



napa valley vintners

Napa Valley Vintners-Report on Harvest 2010

In the cellar, winemakers are delighted, undeterred by challenges of Mother Nature

In some years winegrowers must feel like baseball players in the batting cage swinging at whatever Mother Nature throws their way, and for vintage 2010 in California's renowned Napa Valley this was the case. But now vintners are rounding third, feeling good and ready to slide into home.

Rainfall returned after three dry years, pushed bud break, flowering and fruit-set back by at least two weeks at the front end of the growing season, and due to the cloud cover, there was no frost damage in 2010. The summer brought cooler than normal temperatures, where constant vigilance and rigorous canopy management averted mildew or pest problems.

The ten-day to two-week lag continued into a later than average veraison—the time when white varieties turn from green to golden and black varieties for red wine turn from green to pink to inky purple before final ripening. Winegrowers were faced with a two-day heat spike into triple digits for the first time this season, coinciding with the first day of harvest on August 24. With canopies thinned to adjust for the cooler season, grapes at various sites experienced some sunburn. The damage was variable site-to-site with many vineyards reporting no sunburned clusters at all.

"The good news was that the spike came before most blocks had been thinned as per usual post-verasion, and by in large damaged clusters were dropped during annual crop thinning," said **Bruce Cakebread of Cakebread Cellars**.

"This (heat spike) was not the end of hope, it just meant a lot more work for the vineyard crew. When it came time to pick Sauvignon Blanc (21 days later than past years) the crew had to first make a pass through the vineyard and remove all the sunburned or shriveled grapes. They then went back through to pick the rest of the clusters that were ripe, and if there were a few sunburned grapes left on the cluster, the picking crews removed those grapes carefully before throwing them in the picking bins. This is a textbook case of what we call "precision farming"; it can be very time consuming and expensive, but the results are worth all of the extra effort," said **Mecaela Miller and Winemaker Brian Brown of Round Pond Estate**.

Cakebread added, "The fermenting Sauvignon Blanc looks great--good flavors, nice acid and lower alcohol levels than previous years. "

"Definitely not a year for winemakers to sit back and relax," said **Stephanie Putnam of Raymond Vineyards**. "The relatively cool growing season coupled with the unexpected heat spikes in late summer is resulting in a late and shortened harvest with lower yields. We are excited about what we are seeing from the vineyards, and know that our patience will be rewarded in the end. The grapes have concentrated flavors that will materialize into elegant, structured wines, almost European in style."

"Cooler than average temperatures returned again in early September, but gave way to a welcome, warm and consistent Indian Summer that has been just the ticket, bringing good flavor and color development across the board. It looks as though this weather pattern will bring us to the finish line." said **David Beckstoffer of Beckstoffer Vineyards**, and president of the board of directors for Napa Valley Grapegrowers.

Longtime Cabernet Sauvignon producer **Cathy Corison of Corison Winery** said, "My favorite vintages are always the longest and coolest. Indian Summer saves the day again! Seeds started turning brown 2-3° Brix earlier than in warmer vintages. Flavors and tannins came around at lower sugars which allows us to make wine with lower alcohol levels. This was the year of sorting. We went through each block dropping sunburned fruit to the ground the day before picking- a very expensive proposition; we

essentially picked twice. The fruit that made it to the crusher displays the wonderful concentration, complexity and balance of a classic long, cool season.”

Chris Howell of Cain Vineyard and Winery atop Spring Mountain in the western hills said, “The potentially dark clouds of our late harvest have been looming ominously since late May when we faced a delayed and lengthy bloom, but sometimes Nature smiles on us. Those dark clouds have not appeared - to the contrary, in the past three weeks, we have enjoyed warm, sunny weather - perfect for ripening!”

Bruce Devlin of Three Clicks Wines said, “Petite Sirah looked the best it has in years, and the flavors are intense for sure. The heat, for some reason was gentle on the fruit and did more damage to some of the leaves, perhaps sacrificing themselves for the glass of wine that we will make from the fruit.”

