

South Dominion Vintage Reports

Overall, incredible vintage variations are the norm in the Upper Hudson Valley, not only in terms of climate or harvest complications but also through the expression of our wines, which are very specific to the Upper Hudson and less pronounced in other New York wine regions.

2023 Spring Angel of Death

It started out like a dream with a once-in-a-lifetime early and warm spring until the first of many poxes struck the house of South Dominion on the morning of May 18th. I sat in horror just past midnight, watching the vineyard temperatures slowly start to fall below freezing - finally bottoming out at a frigid 26.4°F for four hours. At this point, the angel of death's icy breath had extinguished 95% of all our young vine growth. A cool summer followed with biblical levels of rainfall not seen since 1869. Record-breaking rains in early summer created serious disease pressure, which, combined with severe frost damage, resulted in empty grape bins at harvest in many New York vineyards. With far fewer fruit clusters, the vines put all their energy toward vine growth, which gave rise to canes extending 30-40' long. It was all we could do to keep track of our harvesters as they worked their way through vineyard rows! Thankfully, fall dried out, and October was unusually warm, which allowed our Frontenac to hang on longer than usual. Still, the growing season lacked sufficient growing degree days for the grapes to achieve ripeness, and our yields were 85% below normal. From the small amount of wine produced (<800 liters compared to 5000!), the Frontenac may yet prove to be the best. The St. Croix is surprisingly complex and lacks the usual foxiness. The Rosé is vibrant, powerfully fruited, and well-structured.

2022 Sour Rot War II

With nearly identical growing conditions to those of the 2020 benchmark vintage, our heavily-laden vines inspired a sense of cautious optimism in August. The vineyard's growing degree days were far above our area's 30-year average throughout the summer, and we anticipated an excellent, possibly earlier harvest. Yet September weather began to turn ugly as periods of rain only increased to an unbelievable 2X the 30-year rainfall average. This resulted in perfect sour rot conditions: warm days with high humidity. As the grapes began to reach peak ripeness, the birds, wasps, hornets, and fruit flies started their relentless assault on the abundant fruits of our labor. The mechanism of infection and the role that multiple causal organisms play in sour rot etiology are not fully understood and are becoming a serious problem for northeastern vineyards. In just the last two weeks before harvest, we lost the war against unforgiving sour rot and lost 50% of our yield. Despite these setbacks, 2022 resulted in very fruit-driven and very expressive reds and exceptionally fresh and intense whites.

2021 Sour Rot War I

Most vintners in New York remember 2021's cool, wet spring and summer that gave us consistent rains throughout the growing season. Disease pressure heightened following an extremely wet September. Our 20-day harvest season was cursed with 15 days of rain, at times a deluge, on one occasion slamming us with 2.3 inches of rain within nine hours. These conditions resulted in grape clusters bursting, leaving them highly susceptible to sour rot infection and struggling to ripen. By harvest time, the vineyard was already littered with rotten grapes. Rigorous selection and attentive harvesting in the vineyard were essential. In a race against birds, bugs, and disease, we felt ill-equipped. Harvest was painful, with half the yield unusable but still needing to be removed. What we could salvage hadn't reached optimum brix levels and seemed saturated. The result was lighter medium-bodied reds akin to spicy Northwest Pinot Noirs with leaner and crisper whites.

2020 Perfecta

Practically a flawless cold climate growing season, with warm temperatures throughout and no spikes in heat or rain. September was hot and very dry, and all the varieties reached peak ripeness by the end of the month. The resulting wines brimmed with fruitiness and structure. A no-brainer cold climate wine benchmark.

2019 Hardy Ignorance

The spring started out with promise, even though it was slightly wet, but then went downhill and ended up developing into a very cool season with the lowest number of growing degree days in the last 5 years. That being said, the vineyard produced a 78% larger yield than the vineyard would produce for the next five years. Although the reds from this vintage have a higher-than-average acidity, the wines have grip, texture, and personality. The reds needed more work, but that's not surprising because 2019 was only the second vintage from these young vines and for the vintner. In the end, despite such an unusually cool season, the wines are finding their balance as they age.

2018 Youth Wasted

Our 1st vintage! This year was an unusually warm year in which the grapes reached full maturity because of a record-breaking number of growing degree days (i.e., 9% higher than normal). The vines were young and extremely vigorous, and the nearly perfect conditions resulted in fruit-driven and very expressive complex reds. No whites were harvested due to the younger age of the vines.