



GROWING SEASON

Growers laugh or cry with the weather—this is the romance of the industry. Several nights of near-freezing temperatures during the first half of April meant several sleepless nights for both growers and winemakers. While we slipped through this frost-threat unharmed, Mother Nature quickly put us in place with an untimely rain we could do nothing about. Spring is a very delicate time for developing vines. These mid-May showers during bloom intercepted the pollen, drastically decreasing the success of plant fertilization, leading to an overall 35% reduction in crop. Although the loss in yield was one reason the 2011 vintage was dubbed the “vintage of long faces” for growers, the berries that did set enjoyed the benefits of a perfectly moderate summer temperatures—not too hot and not too cold. The maturation was slow and even, allowing for the Chardonnay grapes to develop a brighter aromatic varietal fruit character, backed with classic Russian River minerality, while retaining their natural acidity and keeping sugar levels low. The risk of slower ripening is not achieving full physiological maturity of the fruit before the commencement of the fall rains—this risk nearly became a reality in 2011 with two more untimely rain showers in early October. Fortunately, our well-drained vineyard sites and viticultural practices brought the Chardonnay grapes into perfect balance just before the rain started as the last grape passed through the sorting table just as the first drop fell. Déjà vu of the 2010 harvest.

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. The exposed gravel deposits of these vineyards help give Jordan Chardonnay its elegance, minerality and a lush, lingering finish. Working closely with our growers, Winemaker Rob Davis adapts every minute detail of nurturing vines based on constant changes during each growing season. His long-term relationships with our extended family and historical experience with each river-benchland vineyard ensure grapes are grown to our standards and new vines are planted to our specifications. Vines range in age from three to 35 years with a variety of Dijon and UC-Davis clones.

VITICULTURE

Assessing the devastating results of the mid-May rain showers was sobering for growers, but any experienced grower knew that the only option was to make the most of the remaining fruit. Every resource available was utilized to analyze situations in each vineyard and react swiftly to preserve the integrity of the developing grapes. Focus was put on canopy management to precisely adjust the sun exposure needs of each vine. Leaves were thinned from the eastern morning-sun side of the vines to encourage ripening while the leaves covering the fruiting zone were left untouched on the western afternoon-sun side to prevent sun-burn. In addition, fruit was dropped from week shoots, only adding to the diminished returns from Mother Nature. By late September, the precision viticulture paid off, as the maturity level of the grapes was uniform within the individual vineyard blocks.

HARVEST

Harvest of the 2011 Chardonnay was perfectly timed. The grapes of the 20 different vineyard blocks reached physiological maturity and were picked at an average Brix level of 23.5° from September 26 to October 10, just before the rain began. All fruit was hand-picked in the coolness of the early morning hours before sunrise, ensuring that the beautiful acidity and bright aromatic character of the 2011 Chardonnay fruit was maintained. A pre-sorting was performed in the vineyard to remove any clusters that did not meet our standards.