



An exceptional Vintage of unsurpassed quality Vintage Report

Winter in 2018 was quite wet, and the moist conditions continued through the early spring and allowed a normal bud break. Thankfully, the crucial flowering period was relatively dry and resulted in a very even fruit set in December. The three days immediately prior to Christmas Day gave us nearly 60 mm of rain, but that was the last significant rainfall of the summer. The temperature during the critical ripening period of January and February 2019 was mostly in the low to mid-twenties, with a maximum of only 29.3°C for one day in January. Most years we can expect at least a day or two over 30°C, but this year conditions remained cool to warm.

January, February and March became progressively drier, however, and that was where the real character of the vintage comes from. The weather was mildly warm, but dry and clear, so the ripening conditions were perfect for aroma and flavour development, while still retaining the fresh acidity that our region is noted for. Low humidity meant there was no disease pressure and the grapes were able to be harvested in beautiful, clean condition.

After the early harvest of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay grapes destined for our Crémant wines, we were able to pick the Hunting Hill Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards at optimal ripeness, and these have given us truly remarkable examples of their style.

All of our vineyards were rapidly reaching their ideal maturity at about the same time, so the ensuing 4 weeks were extremely busy, with harvest in full swing in both Kumeu and Hawkes Bay and the winery in 24-hour mode to be able to cope.

Pinot Noir and Pinot Gris tend to be early, and both were giving us rich colour and texture that have transferred through to the wines which have lovely mouthfeel and weight, with pronounced berryfruit characters on the nose and palate.

The Village Pinot Noir is a blend of Rays Road and Kumeu. It has a bright cherry red /burgundy colour with lifted red fruit aromas. On the palate the wine is cool, round and fruity and with a nice hint of chalky tannin that keeps the wine dry and refreshing.

The very best of our Hawkes Bay Pinot Noir is vinified separately and aged in oak barrels. Labelled Rays Road Pinot Noir, it is mid-ruby in colour, with ripe strawberry and light cherry fruit aromas. There are rose-petal floral notes, too, with a distinctive limestone lift. It has a medium-bodied, chewy palate with attractive ripe fruit characters, and a chalky, fine tannin finish.

Kumeu also gave us beautiful Pinot Noir fruit in 2019, and the Hunting Hill has a deep ruby colour and a substantial ripe cherry fruit aroma with earthy mushroom/truffle undertones. The palate is weighty with mahogany-like wood complexity, and firm tannins giving great palate length.

The Village Chardonnay vineyards which deliver slightly higher yields and simpler flavours all came on in a rush. They were still able to retain crisp earthy minerality from Kumeu, and some delightful stonefruit aromas from Hawkes Bay, to create a blend which must surely be our best Village Chardonnay ever.

The limestone-based vineyard at Rays Road in Hawkes Bay has yielded some uniquely characterful Chardonnay from this vintage. It has the aroma of citrus peel, flinty minerals and salty seashells. There are creamy, peach-like flavours on the mid-palate, but then it finishes firmly with zesty fresh acidity and a steel backbone.

The Kumeu vineyards that contribute to our Estate Chardonnay gave us some magnificent fruit. The level of citrus fruit complexity, and the layering of aromas and flavours that this wine shows are stunning. This is a quality Chardonnay wine of style and pedigree.

The single-vineyard Coddington wine is strongly coloured and richly ripe in the yellow peach and apricot spectrum, with a background of toasted oak and caramelised hazelnut. It is the biggest style in our range, and satisfyingly rich as such, but also nicely balanced with its acidity.

Hunting Hill is very distinctive in its terroir typicity, with piercing lemon/lime fruit lift and florality on the nose, richness and volume in the mouth followed by lingering acidity and minerality on the finish. This is an absolute classic example of how great the Chardonnay grape can be: A beautifully powerful, yet elegant and complex wine.

Mate's Vineyard is always the last site we pick each year. In 2019 the grapes certainly had the distinctive Mendoza *millerandage*, giving many small berries along with the normal sized ones, and as a result a wonderfully concentrated palate texture and fruit richness. Although still somewhat shy on the nose coming out of the barrel, with bottle age the full palette of complex aromas and bouquet of this wonderful wine will be gradually and seductively revealed.