



GROWING SEASON

In classic vintages there are still challenges, and in challenging vintages, there are windows of opportunity that help frame a wine into a classic. 2010 was such a year. Spring weather was cool and rainy, which extended the bloom period. Fruit set was consistent with average-sized clusters. Cool temperatures and coastal fog lingered throughout the summer, raising humidity levels and thus increasing the incidence of mold and mildew. It was the coldest summer on record in the North Coast in the past 40 years. Luckily, the consistency of these cool temperatures in the months of June and July led to slow but even development in the Chardonnay grapes, thus enhancing the intensity of fruit character while keeping sugar levels low and acids high—beautiful fruit for food-friendly wines. Growers and winemakers alike, however, were nervous about fruit ripening before the October rains, and vine canopies were opened. Two heat waves arrived—one in late August and another in early September—quickly finishing the ripening period and kicking harvest into high gear. Then we had to wait for a minor rain to pass in late September. Speed in picking the fruit was essential. (Some vintners in Burgundy say it is like this every year for them). The fact that the last cluster of Chardonnay made it into the press minutes before the late October rains was not lost on any of us. This vintage was perfectly suited for the style of winemaking Jordan has always been committed to—wines naturally lower in alcohol with bright acidity.

VINEYARDS

The final blend of Jordan Chardonnay begins with nearly 20 different vineyard blocks from eight sites on the east side of the Russian River with gravelly, well-drained soils. All grower vineyards experienced that same long, chilly growing season, which was perfect for developing Burgundian-style Chardonnay fruit characters—pure, racy, stone fruit, mouth-watering acidity and a finish oozing with crisp apple and mineral notes.

VITICULTURE

The cool, humid conditions in 2010 forced our vineyard teams to combat disease pressure, primarily mildew, most of the season. We had to work closely with our growers and decide if we should pull leaves earlier in the season and open up canopies on both sides of the grapevines in June, which would allow for ample air flow and mitigate any threat of mildew and botrytis. But opening the canopies would increase the risk of sun damage to grapes in the event of any heat spikes. Gambling with decisions like these is why few growers spend their time in the local gambling casinos! In most vineyards, the winemaker and the grower worked together on decisions in July to remove lateral shoots to aid airflow throughout the middle of the vine canopies. Hand-plucking of lateral shoots is one of the most expensive viticultural practices due to the intricacy and labor intensiveness, but in years like 2010, this technique was critical to ensuring a healthy, quality crop. With foggy mornings and humid days lingering into August, farmers who had not removed leaves from the afternoon-sun side of the grapevines went ahead and opened their canopies to let more sun and air into the fruit zone. When the heat waves hit in late August and early September, the exposed shoulders (or “wings”) on some Chardonnay clusters received sunburn to their fragile skins. Winemaker Rob Davis surveyed the vineyards, then requested the vineyard crew complete the meticulous task of hand-clipping damaged wings off any affected clusters, thus leaving pristine fruit to be harvested. When the remaining grapes were ready to be harvested, we then worked with growers on an additional pre-sorting of grapes in the vineyard to remove any remaining grapes that did not meet our standards.

HARVEST

All fruit was hand-picked in the coolness of the night and early morning hours before sunrise, September 20 – October 15, with sugar levels averaging 23.0 Brix. The majority of our grapes were picked after September 29, once the brief rains passed. Rigorous separation occurred again at the winery sorting table. We purchased 20 percent more grapes than needed in 2010 to ensure only the top lots would make the final blend of Jordan Chardonnay—any grapes and wine with over-ripe characters were declassified. Quality comes at a price. The final selected grapes had intense fruit flavors and bright acids due to the long, cool growing season.