

May 2008

## Martinborough Enjoys Magic Vintage

Quality and character of this region has never been in question, although very rarely do the rather humble winemakers of this district say this to the world. Their tone may however be influenced by circumstance. Martinborough is a region that has been beset by vintages of highly variable yields over the last few years, making the business of winemaking a very demanding one for this region of boutique hand crafted wineries. In 2008, though Martinborough has had what can only be described as a magic vintage, absolutely superb quality backed up with moderate, even crops from very carefully farmed vineyards, the humility of the winemakers will remain. However, their demeanour may well be more animated and confident after 2008.

The reason is simply the climate and weather conditions prevailing throughout the season, and the modern viticulture now highly tuned to this environment. After miserable yields in 2007 the vines enjoyed excellent budding, and early indications of fruitfulness were pleasing. With many vineyards now well frost protected, the early evil of the spring chills were avoided. In addition, flowering conditions proceeded in superb conditions in late November and December, with the severe winds largely missing. The fruit set was very good however bunch sizes were only moderate because of the lower number of potential berries in the bunch, a carry over from the very cool Martinborough summer of 2007. The warm summer and autumn drought that affected the pastoral farmers provided perfect conditions for the developing grapes with most vineyards now practising very detailed management of the vines to maximise the potential from the superb summer. The harvest period was dry and sunny with no effects of rain, and harvest proceeded without a hitch throughout the last few days of March and in the first three weeks of April.

While the star in the region is obviously Pinot Noir with winemakers reporting some of the most beautifully coloured, aromatic and finely structured young wines ever seen, there are other notable successes. The region's Sauvignon Blanc wines from 2008 show exceptional promise with pure vivid flavours and excellent concentration and texture that can only be achieved from ripe grapes in a perfect season from moderate cropping vines. In addition, the Chardonnay fruit harvested is of the highest standard. Those who follow the regions reputation for the aromatic varieties of Riesling, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer, all harvested in perfect conditions, will enjoy some very expressive and beautifully composed wines when they are released later in the year.

The real quality of the vintage can really be gauged by the enthusiasm shown by some of our most experienced, famous and well travelled winemakers and owners. Phyll Pattie and Clive Paton at Ata Rangī, Allan Johnson at Palliser, Larry McKenna of Escarpment, Neil McCallum of Dry River, Steve Smith MW from Craggy Range and Paul Mason at Martinborough Vineyard to name a few. These and others in this small wine community have their own individual views of the "magic" vintage of 2008, including Richard Riddiford of Palliser Estate describing it as "a vintage you'd dream about".