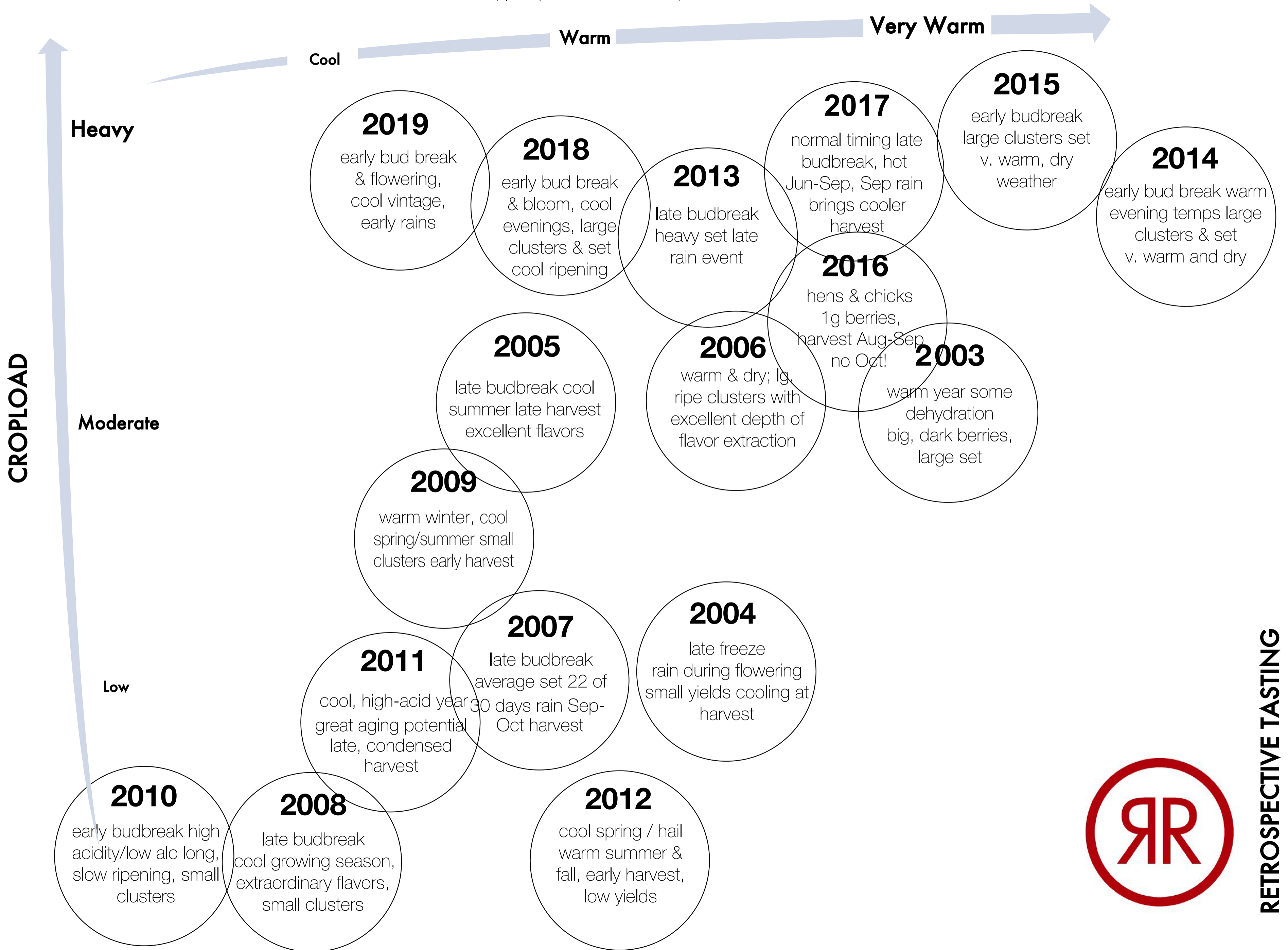


# GROWING SEASON HEAT



RETROSPECTIVE TASTING

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

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< ] khá] Yf`gd`%[` ggdna`f`Y\_] \$l` ] [ g f [ ] f l j Yl`\_`f` \$ \ ] h l` ` g`^`\_`ngj`\$[ g`d`j` Yf` \ k l j m [ l m ] `g`^`j] [ ] f l` q ] Y j k Yd k ] ] e` `lg`Z] `l` ] j] &*And the old is new again!*

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**\* ( ) 02**We kind of cruised into the 2018 harvest, after an early bud break and bloom, a comfortably warm spring, and those precious, cool, summer evenings that make our eyes light up. The stellar prospect of the vintage was heightened by a “cool” final ripening compared most of the previous five. Perfectly ripe, but not overly so. Zero disease pressure, thanks to coastal and ridge-top breezes and the absence of rain. Rich flavors with an edge of restraint, combined with the lift of gentle acidity. Textbook perfect from our vantage, and worthy of all the hype.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**\* ( ) 2**!! lead with the same line as last time, *“The warmest vintages we’ve ever seen in the Willamette Valley over 50+ years are the last five. Period.”* It can’t be overstated. By October 4th we’d already seen 2445 degree-days, within a chip shot of Region 2’s lower boundary of 2500 degree-days.

