

Three sixty, with Geoff Thorpe

Source block magic

Well, the summer holidays have been and gone and suddenly vintage is almost upon us – where does time go???

Seems like only yesterday I was writing about a couple of very cool end-of-year school trips into the wilderness with my 12-year-old son Jack, and musing on how fortunate we are in New Zealand to have such rejuvenating experiences right on our back doorstep.

Christmas and New Year was very full on, family and work-wise, but we did manage to get Back to Nature in late January for a week at Lake Rotoma – a very special getaway which has been in my family for 45 years now. There's no road access, no phones, no mobile reception, no radio, TV, or computers – in other words, it's paradise!

But here we are – it's mid-February already and things are as busy as ever at Riversun. Most people think this is our quiet time of year: the grafting is all over, the vines are well on their merry way in the field nurseries (and looking fantastic, with the best growth ever), and our clients are all far too preoccupied with netting, bird scaring, and cloud watching to want to talk to us!

This time of year was quiet before we embarked on our ambitious importation programme back in 2003, but that's not been the case in recent memory. Nowadays, the approach of vintage sees many growers, viticulturists, winemakers, and journalists making plans for their annual pilgrimage to Gisborne to check out our six-hectare source block.

The source block is where they can see the first fruit on the very latest releases (three new clones of Albariño from Portugal, Fiano, ENTAV-INRA® Chardonnay 1066, and Zinfandel), as well as seeing how the "New to NZ" clones of the classic varieties are measuring up against industry standard clones.

Given the huge investment in time, energy, money, and passion to create this "jewel in the crown" source block, it is incredibly rewarding for us at Riversun to see so many making the effort to visit. Especially rewarding is seeing the light in their eyes when they witness for themselves the giant strides made in the world of vine breeding, in terms of bunch architecture, yield moderation, and flavor profiles.

The proof is in the pudding – last spring, the new imports accounted for almost 70% of our grafting orders for delivery this winter. While things are incredibly tough out there for all of us in the wine world,



a steadily increasing number of growers and wineries seem to have come to an important realisation: slashing costs and hunkering down, while they yield obvious short-term cash-flow benefits, may not be enough to protect their livelihoods over the medium to long term.

Proactive clients are now telling me they believe the "hunkering down" strategy is a major contributor to the continuing structural surplus of Sav Blanc fruit in our industry. The proactive among us are instead investing in alternative varieties and superior clones of classical varieties.

If you would like to make the pilgrimage, I would love to show you through the block, so please see this as a personal invitation. Trust me, every single visitor comments that it is one of the most stimulating and fascinating days they have had in a long while.

Cheers,

Geoff