlies that brought snow to the mountains and tempered the post flowering growth and development. By the end of January and leading into veraison, the weather stabilised considerably and provided us with the warmest and most consistent temperatures in February and March we have yet experienced. Fortunately, it was without the excessive high temperatures that we can encounter at this time, as these high temperatures, along with our high UV levels, can cause vine stress and sunburn on the grapes. There were few but much needed rain events.

The most interesting aspect about the entire growing season was the warmer night temperatures through February and March, which is uncharacteristic for Central Otago. This brought on the fruit ripeness earlier than we would normally expect considering the brief cold periods we experienced in November and January. Bunch thinning was required on all varieties to achieve lower and more appropriate yields. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay had lower acidities and early flavour development at lower sugar levels than normal. Riesling still retained good acidity with normal sugar levels at harvest. Harvest began on March 26 and was completed by April 15 with ideal conditions throughout. With the warmer evening temperatures leading up to harvest, the Pinot Noirs have riper red fruit notes with a broader palate and softer acidity.

2014

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

Vintage 2014 was preceded by an unusually wet and significantly warmer winter than we usually receive. The heightened soil moisture and mild conditions gave rise to an early bud burst followed by vigorous early season growth. The old Almond tree at our Cornish Point vineyard was blossoming by August 20th, a sure sign of an early spring. The elements conspired to offer Gareth and his viticulture team some sleepless nights with low-lying snow keeping the threat of frost ever present. A mixture of good fortune and careful management of inter-row crops kept the threat at bay.

Warm and unseasonably calm and dry weather encouraged rapid and even shoot development throughout November with a marked advance over previous seasons. December saw early

completion of flowering and fruit-set with November's heat continuing through mid-month. Recompense for early warmth came in the form of cooling southerly winds. Shoot growth continued to be strong and the vineyard team had to work hard (more than usual!) on tucking and shoot positioning in already heavy canopies. Trimming was underway by midway through the month, a sure sign of the season's advancement.

Although peak afternoon temperatures were lower than average throughout January, heat summation was right on target, offering the vines sufficient warmth to maintain their advanced state. Shoot thinning was quickly followed by fruit dropping with particular attention paid to younger and weaker vines to ensure they built appropriate healthy shoots and leaves for better vine balance and optimal fruit quality. Soil moisture remained naturally high from regular rainfall with no requirement for supplemental irrigation. Veraison started well in advance over our seasonal average. However, cooler temperatures slowed the progress allowing the vineyard team to control fruit thinning and fruit evening across the vineyard, as and when required. This slowing down of the fruit development was seen as beneficial in helping delay the final ripening period from occurring in the usual heat we can experience in early to mid-March. February was very dry with virtually no recorded rainfall for the month.

The dry weather continued through March and with the completion of bunch thinning, the waiting game was underway. Like parts of February, cooler temperatures than normal were complemented by significant diurnal temperature swings tempering the warm and rapid early season growth with some maturing calm and finesse. Harvest began early on March 20 with low sugars and vibrant, balanced fruit. February's slow, staged veraison became quite instructive for Blair and Gareth's picking decisions. The harvest period was generally dry with only a couple of light and insignificant rain events throughout the entire harvest period. Individual Block's and clones of Pinot Noir offered themselves for harvest at a steady and pleasingly not rushed pace. Carrying through into April, the window for picking Chardonnay at optimal ripeness was more tightly defined as that for Pinot Noir. Yields were balanced with good levels of acidity across all varieties. The harvest of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were completed by April 8 with the Riesling finishing on April 14.

2015

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

Cool early spring conditions resulted in bud burst occurring a little later than usual and slow early season growth. Relatively cool and very unsettled spring conditions prevailed throughout November with slighter higher and more frequent rainfall. Vine growth was slow and behind normal. Fortunately, the weather finally stabilised and warmed in time for flowering which occurred in mid-December. Rainfall was very low and soil temperatures finally began increasing. This caused a rapid growth surge keeping the vineyard team very busy with shoot placement, wire lifting and trimming through to the end of the month. Peak temperatures continued to be high in January. Periods of cooler weather occurred but were not persistent enough to drop soil temperatures in the build up to veraison. Bunch compositions were variable (as a result of the cool spring conditions) making accurate crop predictions difficult. Bunches were overall of a good size although berry numbers were down in places.

