

Brian Carter Cellars
2008 HARVEST NOTES

If you are a sports fan in Washington State, 2008 has been pretty dismal. First the Sonics tank and then leave, next the Mariners implode, and now all 3 of our major football teams are looking rather anemic. Thankfully the 2008 vintage for Washington wines is looking very promising. Here are some of Brian's notes from the harvest.

October 6th - As of today we are about half way through harvest and so far things are looking great. Most of the Merlot and Syrah are harvested along with Roussanne and Viognier. The Grenache from Stone Tree and Olsen Brothers Vineyards is due this week. Cabernet Sauvignon from Klipsun and our other Red Mountain Vineyards is scheduled for next week. While it is a bit early to tell everything about the quality of the wines, they are in general just what I am looking for: good color, great fruit and balanced alcohol, acid and tannins. I think these wines will be memorable.

Now if the second half of the harvest goes as well, and there are a few hand wringing 'ifs' to overcome, we think 2008 will shape up to be a really great vintage. The warmest areas and the earliest grape varieties are in the winery; where as the grapes from the coolest areas (such as the western Yakima Valley) and the latest varieties (such as Sangiovese) are still hanging on the vines. Most of these grapes are close but we do need a little more late-season sunshine to push them into perfection.

A big blow hit the Puget Sound area last Saturday (October 4th). We lost power in our tasting room for several hours, but it didn't dampen our visitors' spirits. Tonight I am staring out the window in Bellevue at a particularly strong rainstorm which may have enough energy to push itself over the Cascade Mountains and further dampen our immediate prospects for harvest. It's time to break out a favorite Brian Carter Cellars wine and send up a prayer to the gods of rain for a little more Indian summer.

October 12th – Mike and I left early for a quick visit to several of our vineyard sources to check on their progress. Crossing the Cascades we left the gray behind us and the sky began to clear around Ellensburg. The temperatures stayed moderate and only managed to get into the mid-50's.

We stopped first at Newhouse Vineyards to sample Sangiovese and Tempranillo. Both varietals had plenty of acidity, but need some more hang time to bring up the sugars and the PH. Next we met Jim Willard at the Solstice vineyard to sample his Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Grenache. Jim had had a few restless nights worrying about frost, but said that the night time temperatures had stayed above freezing. It is not unusual for fruit from Solstice to be one of the last to harvest and it looks like this year will be no exception.

After leaving Jim we met Dick Bouchet at his vineyard to sample Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Again all three varietals were close, but not quite ready for harvest. Last, but not least we stopped at two sites of Elerding vineyards, both on the south side of the Yakima Valley. After sampling several varieties at each site we then headed south up into the Horse Heaven Hills.

With more than 25 grape samples in the back of the car we headed home. Tomorrow Brian will run an analysis of all the samples to measure the sugar levels, acidity, and PH. All these factors will help Brian to decide when the fruit is ready to pick.

Crush Time! The press of the crush or the crush of the press; no matter how you phrase it, this time of year is extremely busy for every winery in Washington. In Woodinville, the timing crunch of harvest can get even more interesting. Hand picking grapes is very weather dependent; fall rains slow the harvest, as no winemaker wants to crush soggy fruit. Add to that all the logistics that goes into transporting the grapes across the mountains, coordinating the processing equipment and volunteer help. Most often grapes arrive in the cool of night and are processed the very next day. White wine varietals are sent straight to the press in whole clusters so that clear juice can be separated from the skins as soon as possible. The red varietals go through a two step process of removing the stems and breaking or crushing the berries to release the juice while keeping it in contact with the skins for added color and tannin. The juice and skins will remain together as the fermentation process begins. Once Brian is satisfied that the new wine is ready, it is sent to the press and the young wine is separated from the skins and seeds and placed into oak barrels to continue the aging process.

Fortunately Brian and Mike have gotten some extra help for harvest, our new Cellar Rat: Malinda Burdo. After starting at BCC as a part-time server in our tasting room, Melinda joined Brian in helping with cellar chores midway through the 2007 vintage. She has been instrumental in moving those wines along as well as getting the 2006's ready to bottle. Melinda's former life as a chef and event coordinator has made her even more valuable where she does an excellent job coordinating our food pairings for wine club and investor events. Her enthusiasm, willingness to jump in and eagerness to learn has been a great addition to our winemaking team.

A little help from our friends - We at Brian Carter Cellars want to take this opportunity to thank all our volunteers for their enthusiastic help and our friends at Efeste. For the second straight year now we have been making our wines with the help and generosity of winemakers Brennon Leighton and Mary Lloyd. We want to express our sincere gratitude to Daniel, Kevin and Patrick for allowing us to make wine in their winery and congratulations on the grand opening of your new Tasting room! For more information about Efeste go to www.efeste.com