



GROWING SEASON

Growers laugh or cry with the weather—this is the romance of the industry. Several nights of near-freezing temperatures during the first half of April meant several sleepless nights for both growers and winemakers. While we slipped through this frost threat unharmed, Mother Nature quickly put us in place with an untimely rain we could do nothing about. Spring is a very delicate time for developing vines. These mid-May showers during bloom literally put a wet blanket on the pollen, drastically decreasing the success of plant fertilization and leading to an overall 35% reduction in crop. Growers in our region suffered at least a 20% drop in average yield and some as much as 50%. Although the loss in yield was one reason the 2011 vintage was dubbed the “vintage of long faces,” the berries that did set enjoyed the benefits of perfectly moderate summer temperatures—not too hot and not too cold. The maturation was slow and even, allowing for the Bordeaux grapes to develop a brighter aromatic varietal fruit character with higher acidity and lower sugar levels. However, the slow pace of ripening requires a longer growing season, which can be problematic if the delay in maturation is met with rain during the harvest. This possibility was only too evident in the harvest of 2011. Two untimely rain showers in early October affected some of our Estate Petit Verdot and required us to declassify vineyard blocks that usually make the master blend cut. Fortunately, our well-drained vineyard sites and viticultural practices brought the Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Malbec grapes into perfect balance just before the rain started. The last grape passed over the sorting table as the first drop fell—a *déjà vu* of the 2010 harvest. No harvest has ever been so dependent on the quality decisions made with our grower selections. Vineyard sites that were composed of well-draining soils provided an extra measure of warmth to aid the maturation of the fruit.

VINEYARDS

The final blend of 2011 Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon began with about 60 different vineyard blocks from nearly 20 different growers and Jordan Estate. Family growers ranged from southern Alexander Valley to the benchlands and hills east of Geyserville (primarily situated on the left bank of the Russian River) and two exquisite hilltop vineyards just outside the appellation. Each of these blocks was chosen for its potential to yield fruit of the highest quality and utmost finesse. Well-drained soils with the ideal calcium/magnesium ratio are a prerequisite in this selection process, but also of importance are the rootstock, grape variety clone, and vine row direction and spacing to best match the composition of each piece of land. The selection of a vineyard block is just the beginning; even if the grapes are chosen to be harvested, there are many more checkpoints to pass through before potentially becoming a component of Jordan’s final blend.

VITICULTURE

It is quite sobering to approach the early part of a growing season knowing that the potential for your crop size is already a fraction of a normal year. One might think that whatever crop remaining would be given high priority, but considering the uneven range of maturation, as odd as it seems, additional thinning of unevenly ripening clusters was required. (Great wines are born from uniformity of fruit, and our goal was no different in 2011.) Leaves were thinned from the eastern morning-sun side of the vines to encourage ripening while the leaves covering the fruiting zone were left untouched on the western afternoon-sun side to prevent sunburn. By late September, the precision viticulture had paid off, as the maturity level of the grapes was uniform within the individual vineyard blocks.

HARVEST

Thankfully Cabernet Sauvignon—with its loose clusters and thick skins—is well-suited for a challenging year like 2011. Clusters from each of the nearly 60 vineyard blocks were harvested, row by row or block by block, depending on physiological maturity, between September 30 and October 27. Many winemakers noted that 2011 was a year that kept alcohols from getting “too high;” even though Jordan Cabernets have lower alcohols by comparison every year, 2011 proved to be another successful vintage of balance for Jordan. Our average Brix was 23.5 with the last Cabernet grapes of the year coming in at 23.8 on October 27. The lower sugars and cooler weather resulted in a very appealing Cabernet: vivid aromas of cherries, strawberries and blackberries with nice, firm acidity to frame the fruit. Compared to 2010, the tannins are a bit softer and more accessible—a wine already showing maturity in the palate and finish.