Temperatures were relatively moderate with warmish nights but with more than double the normal February rainfall. Veraison was helped by the early warmth and achieved completion quickly which is important for a consistent level of ripeness. Some light rain events in early March kept us on edge but fortunately only 24mm recorded for the entire month. Some minor frosts as usual, but not severe enough to cause any pre-harvest leaf loss. This contributed to the high diurnal variations we normally experience offering potential for a classic Central Otago vintage. These high diurnals (often as much as

25 °C) help retain bright flavours, varietal integrity and good acidity. Leaf condition held very well with no signs of stress or early shut down allowing a late transition into dormancy. Harvest started on March 27 and Chardonnay and Pinot Noir completed by April 11 after 8 consecutive days of fast picking. The last of the Riesling was picked on April 14.

2016

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

Unusually high rainfall and persistent frost events throughout winter 2015 placed soil moisture levels very high. Cherry-plum tree at Elms vineyard blossoming from 1st September. El Nino conditions resulted in windy conditions throughout spring. These Westerlies brought early warmth which worked in unison with high soil-moisture to push early bud-burst and vibrant growth. The rapidly rising temperatures plateaued through November, placing the total heat accumulation in keeping with long term averages. Winds were far from average however, blowing with persistence and strength, wicking moisture from the soils and de-vigourating exposed young shoots. Some close-calls for the frost monitors, but no sub-zero temperatures were recorded.

On reflection, December's total heat summation could give the impression of an average month. However, this would deny the extreme diurnal temperature swings the likes of which we're not accustomed to seeing so early in the season: afternoon highs in the low thirties were balanced by single-figure overnight temperatures. Fine conditions for flowering resulted in a normal fruit set. The pattern of large diurnal swings and strong westerlies continued, with particularly cool night-time and early morning temperatures at the start of January. Temperatures surfed freezing point on the 4th, although damage was avoided. A 30°C diurnal swing was recorded on the January 11.

February was substantially warmer than January with overnight temperatures warmer than average: pleasant conditions for outdoor dining and also for advancing ripeness. Scattered rain events provided welcome relief in a season where dry conditions (even by Central Otago standards) combined with wind to increase evapotranspiration. Veraison was early with a rapid onset but prolonged completion. Pleasant evening temperatures were now more scattered in March with afternoon temperatures no longer exceeding 30°C. Near freezing temperatures on the mornings of March 12 and 17 were thankfully not cold enough to cause any leaf damage. This continuation of high diurnal variations, something Central Otago is accustomed to at this end of the growing season, offered the opportunity to retain some balancing tension and finesse after the welcome but unusual warmth of the earlier months. Picking began early on March 22 with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir finished on April 3 and 9 respectively, with dry conditions throughout.

2017

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

The rise of spring through August and September 2016 was as strong and sustained as we've ever experienced. Fruit trees throughout the region were in blossom from early September. Not since 1999 had we seen a wetter October. With sap flowing through warm afternoons and soil moisture levels high, early growth was rampant. Into November and the warm spring didn't abate but rather plateaued. Normal spring westerly winds began to wick soil moisture but for the most part, were not intense enough to interrupt the continuing growth of strong and healthy canopies.

Overall, December was in no way outstanding. Heat summation for the month was more or less average. This average however, was achieved without any great peaks of temperature. Afternoon

winds were concurrent with cool overnight temperatures. This combination provided challenges for the vines as they underwent flowering. A shattered and varied fruit-set would follow. In stark contrast to the striking early season warmth, January was peculiarly cool. Rainfall was high offering succour to both the canopies and the understory. Soil and plant health were good even though progress in bunch development was slowing.

Veraison like flowering was steady to the point of being slow. By this time, we were able to observe evidence of uneven bunch composition with a great degree of variation in both bunch and berry size. Following the January rainfall, February was exceptionally dry, even by our standards, only 13mm for the month. As was the case for heat summation, our season's rainfall seemed to have been provided early. March 3rd and 4th brought challenges in the form of near freezing temperatures for two consecutive days. Sleepless nights for the vineyard team but no damage was incurred. What had been apprehension in the face of unsettled conditions through flowering and veraison, now turned to joy as it became apparent that although the harvest would be smaller (due to the unsettled weather during flowering), quality would be of the very highest. Nature provided us with a perfect outcome to an unusual season characterised by a fast start and slow finish. Rainfall was low and did not affect the harvest. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay were harvested swiftly from the 29th of March with both varieties complete inside of one week. Riesling followed with a longer hang time allowing for excellent flavour development. Harvest concluded with Block 1 Riesling on the 20th of April.

