



## 2004 VINTAGE

### **HUNTER VALLEY**

The growing season was a marked improvement on the drought-affected 2003 vintage. All varieties responded to useful periods of rain supplemented by irrigation systems. Spring was generally cool with good rainfall, leading to excellent flowering and fruit set. The lead-up to harvest in late January was extremely hot and continued into February, resulting in advanced ripening of all varieties. Crop expectations were generally exceeded in all varieties, particularly Semillon and Shiraz. In late February the Hunter had a dramatic change in the weather pattern with a 36-hour period of drenching rain. The cool weather that followed delayed ripening of the remaining crop. The 2004 whites are clean with crisp acidity and varietal structure. The reds, particularly those picked prior to the heavy rain in late February, are deep in colour and rich in fruit flavour.

### **ORANGE**

The 2004 vintage in the Orange region was excellent compared with 2003. The main improvement was an increase in yield attributable to light rainfall throughout the season. Disease pressure was low and up until early February, growing conditions were excellent. During February, record high temperatures placed pressure on white varieties and led to a small loss of flavour. Harvest got underway with 'classic' Orange weather of warm days and cool nights. There were some excellent parcels of Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc with some Viognier showing good varietal character. The red varieties were a high standard with Cabernet Sauvignon arguably the best performing variety of the region, with the excellent finish to the season allowing well balanced and generous fruit to be harvested late into May. Overall tonnages were well up from 2003, and quality was a further improvement. Nonetheless, the region's growers were hopeful of a wet spell after vintage to fill the soil profile and refill local dams.

### **COONAWARRA**

An ideal growing season leading into the 2004 vintage combined with the maturation of new plantings resulted in an anticipated record vintage for the Coonawarra wine region. Although it was one of the latest vintages on record, the region's winemakers were particularly pleased with the quality of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot wines, and there was widespread satisfaction with white wines, most notably Riesling and Chardonnay. The winter and spring conditions of 2003 were considered average in terms of temperature and rainfall, although budburst occurred slightly later than normal. Warmer weather in late spring and early summer ensued, producing ideal flowering conditions. Characterised as short, sharp and even, the excellent flowering period achieved almost 100% fruit set, and all indications pointed to above average crop levels in all varieties.

Very cool and dry conditions during January 2004 resulted in a delay in veraison, and despite welcoming increased yields after the well below average crops of the past two vintages, a number of producers decided to thin their heavier cropped areas. The slow ripening conditions continued, and even with warmer conditions in February, it became apparent the start of the vintage would be approximately two weeks later than normal, in mid-March 2004. The warm weather continued through March with two rain episodes of 20 millimetres each, at the beginning and the end of the month, causing minor disruption to harvest, but also boosting soil moisture after a particularly dry summer and early autumn. Wind and sun immediately following both rainfalls ensured rapid drying of the vines and minimized any disease pressure. Mild weather continued through April and May 2004, with no significant precipitation until mid-May by which time majority of fruit had been harvested. There were a number of isolated outbreaks of Botrytis in some thinner-skinned varieties, however the vast majority of fruit was clean. Post-vintage assessments were encouraging with early reports identifying rich, ripe fruit flavours and good structure in the red wines, and attractive fruit and acid balance in the white wines.

### **WRATTONBULLY**

Wrattontully bounced back from the lower yielding previous vintages with very good crops across all varieties and a relatively easy growing period. Vine vigour matched fruitfulness to find that crops matured adequately, even if slightly later than normal. There were some encouraging results for those who crop thinned. The vibrant season saw vine canopies in excellent condition and a greatly reduced requirement for supplementary irrigation. Temperatures and sunshine on average were lower than usual, with low figures every other month indicating a 'see-saw' type of growing season benefiting the early ripening varieties the most. Cabernet Sauvignon was on average of exceptional quality, with the 'Indian summer' conditions at the end a key factor. Rains created some anxiety during harvest, with conditions in late-March causing some late Botrytis.