

2008 METEOR VINEYARD HARVEST



What a vintage!

Every vintage has its own personality and along with that, a unique set of challenges, but no vintage in recent times has been quite as challenging during the growing season as 2008, or for that matter, as rewarding in the winery.

Barry calls it the vintage of Fire and Ice – a literal reference to the weeks in July when the skies around Napa were darkened with drifting smoke from wild fires burning out of control in neighboring Solano county and the 20 days of frost in April; the worst in nearly 40 years.

We've gotten used to saying that Meteor Vineyard is almost freakishly consistent, budding out early, riding through heat waves and ripening slowly as the days shorten in October. Our own conventional wisdom about this was put to the test this year, but in the final analysis, it did hold true.

We truly have been spoiled by Meteor Vineyard's uniquely modulated microclimate, its geography and its geology add to all of that, but in 2008 we experienced some of the extremes more typical further up valley and on the valley floor. Cool weather during bloom caused poor set in the blooming clusters and to make matters worse, in one extremely cold night, frost took the crop from the lower sections and swales in the vineyard.

The challenge in this situation is to ensure that the remaining fruit ripens evenly and again, our vineyard crew proved up to the task. Much of the credit goes to Mike Wolf, Meteor's vineyard manager whose vigilance and commitment to keeping the vines in balance in our well-drained volcanic soils borders on heroic! It's ironic but it seems that in the years you get the least crop, you do the most work and certainly, that was the case in 2008.

Later in the season, the 'fire' metaphorically returned with an early September heat wave. During ten days around Labor Day the temperature spiked into triple digits. With a small crop, sugars can come up rapidly and I remember one day when the normally calm Barry called (in a truly uncharacteristic panic) saying that he was testing sugars in the vineyard and was getting 24s and even 25s and hoped that we were all paying attention!

Many vineyards scrambled to an early harvest but the following week the weather cooled and our vines happily re-hydrated and we had an additional month of real quality hang time before we ultimately brought the fruit in, in October.

The result of this year's 'drama in the fields' has a very happy ending. While the unusual conditions produced a very small crop, the surviving fruit was given great concentration of flavor and as the wines go to barrel, they look fabulous.

We always accept that we get what nature gives us each season and in this very special year, the year of 'Fire and Ice' we have a small, but truly rare vintage.