



## 2003 VINTAGE

### **HUNTER VALLEY**

With the worst drought recorded since 1902, yields for the 2003 Hunter harvest were destined to be lower than usual. Typically, irrigated vineyards were down by 25% with dry-farmed areas in some instances down significantly more. It was estimated that across the board the Hunter was down in the order of one-third of its usual crop. Despite the drought conditions during the growing period, flavours in most varieties were extremely good. In part this was due to a well timed 100mm of rain in the early part of December to assist the vines during the important veraison period. From that period on, with good soil moisture, the weather stayed dry and mild to produce wines of increased varietal intensity. The dry conditions made for an early vintage with most whites off the vine by the end of January, and allowed most growers to achieve optimum ripeness of fruit with next to zero disease incidence. Aside from the loss in yield, 2003 was expected to rate as a very good vintage.

### **ORANGE**

The season started early with the subsequent vintage coming in between two to three weeks earlier than usual. Little rain fell in October, November and December. Rain in February was ideal for ripening, as was the drying off that followed. The dry conditions meant very little, if any disease. Fruit was very clean, while berry size was down on previous years. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Shiraz, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc all showed exceptional colour and flavour. Reduced acid levels, while evident, were not severe due to the naturally cooler climate. The overall warmer season did mean that fruit was well-matured. The drought reduced yields by about 15% across the board, with more drastic reductions in some cases. Lack of water was especially felt on larger vineyards with some losing 50% and more of their potential yield, particularly in the case of younger vines. Overall the quality of the harvest was excellent.

### **COONAWARRA**

Despite some challenging weather and below average yields, the 2003 vintage was pleasing. During the winter of 2002, Coonawarra had below average rainfall, however what rain there was fell in late winter so that the soil moisture levels at the start of the growing season were at or above previous seasons, ensuring good moisture levels for the spring growing period. These conditions brought about a good, even and slightly early budburst in early to mid-September. Consistent weather patterns continued right through spring with warm days, average rainfall and no frost damage reported. As a consequence no disease problems were experienced. December and January were warm to hot and dry, however there were two significant rain events. The first of these occurred on New Years Day with 30mm of rain recorded, with another 30mm rain falling at the end of January. Fortunately on both occasions the rain was followed by warm drying weather and therefore caused no problems. The weather turned milder during February with lower than average temperatures. In late-February, 35mm of rain fell over three days and as a result there was a small amount of berry splitting; estimated at around 5% with Chardonnay, Riesling and Shiraz being most affected.

Vintage commenced with the harvest for sparkling wine base in late-February and the harvest of white grape varieties for still wine in early March. On March 19<sup>th</sup>, 48mm of rain fell in just over five hours, with some reports of localized minor hail damage, causing a brief flurry of activity as winemakers picked any damaged fruit. This was followed by a temporary lull in harvesting as winemakers waited for the sugar levels to rise. Subsequent to this rain the weather was near perfect, with warm and sunny days continuing through to the completion of harvest resulting in fruit reaching its full maturity. The 2003 Coonawarra harvest was completed in early-May with yields approximately 25% below average across all varieties. This reduction in yield was attributed to low bud fruitfulness from the previous season rather than the weather conditions. The Coonawarra vignerons were pleased to report that the 2003 white wines were showing excellent varietal definition and flavour, and the red wines were well balanced and showing good varietal characters, with Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon looking particularly strong.

### **WRATTONBULLY**

The Wrattobully wine region experienced a dry start to the season with a few small frosts causing minimum damage, leading into a warm to hot summer period until the end of February, finishing with a cool march and temperate April. Heat degree days were very close to the long term average, being an encouraging change after the dramatic highs and lows of recent vintages. Rainfall from December was significant in that 30 – 40 millimeters fell towards the end of every month until April presenting some viticultural problems in February with incidents of splitting and botrytis. Shiraz crops suffered more than most during this period with up to 30% crop loss due to splitting and the resultant shriveling. Across the district, growers reported an average of 20% to 25% down on estimate. Quality was reported as excellent with most winery specifications met or slightly exceeded.