

Vintage 2010 - Oregon

1 Dec 2010 by Jancis Robinson

This official report on Oregon's grape harvest suggests that here is yet another wine region where wine quality may be exciting in 2010 - at least, according to its own governing body the Oregon Wine Board. See also [Oregon's heart-warmer](#). Their précis reads: 'Vintage delivers high-quality fruit at lower yields that growers and winemakers say will translate to balanced, food-friendly and ageable wines'.

November 30, 2010 – An Indian summer that began in early October and lingered through month's end created optimal conditions for Oregon's winegrowers and vintners, advancing ripening of smaller-sized grape clusters throughout the state and delivering balanced fruit with full flavor development and lower brix levels, great acidity and potentially lower alcohol levels. Winemakers who have had time to spend with the resulting wine say they are very excited to see what emerges from the barrel.

The 2010 vintage cumulative growing degree day (GrDD) values for four sites throughout the state tracked slightly down from 2008 (three to nine percent statewide), one of Oregon's most highly touted vintages.

The warm, dry harvest conditions bookended a growing season that began with a relatively dry and warm winter highlighted by the warmest January and February on record in most locations. What followed was a cool Spring and early Summer timeframe (April – June). According to Dr. Greg Jones, a climatologist at Southern Oregon University in Ashland, Oregon who monitors conditions throughout the state's winegrowing regions, the growing season ended with near normal to slightly cooler than normal temperatures statewide, with fewer than normal heat spikes.

Yields were lower than in typical years, due in part to early season weather conditions and crop thinning near season's end. The lower yields delivered high quality fruit, with characteristics of full phenolic ripeness, concentrated flavors and balance.

"In Oregon, each vintage is an expression of that year and this place," said Sam Tannahill, board chairman for the Oregon Wine Board. "As winegrowers who farm artisan wines, we celebrate farming on the edge. In 2010, we were rewarded with potentially very long-lived, gorgeous wines with more concentration and depth, combined with a very beautiful crystalline structure with great purity -- everything we in Oregon could ask for in a vintage."

The following regional harvest reports include perspectives from individual growers and winemakers for their respective areas.

Willamette Valley

The last ten days of sun and dry conditions gave the hang time to allow physiological maturity and complexity. Yields were down 22% and cluster sizes were small to medium. With nearly identical heat degree days we are hoping for the great vintage of '99 and probably came close. Juxtaposed to a hot year where sugar development leads flavor, this year flavor development did indeed lead sugars. This should mean wines of substance at lower alcohol levels and good acid for ageing and food pairing.

– Jim Prosser, JK Carriere Wines

The long, cool spring and no summer really slowed down maturation. In general yield was low and we saw mildew pressure and spring Botrytis which further reduced set. We noticed right away that the color and flavor of the fruit was showing nicely at very low brix. I think we will have wines with great fruit, liveness and a real purity of fruit at lower alcohols than we have seen in a long time.

– Lynn Penner-Ash, Penner-Ash Wine Cellars

Yields began normal-to-slightly-high early in the season, but we systematically dropped crop in green harvest. Cluster sizes seemed normal, berry sizes running a range from small to large depending on vineyard. Final wine effects are almost exclusively positive, with great color and flavor without alcohol in Pinot Noir, and with finesse in whites also due to 13% or lower alcohols. Higher than normal acids bode well for perfect balance and subsequently great aging. This will be a delicate, fruit-centric vintage, with red-to-black fruit flavors in Pinot Noir and white fruit in whites.

– Harry Peterson-Nedry, Chehalem

We started picking Sauvignon Blanc out of the Gorge the third week of September and started the first week in October with Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir from the Rogue Valley. Yields were down for the most part and in some cases up to 40% down, but the average was more like 10% across the board. Clusters were smallish and loose. The late fall weather was beautiful and the fact that the fruit was pure, beautiful and very, very Pinot Noir. This could be a very long lived gorgeous vintage with more concentration and depth than most, but combined with a very beautiful crystalline structure with great purity.

– Sam Tannahill, REX HILL/A to Z Wineworks

Harvest started for us on October 18 and we finished with all of our estate fruit by the following Saturday, October 25 just before the rains. This was the second latest start for us in 26 years, and the most compressed harvest. Yields were very low, caused by poor set and some draconian thinning. Cluster size was lighter than normal. Though the weather clearly drove our harvest decisions, the sunny two weeks that Mother Nature gave us in October got the grapes ripe, sugars were moderate and the juice is very promising. My guess is that they will be very good to excellent, and more like 08 than 09.

