



HEATHCOTE SHIRAZ VINTAGE 2018

Below is an account of the 2018 vintage through the eyes of our Chief Winemaker Robert Ellis



The growing conditions for the 2018 vintage were near perfect. The vines responded well to the cool and rainy spring of 2017. They produced plenty of buds, and the very dry and warm start to 2018 reduced berry sizes, strengthening the fantastic concentration of fruit-flavours from our vineyards in Heathcote. The cool change that followed lengthened the ripening periods to ensure the freshness of flavour and strong natural acidity that we look for in a robust Heathcote Shiraz. Although I often find myself putting positive spins on adverse conditions for other vintages, the 2018 vintage really was ideal for growing Shiraz in Heathcote.

ATHOL'S Paddock VINEYARD

The Athol's Paddock Vineyard is an extraordinary plot of land we own on the foothills of the Camel Back Range. It is one of few vineyards in Heathcote that can authentically claim to be grown on the ancient Cambrian soil. In order to truly lay claim to this soil, the vineyard must be within a 1.2km wide and 30km long stretch of the Mount Camel Range where the soil emerged from tectonic activity 500 million years ago (when the Earth itself was middle-aged). This historic soil therefore provides the perfect example of terroir where you can literally sense the wonderfully rich and potent tastes and aromas of the vineyard in the wine.

To exacerbate these characters our vineyard is dry-grown; however, this brings with it the risk of poor cropping and potential issues with vine health. To ensure the longevity of the vineyard, we adopted a new pruning technique in 2016 with the aim of lowering vine stress at the expense of lowering the potential crop level. Because of this, we picked 8.5 ton of fruit off our vineyard in 2018, higher than average over the previous decade. The grapes were picked nearing the end of February, the Baume was 13.5 and the pH 3.42. I'm sure my fellow wine nerds out there would agree that these numbers are perfect!

WINEMAKING

In 2018, I started trialling 'heading down', a winemaking technique for my premium wines. It isn't a new technique, since it has been used in some parts of Australia for over a hundred years, but it is used rarely because it is both difficult and time consuming.

I have altered some of our stainless steel picking bins and open fermenters so that they hold wooden boards on top of the skin cap during fermentation. This keeps the skins wet and avoids procedures like pumping and punching down, which are both physically hard work, abrasive and extractive to the wine.

This 'heading down' worked remarkably well; the wine is darker and more flavoursome, while being less aggressive than those made using traditional winemaking methods.

Because this was a trial, I made other parcels of our Heathcote fruit in traditional 'Rob' ways:

1. 50/50 whole berry/crushed berry wild fermentation
2. Heads off new barrel fermentation
3. Extended skin contact

As always, this blend creates fantastic complexity, richness and depth.

The wine has then spent 18 months in oak, around 25% of which are new French oak barriques.

It's been 8 years since I started making this wine. This experience and the perfect growing conditions in 2018 may well have made this the best Heathcote yet.

Chief Winemaker