Jac Cole, winemaker at Spring Mountain Vineyard reported, “Even though this is a later than normal year, we’re already getting some great flavors in our Cabs and Merlots and I’ve got a good feeling we’ll be getting the lion’s share of the reds in before the end of October. Even though we’re hovering in the high 23° Brix realm with the Cabs, the flavors are bright and fruity and there is little to no green herbal notes, which is terrific! This could be much like the 2005 vintage, with great flavors and depth and very moderate alcohols, just ripe, balanced, and beautiful wines.”

Wesley Steffens of Vineyard 7 & 8 said, “Flavors are progressing beautifully, while the tannins in Cabernet continue developing nicely. We are finding physiological ripeness of the fruit at a lower Brix, with great concentration and flavors.”

Dirk Hampson, director of winemaking and owner of Far Niente and Nickel & Nickel reports that as of the end of October’s week two, “Chardonnay is nearly all in and the juice from this vintage is among the best ever. Our warmest Cabernet vineyards have been picked for Nickel & Nickel but we haven’t yet started with the Oakville vineyards for Far Niente. There is more sorting than in some years but the first fermentations have wonderful flavor and texture which hold lots of promise. Weather continues to be good so we are optimistic.”

Steve Pride of Pride Mountain Vineyards said, “Although the year got off to a late start, up here at 2100’ we have been enjoying nearly ideal growing and ripening conditions all summer. We managed to get the shoot growth stopped weeks before veraison and the balance between fruit and canopy has never looked better. Although the late spring start means our harvest will be late, we have extremely high hopes of 2010 being an outstanding vintage.”

Jon Ruel, Trefethen Family Vineyards said, “I always cringe when asked if a season is early or late or if we got more or less than our average rainfall. On my office wall, I have weather data for our estate going back to 1968 when the Trefethen family purchased the property. You know what? In 42 years of winegrowing, we’ve never had an “average” year. Of course not. It’s always wetter or drier, warmer or cooler—such is the nature of the beast. And, because of that, we never farm for an “average” year. Instead, we farm in real-time, constantly adjusting to the weather at hand—and that’s how great wine is crafted, year in and year out.” He continued, “In 2009, we picked the same block on September 8th, just one day earlier than this year. The timing is well within our historical range. And we continue to be excited about the prospect of fantastic quality.”

“September 20 marked the beginning of harvest for us here at Spring Mountain Vineyard. As is normal, we started with Sauvignon Blanc, but to confound the doom and gloom of what everyone knows is a late vintage, we were only two days behind the start of last year,” said **Cole**.

Looking forward to harvest **Howell** said, “2010 is a year when we really needed this wonderful embracing blanket of warm weather to fully ripen our grapes, and Nature has come through - Thank You, Nature!” And he added, “What looked to be a difficult harvest is turning out to be really good. The color and perfume are amazing - we see the Cabernet ripening at lower sugars than in recent years.”

Cakebread continued with a wink, “I hate to sound so positive, but Carneros Chardonnay is also great showing good mineral flavors, ripe fruit characters, nice balance of fruit and acidity at again, what we think will be moderate alcohol levels. No problems with stuck fermentation. Crop load is about 5 to 10% over estimate. I think it will be a great year for Napa Chardonnay that will age nicely. And Carneros Pinot Noir is elegant with fine tannins, ripe fruit character and no greenness in aromas. These wines, for us, are more delicate than in the past.”

Remi Cohen of Saintsbury said of Pinot Noir in Carneros, “Although the yield was light, we are very enthusiastic about the lot because the berries and clusters were tiny and the flavors were fantastic. Due to this crazy season, we only harvested an average of 1.48 tons per acre. We’re happy with the concentration and quality, we only wish there was a little more!”

“This has been a very relaxing harvest. The peculiar thing about harvest 2010 thus far is that the ripening of the grapes has not been normal; the question must be posed what is normal? The true answer is we don’t know, it’s agriculture and we must take what Mother Nature throws at us - although we like what she has thrown so far, a long and cool growing season, with the grapes taking their sweet time getting ripe,”
Keith Hoch, Schramsberg Vineyards.