2018

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

August 2017 offered hints of an early spring, however the first half of September slipped back towards cooler conditions. Our cherry-plum tree at The Elms vineyard was in full blossom by early September. On September 25, when after three straight days of warm, strong north-westerlies, a rainy night of heavy thunderstorms seemed to call an official opening on the season. Unseasonably warm temperatures both day and night provided a rapid and exceptionally even budburst. Following an early budburst on September 20, October was the warmest on record and very dry. Rapid shoot growth was not held back by the strong springtime winds that we can normally receive during this period. The warm conditions continued throughout November and December with temperatures again warmest on record. Flowering occurred at the end of November with vines already receiving their first trim. Some dryer areas, particularly those with free draining soils showed symptoms of the hot and dry conditions. Clay like silts at our Calvert vineyard appeared to ride out the unusual weather.

The earliest completion of flowering and a solid fruit set necessitated a green harvest across almost all of the vineyards and varieties. There was close to zero rainfall for the month of December. January was yet again, warmest on record and again virtually no rainfall. Veraison had commenced in most blocks by mid to late January. Temperatures were high enough to cause some stalling of the vines development, a decelerating trend that would be accentuated by the weather that followed.

The hot temperatures finally abated on the first day of February when a southerly blast resulted in snow low on the hills and a morning temperature of only 4°C: a far cry from the 38 °C just 3 days previously. Relative to the record-breaking months preceding it, February was also wet: rainfall was three times higher than the long-term average. The cooling of air and soil along with the moisture was not unwelcome in a season of extraordinarily rapid development.

The cooler finish fortunately allayed our concerns for the potential style and quality of the wines and allowed for a measured and orderly harvest period. Harvesting began very early on February 28 and

was complete by March 20, except for the Block 1 Riesling on March 29. Due to the very dry conditions previously, the wet February did not cause any issues with disease. The fruit was in exceptional condition with surprisingly normal chemistry and flavours.

2019

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

Following a dry winter in 2018, above average rainfall and frost events in September revealed a pattern that was to shape the season. A major frost event on October 13 was the most severe since 2003. Shoots were in their infancy and protective frost fighting activities were required through the night. Fortunately, this event occurred early enough in our growing cycle that damage was limited to just a few specific areas and affected vines were largely able to recover. Although air temperatures varied little from average, the cool, calming effect of early soil moisture could be seen in the vineyards. Notably verdant inter-rows separated vines where potential vigour was balanced by the stultifying effects of cooler soil temperatures.

As is typical, we began to see first evidence of flowering at the start of December, a process protracted by occasional cooling rain events, reaching completion mid-month. Just like the weather, fruit set was varied with small, shattered bunches most evident in the free-draining soils at Cornish Point and the lower slopes of Elms vineyard. In what was to be the wettest season in recent memory, the longest period without rainfall occurred at the end of December until January 6. However, this dry spell was bookended by significant rain events of over 20mm. Soils remained moist and irrigation taps remained firmly closed.

When the first signs of veraison became apparent by mid-February, the variation in bunch and berry development was further highlighted. Above average rainfall persisted accompanied by moderate temperatures. Compared with the rapid advance of the previous vintage, 2019's development was gently (and pleasingly) measured. However, March provided above average temperatures with harvest commencing at Cornish Point on March 29. After a season of patient development combined with late season warmth, the window for picking would prove to be tight. With the exception of Block 1 Riesling, all the fruit was picked in a 12 day window, finishing on April 9. Yields were just below normal.

2020

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

After a moderate winter without extremes, bud burst occurred at the normal time of early October. Temperatures remained moderate throughout the spring hovering around average to slightly below. Little did we know that this was to become the pattern for the entire growing season. Three minor frost events were recorded throughout October that were successfully fought with no damage incurred. Early vine development was steady with rainfall below average. Flowering started slightly behind schedule with cool and relatively wet conditions throughout December causing a protracted and interrupted flowering. With fruit set being affected, careful and prudent bunch counting and yield forecasts were going to be required.

The weather improved over a dry month of January with heat summations returning to average. Veraison commenced in February and was slightly later than normal with double the average February rainfall occurring. With the berry size and bunch weights being considerably smaller than average, virtually no green harvest was required. March recorded half our normal rainfall although it

unusually fell over eight days. These overcast days and cool conditions prevailed throughout March resulting in it being one of the coolest we have experienced.

