



ALLIANCE WINE

Vintage Report 2021
Southern Hemisphere

Southern Hemisphere Harvest Report 2021

2021 marks the second harvest during the COVID-19 pandemic for our southern hemisphere producers. The emergency lockdown measures that came into force during vintage 2020 were certainly a far greater shock than this year's restrictions, nevertheless, wineries have had to prepare for similar challenges this year. With health restrictions in place, wineries had to reorganise the way in which they harvested and processed the grapes, organising shifts and transport to and from work with maximum occupancy levels, checking workers' temperatures every day and so on. On top of this, border closures and travel restrictions have led to labour shortages, especially in more remote countries such as New Zealand.

The 2021 harvest has brought much needed snow and rainfall for a number of southern hemisphere countries, who had been brought to their knees by drought in recent years. However, climate change continues to bring erratic weather patterns for wine growers across the globe, forcing our winemakers to behave more reactively in the vineyard to ensure stable and balanced juice in the winery.

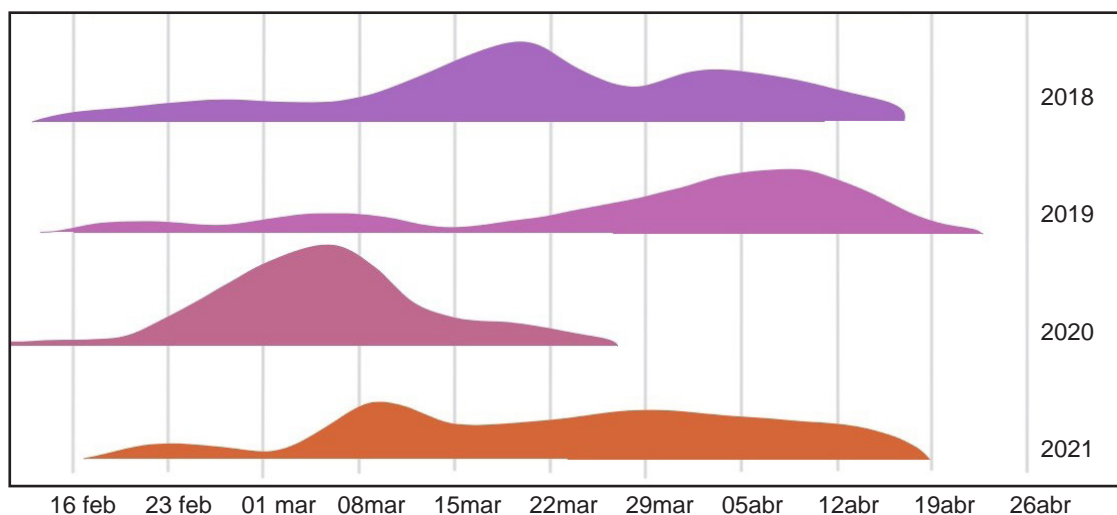


Harvest worker at Viña Cobos, Mendoza

ARGENTINA

The season began with a series of erratic climatic events. arrived in October affecting the eastern part of the province where the majority of high volume wine is made. The region has anticipated a loss of 25% in yields. November and December were very dry months followed by extreme rainfall in January and February, more than 70% of the rainfall expected throughout the year. The summer in Mendoza was marked by 3 weeks of very warm days. Chief winemakers for Viña Cobos, Andres Vignoni, was concerned the heat would demand an early and very short harvest. Thankfully, from the second week of March temperatures decreased and some isolated rains allowed the advance of sugar maturity to stabilise, while the polyphenolic maturity continued to advance and the tannins refined accordingly.

The chart below illustrates yield in tons harvested at Vina Cobos over the past 4 years. Here we see an even and long growing period for 2021. Despite the high levels of rainfall in spring this year, the water crisis in Mendoza continues. Snowfall in winter only accounted for 78% of what is needed to compensate for the worrying drought of previous years. There were no major water availability problems during this season, however producers are mindful of the difficulties future drought may bring for the industry.



CHILE

Chile has reported a record harvest in 2021, producing 11.9 million hl, an increase of 15% from 2020, which was an challenging year with low yields due to frost and extreme drought. The winter of 2020 offered a significant increase in rainfall that slowed maturation, held alcohol levels down, and increased acidity.

The rainfall is a relief for many farmers as it helped bolster water supplies that had fallen to desperate levels the previous year. A state of agricultural emergency had to be declared for a large part of Chile in 2020, including all of the Central Valley. With climate change forecasts of significant decreases in rainfall for the whole Central Valley, efficient water use has become a priority for most Chilean wineries.

SOUTH AFRICA

The South African government tried to control the COVID-19 outbreak by banning the sale of alcohol, an attempt to keep people from gathering in public. Since the start of the pandemic last year President Cyril Ramaphosa has imposed four bans, the most recent coming to an end in July, saying the move was necessary to ease pressure on hospitals brought by emergency incidents related to drinking. Vinpro warned about the “dire consequences” of restricting wine sales would have for related businesses and the livelihoods of those working in the South African wine industry.

