

Press Release – 1 May 2008

MARTINBOROUGH ENJOYS MAGIC VINTAGE

Martinborough is a region that has been beset lately by vintages of exceptionally low yields, making the business of winemaking a very demanding one for this region of boutique wineries and their hand-crafted wines. In 2008 though, Martinborough has had what can only be described as a magic vintage; superb quality backed up with moderate, even crops from very carefully farmed vineyards.

The reason is simple - the weather conditions prevailing throughout the season, and the modern viticulture now highly tuned to this environment. After miserable yields in 2007 the vines enjoyed excellent budding, and early indications of fruitfulness were pleasing. With many vineyards now well frost protected, the early evil of spring chills were avoided. In addition, flowering proceeded in superb conditions in late November and December, and the typically severe nor-westers of early summer were largely absent. Fruit set was good with the region's usual compact bunches of small to moderate size resulting.

The warm summer and autumn drought that affected the pastoral farmers provided perfect conditions for the developing grapes with most vineyards practising very detailed management of the vines to maximise the potential from the superb summer. The harvest period was dry and sunny with no effects of rain, and harvest proceeded without a hitch throughout the last few days of March and the first three weeks of April.

While the star in the region is obviously Pinot Noir with winemakers reporting some of the most beautifully coloured, aromatic and finely structured young wines ever seen, there are other notable successes. The region's Sauvignon Blanc wines are always distinctive for their richness and concentration, due largely to the consistently and naturally lower yields and free-draining gravels of this area. Those from 2008 are no exception. Already showing huge promise, they have pure vivid flavours and excellent weight and texture that can only be achieved with clean, ripe grapes from moderately cropped vines in a perfect season. In addition, the Chardonnay fruit harvested is of a very high and exciting standard. Those who follow the regions reputation for the aromatic varieties of Riesling, Pinot Gris and Gewurztraminer, all harvested in perfect conditions, will enjoy some very expressive and beautifully composed wines when they are released later in the year.

The real quality of the vintage can be gauged by the enthusiasm of some of the area's most experienced, famous and well travelled wine personalities. Winemakers Helen Masters at Ata Rangi, Allan Johnson at Palliser, Larry McKenna of Escarpment, Neil McCallum of Dry River, Steve Smith MW from Craggy Range and Paul Mason at Martinborough Vineyard are all smiles. These and others in this small wine community have their own individual views of the "magic" vintage of 2008, including Richard Riddiford of Palliser Estate describing it as "a vintage you'd dream about".

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