This year we caught up to a late start with hot-hot-hot! Extremes in 2017 saw more days over 80F, at 86, than any year except 2015, the record-hot year so far, and more days over 90F, at 32, than we’ve ever seen. Harvest 2017 happened when it traditionally has, beginning the last week or so of September and lasting until the first few days of November. Timing is reassuring since last year’s harvest began in August—freakily early. At first, 2017 looked like an extreme opposite to 2016, with very late budbreak and bloom, following a wet rainy season where 150% of average rainfall filled soils. However, abnormally warm and dry months then took over. Very high temperatures this year were the norm, with no other year showing more days over-90F days and only 2015 having more days above-80F. Harvest timing was similar to the old days of cool climate harvests in the Willamette Valley—the only difference being the intensely hot summer preceding it. The heat gave full ripeness to the fruit, despite a large crop load and a plodding start to the growing season. A bit more rain fell this year, but September’s 2.06 inches had only a refreshing impact, especially since it was spread over 11 days. The rain coincided with cooling weather, seeing 67F average highs over the last 10 days, compared to the prior two weeks’ 87F. Since harvest began September 17th, low temperatures averaged 47F, with a high-low diurnal swing of 27F, which means acid brightness was well retained.

Implications are a large crop load, pristine fruit quality, fully mature flavors and phenological parameters, softer acids urging earlier harvest despite pH and sugars saying “don’t pick yet.” Although I may be thinking too highly, 2017 reminds me of 1994 and 2008, based on concentration and spherical focus. The harvest timing being normal is a big plus and the industry’s ongoing education on how to adapt to a warmer/changed climate makes each vintage more-and-more sophisticated, age-worthy and complex.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**\* ( ) . 2**This is the year of Earliest Ever. The winter was warm, budbreak was early and 2016 never looked back—bloom, veraison, and harvest all early records, beginning harvest in August and done before October. Although early, the growing season wasn’t as hot as the prior three, but still in the same new, warm norm. Fruit is fully ripe but not overripe, with moderate alcohols, good enough acids and intense, easily extracted, dense wines, from 15% smaller berry sizes and yields. Potentially an excellent-to-classic vintage. Finally dialed back a little from the 2014-2015 twins.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**\* ( ) - 2**Here, have a cigar! We just had twins, one year apart. The 2015 vintage was slightly different in early growing season timing from 2014, but the final effect was the same, with big heat, big crop and big expectations. The acids are down, the alcohols are slightly over 14% on average and the work many did to minimize over-extraction resulted in more elegant wines than a hot vintage deserves. Similar to 2014. Also as in 2014, the fruit was impeccably clean and devoid of disease, with only a little sunburn being tossed from the sorting conveyor. Whites again look fully ripe, texturally rich, and yet balanced. Pinot noirs will rival 2014 for rave reviews.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2014:** 2014 was one of those rare vintages that got everyone excited—writers and winemakers love the quality, grape growers had no handwringing to do and yields pleased bankers, which also means customers will see reasonable prices! Wine quality is excellent, based on full ripeness, probably the cleanest fruit we’ve seen in decades, and restrained extractions in fermentation to compensate for the warmest growing season on record assure balance. Despite the warmth of over 2800 degree days, driven by many very hot summer days (*almost double the over 90F highs we’ve recently seen at 29*) and warmer lows, good cropload balance and harvest timing gave reasonable alcohols, averaging just under 14%. Whites are lush and gorgeously fruited. Pinot noir colors are appropriately rich but not too deep, wines not tannic or over-extracted.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2013:** A Tale of Two Harvests—one very early and one normal, with rain in between. They started as one very early harvest thanks to a very consistent, warm growing season, the warmest on record up to final ripening mid-September. An unanticipated 30-year rain event of 5” then appeared the last days of September, made of remnants from a typhoon that had hit Japan days before, ushering in a spate of cool weather, interrupting the season, slowing ripening and turning it into two discrete picks, with early Pinot noir ferments already in barrel before remaining grapes were ripe and picked! Although grapes ripe during the rain were vulnerable to botrytis, earlier and later picks showed very good quality, with many considering the coolness and longer hang-time a big benefit, preserving acidity and flavors, while minimizing alcohol. Color, texture, balance and acidity on the whole were good for the vintage. Croploads were moderate to high, except for blocks and varieties lost to the rain.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2012:** This was a uniformly excellent vintage in the Willamette Valley, moreso than the past few years where some winemakers read it well and others may not have. The weather was storybook, almost entirely positive, with the Grinch of hail in one or two localized sites proving we’re as vulnerable as Burgundy. The heat accumulations are the 5th highest in the last 16 years, putting ripeness in the league with 2004 and 1998. The perfectly warm and completely dry growing and ripening seasons kept disease away and pushed full ripeness without sacrificing acid structure.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2011:** Yes, 2011 is THE latest harvest on our records. Three weeks late, picking some of our blocks as late as the second week of November, one would think the cards were stacked against us. However, considering three positive aspects from the vintage; 1) late season sun, 2) lower yields, and 3) below average rainfall - we’re seeing one of the best vintages of the last twenty years emerge. Resulting wines are fully ripe, rich, deep, dark AND carry low pHs/high acids and low alcohols, which bodes exceptionally well for long aging, food friendliness and a reputation that makes similar years, like 1999 and 2008, humble!

