

Esk Valley Winemakers Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Malbec 2016

The climate change vintage



Esk Valley has long been synonymous with Merlot. In fact we were the first Hawkes Bay estate to bottle both a Merlot based red blend and a single varietal Merlot. Our goal of course was to produce a new world take on Pomerol and Saint Emilion, appellations which at the time in the late 1980s were yet to achieve the status and prices they do today. We were pioneers excitedly pushing the boundaries of New Zealand wine. A straight Malbec followed in 1999 and this too was a first for Hawkes Bay and New Zealand.

Merlot it seemed was the perfect red grape for our newly established vineyards planted in a stony ex riverbed west of Hastings that would later be named The Gimblett Gravels. Merlot's ability to ripen slowly and fully in our gravel based vineyards gave us the opportunity to consistently produce wines of a quality unimaginable not too many years prior, when our wines were based on the later ripening and often unripe Cabernet Sauvignon. With the addition of Malbec for its colour and earthiness, Cabernet Franc for its red fruit perfume and mouthfeel and Cabernet Sauvignon when ripe for its structure, we seemed to continually produce complex and age worthy wines. Wines that have become regarded amongst the fine wines of New Zealand. Here's what leading New Zealand wine commentator Michael Cooper has to say

'This powerful and classy wine is typically one of Hawkes Bay's greatest reds (it is always Merlot based, but the proportions of minor varieties vary)'

Times are changing though, and this 2016 vintage of our Gimblett Gravels Winemakers Reserve Red is first evidence from Esk Valley of climate change and its reach into our Gimblett Gravels vineyards. Its not necessarily our growing seasons becoming warmer (they are) but more the way any inclement weather seems to arrive earlier and the best conditions of harvest are stretching later into the autumn and benefitting the later ripening Cabernets. I have always maintained that this

wine is our best of the harvest irrespective of varieties and in 2016 Cabernet Sauvignon was the best of the red varieties in our cellar, and hence the base for this 2016 bottling. A first for Esk Valley and a break from a tradition that stretches back to that first Merlot based wine in 1989. No Winemakers Reserve wine was produced in 2017, but the recently bottled 2018 is also Cabernet based and perhaps the surest signpost to an exciting new future for these Reserve bottlings. I like to think we have recognised a new reality and with same spirit in which we pushed those boundaries all those years ago we have shifted our sights for now from the right bank to the left.

2016 growing season

Rainfall

Sept 145mm Oct 22mm Nov 40mm Dec 30mm Jan 55mm Feb 12mm Mar 44mm April 19mm

Heat Summation

1432 degree days to the end of April. 1403 days to the last day of picking

Technical Information

Blend : Cabernet Sauvignon 38% Merlot 32% Malbec 30%.

Bottled unfinned and unfiltered

Cellaring potential : 2020 – 2035

Production

574 cases of six

50 magnums