Interestingly, Cornish Point (which is always slightly warmer due to its proximity to the lake) ripened considerably ahead of our other three vineyards only 6 km away. Harvest began there surprisingly early on March 20 (despite the average to slightly below average heat summation for the growing season) and was completed by March 27. The temperatures during this period were very cool stalling the final ripening at the other three sites. Calvert was picked between April 4 and 11 with Elms and MacMuir between April 7 and 20. The slow ripening required patience but gave the opportunity to judiciously choose the precise time of harvest. It was the complete opposite of what we experienced in the 2019 vintage with the very warm month of March requiring a fast harvest.

Yields in Pinot Noir were pleasingly all on target: a welcome relief after the poor flowering and greatly assisted by our higher density plantings. With the small berries, light bunch weights and cool ripening conditions; flavours were ripe and concentrated, with good vibrancy and acidity. Chardonnay yields were not so fortunate being affected by the poor flowering and sadly down around 30%. The Riesling crop was normal with a feature being shared with the Chardonnay of concentrated flavours and bright acidity. The 2020 slightly cooler than average growing season shares many similarities with our other more preferred vintages being 2019, 2017, 2015 and 2012. These cooler and edgier growing seasons all contain features, that combined with our Bannockburn sites and intensive viticultural inputs, contribute to wines with more profound character and depth. We have great expectations for the 2020 wines.

2021

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

Budburst occurred early in late September after a moderate winter and normal rainfall. A significant weather event with snow, hail and cold temperatures occurred right at budburst and unusually sustained over two days. Emerging buds were vulnerable, but fortunately freezing and damaging temperatures did not occur with no severe frosts following. There were two more minor frost events later in October but both were successfully fought.

Despite only slightly above average heat accumulation throughout the spring, the early budbreak set up the timing for an early flowering in the first week of December. During flowering, some rain occurred and temperatures hovered around average with a period of cool evenings raising concerns of a potential poor set.

Significant rainfall at the beginning of January and further rain in the middle of the month resulted in more than double the monthly rainfall for January. This, along with frequent wind, meant spray applications needed to be carefully scheduled to keep powdery mildew at bay. This wetter period throughout the phase of cell division resulted in generally larger berries and made-up for potentially lower bunch weights from the uneven flowering conditions. Meticulous bunch weight predictions were required to accurately predict yields with judicious thinning decisions required to achieve balanced yields. The weather stabilised in February with warmer and much drier conditions; which continued throughout the leadup, and until the conclusion of harvest.

Picking commenced relatively early with Chardonnay at Cornish Point on March 23 and at Elms two days later. All Chardonnay was completed by April 4. Pinot Noir at Cornish Point was harvested from March 25 to April 3 and at Calvert from March 26 to April 1. The heavier and cooler soils of

MacMuir, and the higher elevation and cooler site at Elms, were both harvested from March 31 to April 11. Riesling was harvested from April 9 to 14 with the conclusion of Block 1 (on the heavier soils) on April 20.

Yields in Pinot Noir were on average pleasingly normal and within a tight range. Chardonnay yields were affected by flowering and about 20% below normal. Riesling bunch weights responded more aggressively to the wetter January with yields slightly above average. Fruit condition was very clean and with no weather interruptions over the harvest period.

2022

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

After a moderate winter, early spring conditions in September cooled with increased rainfall. October through December all recorded average or slightly above average rainfall which minimised - or eliminated entirely in most blocks - any need for supplemental irrigation. Combined with above average temperatures throughout this period, growth was solid and flowering completed early in warm and sunny conditions. Only the later flowering Riesling experienced some wetter weather affecting the fruit set. Cover crops in the inter-rows enjoyed the periodic rain events contributing to increased biodiversity and the ability to build good levels of soil organic matter.

January was warm and dry, advancing the phenology until a wet period in early February, with average temperatures throughout. Canopies were healthy and with a good fruit set, a green harvest was carried out across most blocks to ensure balanced and moderate yields. March was very dry with only 7mm of rainfall recorded and sunny conditions continuing. Interestingly, the mean and maximum temperatures, along with heat summation (apart from much lower rainfall), were identical to the favoured 2019 season. These warmer conditions, along with the early season heat accumulation, contributed to an early start to the harvest on March 16. Frantic picking over 5 days from March 22 to March 26 brought in over half of the harvest including all of the Chardonnay. The last parcels of Pinot Noir were picked at Elms and MacMuir on April 4, with Riesling completed on April 8 except for Block 1 Riesling on April 14.

