

Vasse Felix

Vintage Report: 2020

2020, what an unusual and trying year around the world. Some Australian wine regions were unable to have a vintage due to the impacts of bushfires. Others, like us, are now completing their vintage in self-isolation mode, doing everything in our power to finish our harvest and ferments healthily in these uncertain times.

A year like this does remind us to be grateful that we are in a region like Margaret River. Our isolation, pristine environment and consistent maritime influence have kept us relatively safe during vintage, with excellent ripening conditions and exceptional fruit quality. The only downside was lower yields.

Yields were down 13 – 35% in our various Chardonnay plots, for example, compared to our five year average, with the larger declines recorded in our Filius allocated vineyard sections. All varieties this year were below average yields, resulting in one of our smallest harvests in recent times.

The yields were due to a few factors, rather than a specific incident. There were colder than average Spring conditions in 2018 when the fruitful nodes formed for the 2020 vintage, resulting in a lower bunch-set. In the Spring of 2019, varied incidents of hail, winds and rain impacted flowering and fruit-set across our four vineyards, creating low bunch weights.

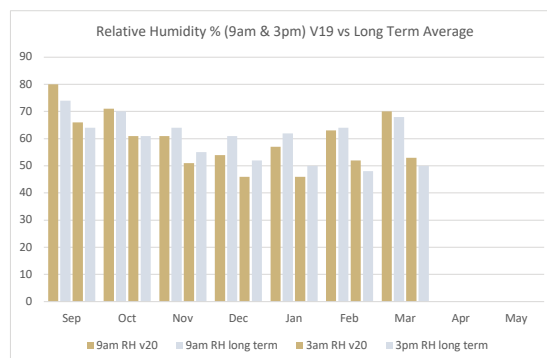
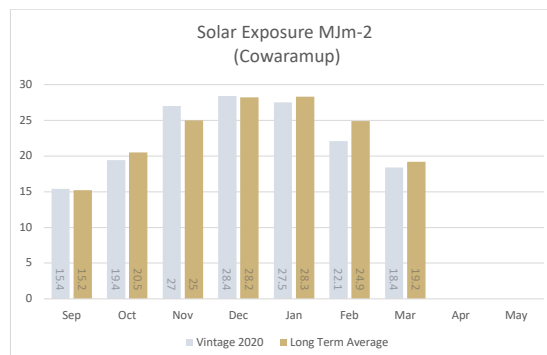
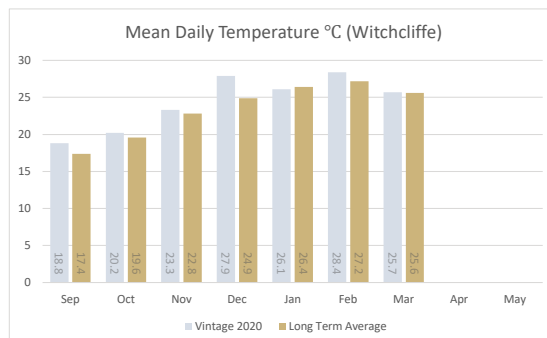
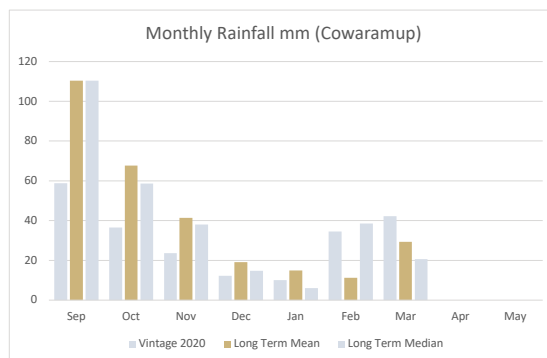
The great positive outcome of low yields and small berries is exceptional fruit with divine concentration. While the 2020 vintage from Margaret River will be in scarce supply, it will be a very special vintage to look out for.

Over December and January, warmer than average conditions with no rainfall events created ideal ripening conditions with no disease pressure. The harvest of Chardonnay began on 30 January, which is relatively early, supporting the notion that lower yields combined with ideal warm, dry weather ripens the fruit more rapidly. Sustained heat in January and February also meant a quick harvest of white varieties with Chardonnay, Semillon and Sauvignon Blanc all complete by 26 February. Very rarely does the white harvest finish this early. During this period, the Marri trees blossomed extensively, which kept bird pressure off the vines. With only one block covered, we likely overdid the netting!

The sustained warm conditions brought the red harvest on early. Shiraz was the first to be harvested on 24 February and Cabernet Sauvignon began on 6 March. A small drop in temperature in mid-March and some minor rainfall incidents allowed the majority of Cabernet Sauvignon to remain longer on vine to achieve measurable softening and ripening of tannins which will reward in the wines. At the same time, the Marri blossom ceased and nets were required on every possible block of red fruit to protect from a large number of birds. After a week of the most incredible sunshine and warmth, Tom's finest old blocks were the last to be harvested on 27 March – remarkable conditions to finish on.

FRUIT PROFILE

Our top blocks of Chardonnay are exceptional, with wonderful wildness, complexity and beautiful ripeness. With the fast ripening, there is incredible retention of natural acidity. Some malolactic fermentation will be allowed. Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon are in a lovely place – not too ripe, not too green; just right. Shiraz loves a warm year and the 2020 Shiraz is showing attractive ripe flavours with medium weight. The Cabernet Sauvignon is dense with dark fruit and strong tannins. Although a muscular vintage; fine, medium bodied Cabernets will be achieved.



Data Source: Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology, 26 March 2020