– Ted Casteel, Bethel Heights Vineyard

After a very cool growing season we had a near perfect four weeks before harvest. It looks like the wines will be very flavorful but lower than normal in alcohol. We are quite excited about the quality of the 2010 vintage.

– Dick Shea, Shea Vineyard/ Shea Wine Cellars

We started harvesting on October 14 and ended on the 30th. We found yields to be average and cluster sizes were slightly smaller with smaller berries and thick skins. The mid two weeks of October with sunny days and moderate temperatures helped turn the harvest in to a great vintage. Acids are higher than normal and sugars slightly lower and in the Pinot Noir, flavors are very concentrated and bright. I am very happy with the wines so far. I think due to the high malic ratio in the Pinot Noir, the wines will be very nicely balanced with lower than normal PH. This will provide us with bright, dark color and pronounced aromatics and long-lived wines.

– Rudy Marchesi, Montinore Estate

Harvest started on October 18 and ended on the 27. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir yields were both down and clusters were about 20%. Flavors are excellent, heading to the red fruit side of the spectrum, good fresh berries and have great acidity. So, although the harvest was late, the quality is excellent.

– David Millman, Domaine Drouhin Oregon

Columbia Gorge and Eastern Oregon

We began harvesting Merlot on September 15 and were complete on October 20. Yields were down and cluster sizes small. In general harvest was delayed, but it allowed for maturation which produced great acidity with many layers on the palate. I think 2010 will be an exceptional year.

– Norm McKibben, Pepper Bridge Vineyards, Seven Hills Vineyards, SeVein Vineyards (Walla Walla Valley)

We began harvesting Merlot on September 22nd and it ended on October 29th with Carmenere and Petit Verdot. Yields were down substantially and we saw about 25% fewer tons per acre compared to average. Clusters were very loose and open in many varieties due to lower fruit set. Tight clustered whites seem to have a near normal structure. We are seeing balanced sugars, great color and better acidities at excellent sensory ripeness levels. It was very gratifying to have a very long frost free fall which allowed us to time our picking for the best grape balance. The end result in the wines will be expressive flavors with lower alcohols, good color and natural balance. This will be a delicious and fully ripe vintage.

– Casey McClellan, Seven Hills Winery (Walla Walla Valley)

We began harvesting Merlot the first week of October, but things really got underway beginning on October 18. Pinot Noir yields were average, but Pinot Gris and Chardonnay were down. The miracle of October's weather made this a stunning vintage, producing wine with bright fruit and ripe flavors that are low in sugar.

– Robert Morus, Phelps Creek Vineyards (Columbia Gorge)

Southern Oregon

Harvest got under way on October 12 with the picking of several varietals for rose production (merlot, Grenache, Syrah). The bulk of the fruit came in between the 18th and 22nd of September and ended on November 6. We were lucky to have great weather the first 3 weeks of October, which led to optimum chemistry and flavors for picking. The long season seems to have had an outstanding impact on flavor. Even in blocks or varietals where sugars were not as high as they have been historically, flavor has been outstanding. Merlot, Cab Franc, and Zinfandel along with all the whites will be impressive.

– Chris Martin, Troon Vineyard (Applegate Valley)

Harvest started for us on October 11 picking Albariño, Tempranillo and Malbec and ended on November 6. Yields were down and cluster sizes were small. Flavors and sugars, thanks to an Indian summer, were excellent. Acids are high but mostly malic and when these are metabolized it will result in some great wines.

– Earl Jones, Abacela Winery (Umpqua Valley)

We started harvest on October 4 with Merlot and Viognier and ended on November 4. Yields were slightly up in most varieties and Cabernet Franc was one that was down. Cluster sizes were smaller. The grapes had good color, lower than usual tannins and more red fruit character than black fruit (compared to 09). Sugars were slightly lower in some varieties (mainly Rhone) and normal in Bordeaux varieties. We do have some exceptional lots of nearly every varietal. This is a year that will showcase the talents and skills sets of both growers and winemakers and will set people apart. Both are equally important every year and one never does well without the other.

– John Quinones, RoxyAnn Winery (Rogue Valley)