

'Thirst For' June 2015 Newsletter

Winter arrived at de la terre a week earlier than expected with the unusual snowfall in the last week of May. We awoke to a picture-postcard perfect Winter wonderland. Snow has settled on our property only once before in the nearly 20 years we have been here. Last week's fall was quite amazing.



2015 Vintage Report from Tony

We are all smiles here at de la terre as we have just completed another fantastic vintage. That's now 3 exceptional vintages in a row – it makes winemaking so much easier when you're not having to fight weather conditions and botrytis pressure. After a big build up at the beginning of March, Cyclone "Pam" came to virtually nothing in Hawke's Bay which was a huge relief to all local winemakers. We had the odd patch of rain through vintage, but not enough to threaten the quality of our fruit. And vintage finished with a long run of hot sunny days which allowed us to leave the Montepulciano out in the vineyard until the second week of May.

As we hoped, this year was also a lot easier due to the extra resources we now have in place at the winery – our new (2nd hand) 2700 litre press, extra transfer pumps, more tanks, better fruit transport bins and a less labour intensive process. We harvested about 40 tonnes again this year – all hand-picked and fermented at de la terre. The new press was a major coup for us. We can now press 1 tonne of hand-picked fruit at a time rather than 280 kg batches as we did with our small press in previous vintages – this makes for much shorter days in the winery.

More importantly however, was the help in the winery cellar from my good friend Brian Hankin, ex Cellarmaster from Church Road who I worked with for 15 years, and George Turner who did most of the fruit transportation from the vineyard to the winery.

With Brian and George around, Kaye figured she didn't have to work in the winery any more as she's now running the de la terre Café – hmmm! I still managed to pull her back into the winery occasionally.

Following is a quick overview of the wines we made this year. Firstly the whites: -

Vintage kicked off with the Blanc de Blancs Methode Chardonnay in early March. As we have now invested in a full set of Champagne disgorging equipment, we increased the volume of this wine by about 4 times more than previous years.

Along with our Reserve Chardonnay, this year we have also made another barrique fermented Chardonnay – it is a more fruit-driven style with less new oak and will be sold at a lower price point than our Reserve.

The real showcase of this vintage however was the Viognier. This year's fruit was quite simply exceptional - wonderfully ripe and clean and showing real flavour concentration. We believe Viognier is highly under-rated as a serious white wine in the market place and we will be doing our best to change this attitude through the full range of Viognier styles we made this vintage:-

- Our normal tight/lean/complex Reserve Viognier which comes from a very steep, shy-bearing limestone terrace.
- A rich and full fruit-driven wine which we are currently referring to as our 'Condrieu' style (for want of a better term)
- A late-harvest Viognier picked at 26.5 Brix at a point just prior to the development of sporulating botrytis. It will be approximately 35 – 40 grams per litre residual sugar
- A full-on Sauternes style from seriously botrytised fruit at an average of 34.5 Brix and a final sugar level of about 120 g/l.
- A simple cold-fermented fruit driven style

Onto the reds: -

The Barbera came in at about 24 Brix and pristine condition. I have fine-tuned the winemaking for this wine each year from our first fruit in 2013. It is now made with less time on skins to give a tighter and more delicate fruit-driven wine.

The Syrah was harvested as 2 separate parcels – one for Reserve grade and the other for Premium. This year's was probably the best Syrah we have harvested so far - we fermented the wines for 19 days on skins and the colour and depth of flavour is fantastic.

The 2015 Tannat is a monster – huge colour and tannin. Again, we split the fruit into a Reserve and Premium grade and the wines were made quite differently. Because the tannins were so big this year, I used very strong aeration during the on-skins winemaking phase. The wines are currently undergoing micro oxygenation (tiny, semi-continuous inputs of oxygen) to further soften the tannins. This will continue for about 3 – 4 weeks when we will then put the wine away to further develop and mature in barrels.

The Montepulciano performed the same as it always does – it looks like it's never going to ripen then it suddenly takes off and rockets through. It was very late this year though – picked on 10th of May. I suspect it was probably one of the last reds in Hawkes Bay to be picked. We really pushed our luck in the last week before we eventually harvested it – there was a small amount of rain forecast which we decided to take a risk on. As it turned out, the rain didn't come so we got an extra 7 days ripening and (more importantly) acid reduction.

Again, I have fine-tuned the way we make this wine as our experience grows, tending towards a shorter time on skins with more aeration and if necessary, deacidification. Our aim for the Montepulciano is a 'black-fruit' focus, reminiscent of black cherries, black olives and Damson plums - a rich, dark and brooding red.

The quality of the fruit into the winery this vintage was great. As we learn more about the vineyard each vintage, the subsequent tweaks in crop management and the winemaking process are really starting to pay off. Our vineyard manager, Murray Hill, does a fantastic job of running our unique vineyard and delivering quality fruit each year.

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With the building and development at the winery largely completed, and with the 2015 wines all finished ferment, Kaye and I will now focus on developing a sales and marketing strategy for de la terre. This will involve completing the upgrade of the website, finding distributors in the main cities and generally keeping in better contact with our customers.

The other priority this Winter is to disgorge the first of our Blanc de Blanc Methode (from 2013) to be released in Spring. There is only about 1000 bottles of this – we tried some recently to check how it's going and were really impressed.

If anyone has any queries about de la terre or any of the wines, feel free to contact us. We will be open weekends until the end of June. We will close for July and August and re-open in September.