Despite domestic hardship and export bans during the pandemic, 2021 has been very promising for South African winegrowers, with a bumper crop of 1,461,599 tons, 8.9% larger than the 2020. The harvest began two weeks later than normal due to unusually cool weather conditions throughout the season,

which persisted throughout harvest time and resulted in some producers harvesting their last grapes in May. Water resources were also replenished in most regions following extreme drought in recent years, which contributed to good vine growth, bunch numbers and berry sizes.

The Vinpro South African Wine Harvest Report has declared the 2021 harvest to be “Exceptional... Moderate weather throughout the season, and specifically during harvest time, resulted in grapes ripening slower, while developing exceptional colour and flavour. Viticulturists and winemakers are especially excited about good colour extraction, low pH levels and high natural acidity.” The later processing time for grapes also allowed producers to store wine that couldn’t be sold due to the ban, a silver lining for many wineries.

Clouds over the Iona Estate, Elgin





Ben Glover, owner of Zephyr, hand harvesting in Marlborough

NEW ZEALAND

The international demand for Sauvignon Blanc from New Zealand is unwavering and ever increasing, and yet, as a cruel twist of fate, this year New Zealand has produced one of the smallest harvests in a decade. This is due to cooler spring weather and late frosts in some regions. This comes at a time when the industry is facing increasing production costs, with ongoing labour shortages also adding pressure. We are now witnessing a global shortage of New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, with is already filtering through for the UK market. “The overall smaller harvest means many of our wineries will face tough decisions over who they can supply in their key markets. There is going to be some supply and demand tension because of this, with the shortfall in the crop equivalent to roughly 7 million 9 litre cases of New Zealand wine,” said Philip Gregan, CEO of New Zealand Winegrowers.

370,000 tons of grapes were harvested during the 2021 vintage, down 19% on last year’s crop. Regions throughout the middle of the country, including Wairarapa, Marlborough, Nelson, and North Canterbury, were impacted the most, down over 20% on 2020. However, there was some variability across the country, with Central Otago the one region to increase its crop, up 21% on last year’s harvest.

Although the harvest was smaller, the quality of the 2021 vintage is reported as being exceptional throughout New Zealand’s wine regions.

AUSTRALIA

Australia produced 12.5 million hl in 2021, an increase of 18% compared to 2020, which means that the country is back to normal levels after having had low figures for three years in a row. Giles Cooke M.W. for Thistledown Wines, provides his account of the 2021 vintage for Southern Australia:

Vintage '21 will be remembered as one of the most perfect ripening seasons, as well as one of the longest. It will be remembered as one of those rare vintages that combines quality with quantity. It will be remembered as a vintage so good, that the external worries facing the industry (Covid-19 and Chinese tariffs) could be forgotten. Though vintage '21 will not be remembered with such fondness right across Australia. It was a remarkable season in South Australia, defined by mild days, cool nights, occasional and timely precipitation and none of the heat spikes that have featured in both 2018, 2019 and 2020. Though the size of the vintage will have placed pressure on winery logistics, it is a vintage where picking decisions were leisurely and the winery style easily defined as a result.

More moderate sugars than previous years, but explosive aromatics, huge colours and great acid/pH balance have all raised expectations amongst the winemaking community that this may be a once in a lifetime vintage. Time will tell whether this potential has been realised by the wines, but there is real, underlying excitement.

Taking McLaren Vale as an example, monthly rainfall in August, September and October 2020 were all above the average and total rainfall in 2020 was higher than the previous 3 years. As a result, we entered the 20/21 growing season with full soil profiles and good

potential. Average rainfall through November, December and January provided ideal growing conditions before slightly higher than average rainfall in February gave the vines a final boost through to ripening. Combine the adequate water supply to below average maximum temperatures throughout January, February and March and you have a season quite unlike any other in recent memory. These conditions, also meant that the period over which fruit was harvested was somewhat elongated. At Thistledown, the first variety we harvested was Riesling on the 15th February and the last, Mataro, was harvested on the 12th April. By no means the latest that we have harvested (Nebbiolo, 1st May 2019) but the longest picking period at 8 weeks.

What we'll try to forget about vintage '21 is the shortage of labour brought about by Covid-19 restrictions on people entering Australia. This provided for many headaches over hand-picking and increased costs as demand exceeded supply. There were periods of extreme worry that the huge weather systems that caused untold damage to the east coast, would, at the last minute, scupper the superb potential. But, thankfully, the odd shower aside, South Australia remained truly blessed.

For Thistledown, this vintage equals our 2019 for tonnage though quantity and quality of our beloved Grenache looks truly special this year. Across an array of sites, sugars look moderate, colour is above average (not that we care much about colour) and the soaring aromatics and intensity of flavour is something to behold. We can't wait to show you what we have made in '21.

Thistledown Wines picking day, McLaren Vale





ALLIANCE WINE

HEAD OFFICE

7 Beechfield Road, Willowyard Industrial Estate,
Beith, Ayrshire KA15 1LN

Tel: 01505 50 60 60 | Fax: 01505 50 60 66

LONDON OFFICE

Unit 2, Elm Court, Royal Oak Yard,
Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3TP

Tel: 0207 939 0770

www.alliancewine.com
[@alliancewine](https://twitter.com/alliancewine)