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2010:** This vintage is one of the Global Climate Change extremes, very cool, late and, at the end, wet. Very early warmth at bud break, cool and wet Springtime weather, a cool growing season RR | Age-worthy wines from the first vines planted on Ribbon Ridge. | rrwines.com | @rrwines RIDGECREST | A Dad, a Daughter, and a Hill. | ridgecrestwines.com | @ridgecrestwines with the least heat we’ve seen in this 40 year industry, followed by a ripening that was Indian Summer-like for awhile, then bringing a wet two-week late harvest. Very low pHs, higher acids and lower alcohols promise great, long-lived, balanced wines.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2009:** The 2009 vintage may be one of the best, with nice balance in all ways for both reds and whites—very good quality and yields as well as good ripeness and acids. The closest vintage in memory might be 2002. It was the type of vintage to satisfy winemakers AND accountants, with yields in the 2.5–3 tons/acre average this year, compared to 2–2.5 in normal years, and with high quality demanding only patience awaiting flavor development. Fruitfulness caused some problems early on, with large berries and full clusters pushing off berries in the cluster, allowing earlyharvested blocks to develop botrytis and require sorting. Later blocks were pristine and, assuming patience (and if nothing else, we’re patient!) to await flavor development rather than picking on simple analytical numbers like TA and brix, will be as good as any wines we’ve made, especially for Pinot Noir.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2008:** The 2008 vintage saw one of the coolest growing seasons on record, with 1,976 degreedays of heat during the growing season, versus the average for the last twelve years of 2,212 degree-days, and second only to 1,968 degree-days in 1999. This vintage resembles 1999 in the counterintuitive ripeness of the crop we finally harvested, and both vintages showed very good acid levels and excellent, full ripeness at lower sugars. Look for both whites and reds to excel this year, with very ageable wines, rich and complex from release to old age. Lower croploads, almost half-crop in nature, also similar to 1999, brought some of this richness, with harvest dates that were two-plus weeks later than average but not experiencing significant rainfall.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2007:** In summary, we think this may be a fantastic white vintage and a surprisingly good red vintage, despite the rain that many times might lead to less intense wines. With rain in the range of 2005 and much less than the last really rainy harvest season of 1997, most winemakers in the valley knew how to adapt and took advantage of the vintage’s attributes, such as lower sugars (and therefore alcohols) and higher acids. As long as botrytis is kept from reds or sorted out, and winemaking sleight of hand provides physical therapy for the intensity shortcomings, such as saignée, tannin adds, chaptalization, and acidulation, the vintage will have stellar wines, just with more variability. Buy whites in general, buy reds from trusted names.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2006:** I have the highest regard for the Pinot Noirs in barrel, not having seen better fruit EVER from selected blocks or vineyards, including 22 harvests from Ridgecrest! The reds should be held to high expectations. The whites are the surprise, since a very warm vintage often blunts the acid, raises alcohol to unbalance the wine, and softens the fruit to soft and fleshy. Not so in 2006. The Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Riesling, and Pinot Blanc are crisp, bright and scintillating in fruit aromas and complex in spice and fruit flavors. The warmth that came during the growing season abated before most fruit seriously began ripening, with cooler days and, especially important, acid-saving nights giving finesse to the wines. Appealing early, they should age respectably, too. Color me pleased.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2005:** 2005 was an old-style Oregon vintage, warning the cockles of the hearts of industry old folks like me as much as the coffee we drank. Cooler and damper than the average modern vintage, mature winemakers and mature vineyards understood and adjusted to the weather, giving the grapes a chance to fully ripen and working magic to assure clean fruit. Experience should show with our three classic estate vineyards. Great extraction, great acid, lower alcohols (*no Pinots above the 13%!*) — expect wines of finesse and ageability.

A Pinot Noir vine in bloom

**2004:** What a difference some rain makes! Vintage 2004 was destined to be equally hot and ripe as 2003, until we had a quenching rain in late August and then a month later. Young and early vineyards that were almost ready to harvest the first week of September could have done without the rain, but the rest (like Chehalem’s) thought it a blessed relief. A short cropload, plus growing season heat make 2004 properly plump, but with restraint. An interesting vintage-almost an average of 2001, 2002, and 2003-it has perhaps a little more variability in reds and more structured, brighter whites, similar to 2002.

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**2003:** This is an excellent vintage, albeit unusual in the fiery nature of the growing season. The same dry and warm growing and ripening seasons held for 2003 as with the past few vintages, only moreso, with Region II (not cool climate!) heat accumulations of 2500 units, average highs of 78F July-October and half the normal rainfall with 2.75 inches. Fruit was disease free, crop loads were easily honed to desired levels, and soil moisture was adequate due to good pre-season winter rains.

Concerns of the vintage center on high sugars and resultant high alcohols, and low acids. Almost comparable past vintages like excellent 1992 may urge us not to worry.