When asked what he is tasting in the sparkling wines developing to date Hoch commented, “The young 2010 wines taste fantastic. The Chardonnays and Pinot Noirs benefited from the long, cool growing season, the sugar accumulation was slow, therefore allowing the grapes to retain their naturally high acidities while having ample time for great flavor development, and aromatic characters.”

As of mid-October, **Cakebread** reports, “Howell Mountain Cabernet Sauvignon from our Dancing Bear Ranch is being harvested as we speak—we found that these small berries were not at all impacted by the heat spikes of the valley floor. We think it is going to be great stuff but as you can see I am a half full-glass type talking about 2010 vintage. We are also picking our Rutherford and Oakville Cabs as well, but at a slower pace than Howell Mountain.”

Winemaker Andy Schweiger of Schweiger Vineyards looks to what the final days of harvest 2010 may bring to the hillside areas that are typically the last to come in, “Even in a cool, late year, we expect dark color and bright berry aromas in our wines. Mountain grapes have smaller berries with tougher skins that stand up better to rain. Water drainage and air circulation is different on the hillsides, and with sunny mornings, mountain vineyards dry out quickly from a harvest storm. In the mountains, problems caused by rain are extremely rare.”

Though rain is forecast for the end of October, **Howell** said jokingly, “This fall, our weather forecasters have not reliably predicted the weather even two days in advance. The weather pattern has not been stable nor typical, but beautiful, sunny warm skies have been balancing precariously over our Napa Valley for the past three weeks - let it continue for two more. Maybe another way to look at it is this: The ever-present threat of rain keeps the dramatic tension high—definitely not another boring year in the Napa Valley!”

Hoch continued, “Harvest is an exciting time, and no vintage is alike. While some people think of each harvest in terms of obstacle or challenges, I believe each vintage is an opportunity to take what the season has given us and create wines representative of the year. In addition, I think each harvest takes on a life or theme of its own, and to me harvest 2010 has been one of the most fun, rewarding and enjoyable harvest yet.”

In the midst of the 2010 growing season, and led by the hard work of Napa County Agriculture Commissioner Dave Whitmer, the potentially crop devastating pest known as the European Grapevine Moth or Lobesia looks to be successfully eradicated in Napa County. Industry winegrowers led by the Napa Valley Vintners, the Napa Valley Grapegrowers and the Napa County Farm Bureau along with residential grapes growers, community leaders and environmental groups joined forces in a highly organized and well orchestrated effort that employed organic compounds, fruit disposal and mating disruption. This effort hit it out of the park and speaks volumes about the collaborative efforts, innovation and leadership of the Napa Valley wine industry.

This report was prepared collectively by:

- David Beckstoffer, Beckstoffer Vineyards
- Chris Howell, Cain Vineyard and Winery
- Bruce Cakebread, Cakebread Cellars
- Cathy Corison, Corison Winery
- Dirk Hampson, Far Niente and Nickel & Nickel
- Michael Silacci, Opus One
- Steve Pride, Pride Mountain Vineyards
- Stephanie Putman, Raymond Vineyards
- Macaela Miller and Brian Brown, Round Pond Estate

- Remi Cohen, Saintsbury
- Hugh Davies and Keith Hock, Schramsberg Vineyards
- Andy Schweiger, Schweiger Vineyards
- Jac Cole, Spring Mountain Vineyard
- Bruce Devlin, Three Clicks Wines
- Jon Ruel, Trefethen Family Vineyards
- Wesley Steffens, Vineyard 7 &8

About the Napa Valley Vintners

The Napa Valley Vintners is the non-profit trade association responsible for promoting and protecting the Napa Valley appellation as the premier winegrowing region. From seven founding members in 1944, today the association represents nearly 400 Napa Valley wineries and collectively is a leader in the world-wide wine industry. To learn more about our region and its legendary American wines, visit www.napavintners.com.