



GROWING SEASON

Winemakers often describe vintages with words such as “challenging” or “unique,” but in 2017, the word we used most often was “crazy.” The quality of the 2017 vintage is truly a testament to the resilience of grapevines and their ability to demonstrate their beauty under stressful conditions.

Following record winter rainfall that refilled reservoirs and replenished the water table, 2017 was a welcome return to normalcy. Days remained cool to cold from late winter into early spring, which prevented an early bud break. April brought plentiful showers, and flowering began in May—three weeks later than the last few vintages. Unseasonable rain returned in late May, while the cabernet grapes were still flowering, which caused some shatter in the clusters.

Then, three major heat spikes hit Sonoma County in June and July, taking temperatures from the mid-90s to more than 100 degrees. Clusters seized up over Father’s Day weekend and the vines maintained small bunches without much increase in berry weight. Temperature swings continued into July, but August days were blessedly cool, with ideal foggy mornings and night temperatures in the mid-50s. A severe heat wave over Labor Day weekend sent temperatures soaring well into the triple digits and kicked harvest into high gear. Fortunately, the above average rainfall we received throughout the winter and spring gave the vines the moisture they needed to get through the summer heat waves.

VINEYARDS

The final blend for the 2017 Jordan Cabernet Sauvignon began with 60 vineyard blocks from Jordan Estate and 14 family growers. Our vineyard sites are selected for their well-drained, gravelly soils in the warmer Alexander Valley, which allow the grapes to gain physiological maturity without sacrificing pure varietal character, bright acidity and moderate sugar levels. In order to ensure that we receive the best-quality fruit, Jordan’s growers are paid by the acre rather than by the ton, and are further rewarded for farming decisions that enhance quality. It is this necessary combination of climate, soil and husbandry that shares a common thread with the grand cru classé Bordeaux that inspire our style of winemaking.

VITICULTURE

Jordan’s vineyard team took several measures to assure high quality fruit despite the successive heat waves. Thanks to the afternoon shade provided by diligent canopy management, sunburn on the grapes was minimal. During the Labor Day heat spike, we irrigated our Alexander Valley vineyards and asked our growers to do the same, which helped prevent berry shriveling. Grapes tested just after the heat spell showed high sugar readings, but lacked real flavor maturity. It was essential for us to wait until the vines could recover from the heat before picking. Two days later, sugar levels dropped back to their normal rate of maturation, and the fruit went on to develop rich and mature flavors.

HARVEST

The high heat continued into harvest for our Bordeaux varieties, which began on September 6. Once tanks were pressed, our winemaking team evaluated each lot. We were truly impressed with how opulent the wine lots showed—like black cherries held in the strong palm of a veteran farmer. Though overall yields were lower than a normal year due to lighter cluster weights and high temperatures, the quality of the fruit more than made up for the smaller crop.

On October 8, the day after we completed harvest and went about our usual routine of pumping over the cabernet tanks, wildfires started throughout Napa, Sonoma and Mendocino counties—fueled by a combination of extremely low humidity, exceptionally dry conditions and 70 mile per hour winds. Because all of Jordan’s grapes were already fermenting in stainless steel tanks before the firestorm began, our wines were not affected by the smoke or flames. However, the fire did impact Jordan’s winemaking team; both our assistant winemaker and a member of our cellar crew lost their homes in the blaze.

-Maggie Kruse, winemaker