



GROWING SEASON

Two significant frosts in March and April affected grapevine growth, lowering potential cluster yields as much as 20% per vine. A rare lightning storm in June sparked forest fires throughout Northern California. The “umbrella” of smoke that formed up north did decrease the overall heat index for the North Coast region and contributed to a decrease in the vineyards’ accumulation of sunshine, particularly in vineyards farther north in Mendocino. Fortunately, the weather was very favorable throughout the latter summer months. Warm, sunny days and cool nights without any major heat spikes moderated the maturation cycle, allowing for a beautiful, balanced, flavor profile. Harvest commenced fairly early for Cabernet Sauvignon, with grapes showing more delicate fruit flavors and softer tannins than the 2007 vintage. Some years, vines just give up when met with adversity. Not 2008. This is a vintage with attitude. 2008’s temperatures and crop size led to a racy character in the fruit that nicely matches the soft tannins. The grapes were amped with determination equaled only by the desire of the winemaking team to take the raw potential of this vintage and craft a wine with such a vivid flavor profile.

VINEYARDS

The final blend of Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon begins with roughly 60 different vineyard blocks—from our estate hillsides in the southern Alexander Valley to about a dozen family growers in 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. Frost damage across our vineyard collection ranged from minimal to devastating, depending on location and frost protection methods. One grower who farms four small blocks of hillside Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec for us is located in a tiny microclimate typically unaffected by frost—but she lost virtually all of her crop in 2008. She was our only source for Malbec grapes. Fortunately, most growers had minimal damage.

The loss of that prime vineyard forced our winemaker, Rob Davis, to secure additional grapes. He approached our long-time growers, looking for fruit similar to his favorite spots in their vineyards—those with well-drained soils that share an ideal magnesium/calcium ratio, optimal for developing concentrated blackberry and blueberry fruit characters without excessive sugar levels. The early seasonal challenges afforded by nature turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as some amazing fruit was available to us—and these little gems discovered in 2008 are now integral to the Jordan blend.

VITICULTURE

Empirical wisdom gained since the 1970s is invaluable in years like 2008, allowing us to agilely adapt every minute detail of grapevine nurturing based on weather patterns and vine health. Suckering and thinning of vine shoots was adjusted according to the frost damage of each vineyard, block by block and sometimes row by row. During the hazy days of June, our vineyard teams pulled additional leaves and raised the canopies to help bring more sunlight on the clusters. The vineyards required 2-4 additional passes this season to hand-groom the vines and balance the fruit, including thinning of clusters during veraison, which occurred in late July. This attention to the unique character of every parcel, what the French call “suivi parcellaire du vignoble”, is critical to raising the bar of every vineyard where we source fruit. Certain vineyards required additional crop thinning just before harvest—“wings” of clusters were removed to focus the energy on the remaining grapes. The desire not to compromise quality at the expense of quantity comes at a price; it is a philosophy adhered to by the Jordans.

HARVEST

From September 12 to October 4, more than 60 vineyard lots were harvested at optimal maturity with an average Brix of 24.3. Ensuring consistency and uniformity of ripeness across this collection of sites required further dissection of many contiguous vineyard blocks. Growers and picking crews, still new to our meticulous approach, had to pick a single vineyard block in 3-4 passes over the course of sometimes a week or more vs. picking the lot in one pass. This tactic optimized both the individual character of the changing soil types and subtle variations in grape ripeness. Detail orientation and adaptability were critical to achieving our desired level of flavor balance and consistency of quality during a year where Mother Nature flexed her power early in the season.