



MARGARET RIVER WINE INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

2012 Margaret River Wine Region – Vintage Report as at 20th January

A fresher than usual pre Christmas period was not foreseen but has proved an ideal lead up to the warm to hot conditions during the day with cool to warm nights that have been the norm for Margaret River since mid January and put simply the vines are loving it.

Fortunately to date Margaret River has missed the inclement weather as it has travelled further inland both north and east of the GI although longer term forecasts predict wetter than average January and February.

Pest and disease pressure is presently low. Marri blossom has started earlier than normal and looks to be very fruitful, the nectar from these trees will keep the birds happy and out of the grapes for a while yet although most vineyards are taking the precautionary steps of starting to install bird netting and getting ready for harvest now. Most vineyards are free from Powdery Mildew and Botrytis at present although some minor losses from Downey Mildew occurred earlier after flowering.

Interestingly bunch size has increased this year but berry density provides for looser bunches, this will also be better in evenness of ripening. Overall cropping levels throughout the region appear similar or slightly up on last year although there have been some reports of lighter crops in Chardonnay although it is still very early days.

Chardonnay is almost through veraison, Sauvignon Blanc stands 20 –30% veraison with Semillon a little behind with and Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz just about to start. Overall berry development is similar to last year but a week or so earlier than average. In Margaret River there is a preference to harvest Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc / Semillon Blanc at lower Baume's and this is also bringing harvest dates forward to what would be seen as more in keeping with “traditional”.

Depending on weather conditions especially heat load from now until vintage will determine actual harvest dates being earlier or later. The general belief is that Margaret River will be looking at a start date around 13th – 20th February in the northern half of the region, commencing with Chardonnay; this is a little later than last year, although we did have some very hot weather leading into the 2011 vintage, but a few days earlier than the long term average.

Soil moisture has depleted earlier than usual as a result of lower rainfall and also greater evaporation rates over recent weeks with the warm to hot conditions. This combined with the viticultural practice tendency to have more grass growing undervine and mid-row now and this also results in reducing moisture in the soil.

Consequently we see slightly less vigour and improved canopy attributes with more open fruit zone as a result lending itself towards better physiological ripeness of grapes at possibly lower Baume.

Of course grape growing is but a part of farming and much can happen between now and when the final bucket is in the winery. However, weather permitting there is a strong possibility of a very great year for all varieties in 2012 particularly in quality which is what Margaret River's growing international reputation has been based upon.

ENDS – Dated 20th January 2012

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