GROWING SEASON HEAT

Cool

Moderate

Warm

CROPLOAD

Heavy

Moderate

Low

2019
early bud break & flowering, cool vintage, early rains

2018
early bud break & bloom, cool evenings, large clusters & set, cool ripening

2013
late budbreak, early harvest, heavy set, late rain event

2017
normal timing, late budbreak, hot Jun-Sep, Sep rain brings cooler harvest

2015
early budbreak, large clusters, set v. warm, dry weather

2014
early bud break, warm evening temps, large clusters & set, v. warm and dry

2016
hens & chicks, 1g berries, harvest Aug-Sep no Oct!

2021
hot & dry. Quick, start picking! Start 9/10, end 10/5

2066
late April freeze; secondaries ripen with late season warmth

2007
late budbreak, average set 22 of 30 days rain Sep-Oct harvest

2006
warm & dry; lg, ripe clusters with excellent depth of flavor extraction

2003
warm year, some dehydration big, dark berries, large set

2009
warm winter, cool spring/summer, small clusters, early harvest

2020
Wildfire SMOKE effects on Reds, none on Whites; v.good ripening on lower yield

2067
normal albeit warm, strong summer growth smaller cropload, early harvest

2005
late budbreak cool summer, late harvest, excellent flavors

2004
late freeze, rain during flowering small yields, cooling at harvest

2011
cool, high-acid year, great aging potential late, condensed harvest

2010
early budbreak, high acidity/low alc, long, slow ripening, small clusters

2008
late budbreak, cool growing season, extraordinary flavors, small clusters

2012
cool spring/hail, warm summer & fall, early harvest, low yields

RIDGECREST RESERVE

RETROSPECTIVE TASTING

VINTAGE DESCRIPTIONS

2023: Return to Normal: Average Becomes winning at dinner

We've had several unusual vintages recently, e.g., 2022 (hard freeze), 2021 (hot, hot hot) and 2020 (wildfire smoke). 2023 pleasantly showed us a recent, relative normalcy, albeit warm.

Only two harvests in the last ten have begun earlier, 2023 starting September 11, a full 30 days earlier than our average the first 15 vintages this century.

Vineyard vigor, growth and ripening were strong in this Summer, with only 2015 having more over-80F days and only 2019 having more rainfall. Cropload yields were slightly smaller by 15% than the all-varietal 2.52 ton-per-acre 5-year average, with disease pressure very low except for a couple late-held varieties and general quality very good to exceptional—and that we'd like to see become normal.

2022: 2022 restores your faith in Mother Nature's capacity to take a poor start and finish well, grape plants revealing their inherent resilience to rebound from nearly disastrous weather events.

In late April, buds were open and vulnerable when a hard and killing freeze settled in. Normally, if vines are damaged, grapes rely on secondaries to replace primary buds. But, this time the extent of the damage was extensive, with secondaries damaged too, so that we anticipated only a yield of 40% of normal, approximately 1 ton per acre.

Growing season weather however cooperated to boost secondary and tertiary buds, with the third highest heat accumulation in 26 years, focused at the end of the growing season, October averaging highs of 72F, with nine days warmer than 80F. Crop load yielded 85% of normal rather than 40% we feared. Whew!

2021: 2021 looks excellent - of course, through the smoky rearview of 2020, it isn't hard. Despite a growing season with searing heat spikes (116F), 2021 was a moderate vintage, beginning harvest the third earliest time in the last two decades, and ending in less than a month, October 5th. It was a "wait-until-they're ripe" vintage with a welcome splash of rain midway in September, after grapes were largely picked - just to prove we're Oregonians.

Based on full-ripeness AND generally very good acidity, 2021 may ultimately resemble 2018 in concentration, and 2008 in crop yield. Small and precise, leaving us wishing we had more to share.

2020: Winemaking gets tested some years, like 2020. All the climate and grapegrowing underpinnings for greatness were there, but this time the test to the vintage was dealing with the Willamette Valley's first-time effects from wildfire.

And, we once again found that Place Matters. Distant wildfires had an impact on aromas, flavors and textures to varying degrees based on place. White wines were unscathed if made well, red wines benefited from a lighter touch in extraction and calling lucky sites, like Ribbon Ridge, home.

How great will 2020 be—close to perfect growing season, concentrated fruit from low yields—how a wisp of campfire is embraced maybe being the key? Grapegrowing is farming after all, winemaking an attempt at alchemy.

2019: 2019 was an old school Willamette Valley Harvest: watching weather reports, valuing coffee over beer, charging bird cannon batteries, and consoling old friends newly moved to Oregon from California. Chats, waiting to offload an ancient truck's fruit, were punctuated by *"cool growing season, early rains, hang time, sugar, birds, electric sunset, botrytis, more birds, sunny days are overrated anyway..."*

Despite an old-school vintage, the concentration, depth of flavor, color and structure of recent years all seem to be there. *And the old is new again!*

2018: 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.

2017: Ah, a classic bone-chilling, damp Oregon winter. That's the ticket. The vines pushed through in mid-April, only to be followed by a roller coaster of weather — record highs and lows throughout the late spring and summer kept us guessing, and thinning crop as necessary. Huge fires in the Columbia Gorge and Southern Oregon meant delayed maturation due to smoke, leading to higher acidity levels.

Wise decision-making in the vineyard was key to the success of this vintage. Pondering the potential effects of each decision, and good, old-fashioned prognostication go hand-in-hand in years like this. It was possibly the most unusual, thought-provoking vintage to date. We played our cards beautifully, and are thrilled with the results. We know you will be, too.

2016: 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.

2015: 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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

2005: 2005 was an old-style Oregon vintage, warming 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%s!*) — expect wines of finesse and ageability.

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.

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.