Yields were on average normal across most Pinot Noir and Chardonnay with Riesling down around 10%. Physiological ripeness occurred readily with pleasingly balanced sugar and acidity.

2023

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

After a few very wet months that signified a wet winter, it was bookended by 2 dry months that resulted in only marginally wetter than average soil moistures to start the season. (Such is the nature of the dry conditions of Central Otago that we often think our wet periods are significant, but taken in context, it is much less so.) Spring temperatures were normal with only a couple of mild frost events which were successfully fought. Normal spring rainfall aided vine growth and contributed to healthy interrow cover crops. While heat summation was slightly ahead of average, the wetter soils slowed development with flowering occurring at the normal time (although a week to 10 days later than 2021 and 2000 flowering). Flowering proceeded in warm and relatively stable weather and resulted in setting a normal sized crop across all three varieties.

December was warm and dry with these conditions further exacerbated over the next several weeks until a decent rain event on February 21. With the relatively dry conditions prevailing for the previous months, this event and the periodic rain throughout March (but still only 43mm recorded), did not present any disease pressure issues and provided welcome relief to the warm and somewhat

previous stressful conditions. This, along with a return to more normal temperatures, and pleasingly cooler night temperatures, arrested the ripening for slow and steady development. Harvest started a week later than what was originally anticipated on March 23, and fears of an early, hot and fast harvest were fortunately not realised. Most interesting for wine quality was the dry and warm period during the critical phase of berry development throughout January, limiting berry size and concentrating phenolic material.

2024

Growing Season & Vintage Conditions

After a wet September, spring commenced with good soil moisture and bud burst occurred at the normal time of early October. Temperatures hovered around average throughout the remainder of spring for consistent and even growth. December ended up being the warmest month above average for the growing season, and along with very low rainfall, aided a successful flowering and fruit set. The dry conditions prevailed throughout January and February limiting berry size and setting the scene for fruit with elevated phenolic material and complexity. Judicious use of irrigation was required to maintain sufficient vine health throughout this sustained dry period. Temperatures never spiked and hovered around average enabling a slow and steady path to maturity. The final ripening month of March was cooler than average with periodic light rain events moderating the final run into harvest. A distinctive feature of March 2024 was the cool night temperatures preserving acidity, freshness and precision of fruit character.

Picking started on 18 March with Pinot Noir at Cornish Point and Chardonnay the following day. All of the Chardonnay was completed by 23 March. Pinot Noir at Calvert, Elms and MacMuir were harvested over fine conditions and at a leisurely pace as the various blocks slowly matured until the Pinot Noir was completed on 9 April. Riesling in Blocks 2 and 4 were harvested from 5-10 April, with the heavy soils of Block 1 requiring extra time to conclude the overall harvest on 19 April.

What is interesting is the remarkable and pleasing consistency experienced over the last four growing seasons. Total heat summation has varied very little with 2024 being the outlier, but still only 5% cooler than the average. Similarly, growing season rainfall has also been very consistent with 2024 again the outlier, but still just a moderate 12% less (being 40mm or one decent rain event). What does make the difference to the overall quality and personality of the vintage is the exact period when we do experience warmer or cooler conditions and when we do receive replenishing rains or experience sustained dry conditions. These factors are complicated and nuanced, but pleasingly subtle with a relatively benign overall influence to normal quality, mainly due to our very low base level rainfall patterns, low humidity and long sunshine hours. When certain combinations align, we see precision, detail and complexity in the wines – all in the hands of mother nature.

It's interesting to reflect back on our earlier vintages knowing what we do now. Every year we learn and apply more. In general, we feel there is a step-up in quality and expression from 2002 onwards and another step in increased subtlety, harmony and balance from around 2010. Could it be because 2002 was when we started converting to organic and biodynamic cultivation and 2010 benefiting from vineyards under this farming regime for several years? Quite possibly, but more likely we should look to Blair's experience with 27 Felton Road vintages now under his belt and Gareth King leading the viticulture for 25 years. This contributes to more confidence in letting the wines express themselves, being patient and continually exploring various opportunities to push for further quality, authenticity and personality.