

The Santa Maria Valley had continued to receive relatively mild weather this growing season until mid-August. At that point a decrease in the marine layer, hot daytime temperatures and a thunderstorm caused both growers and winemakers to ready our equipment. Our middle of September projection to start harvest has been hurried and many of the vineyards began picking following the Labor Day weekend. The thunderstorm, followed by a week of hot weather, started the 2007 vintage with a bang, and a spectacular light show.

Along with the earliness of this year’s harvest, we are seeing both Pinot Noir and Chardonnay ripening together. An average year starts with Pinot Noir being harvested in mid-September followed a few weeks later by Chardonnay. The anatomy of the clusters this year and the weather does help explain why we are seeing our flagship varieties maturing together. As I mentioned in last quarter’s letter, we have seen smaller than normal berries this year and have had to shoot thin more than normal because of reduced vine growth. This has resulted in less fruit per vine, predominantly in the Chardonnay, causing the fruit to ripen earlier...at nearly the same time as the Pinot Noir.

As I write this, I am looking out to the light trail of my machine harvesters picking tonight’s Chardonnay, while planning the morning’s sequence of events with my operations foreman. Hand harvest crews will be arriving at daybreak to begin filling their bandejas with small, dark, sweet Pinot Noir clusters. Please go out and see the 2007 vintage begin its life “in the vineyard” and then we can all enjoy it in the bottle.

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Santa Maria Valley's Acclaim: *Something We All Saw Coming*

It was just a matter of time, really. We here in the Santa Maria Valley have known this for years: our appellation is ideally suited to the successful growing of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, cool climate Syrah and other varietals of great depth, merit and audacity. Our local winegrowers have been preaching the gospel of Santa Maria Valley terroir for decades now, and it finally seems like we're getting the attention---or should I say---the vines are getting the attention, they so richly deserve.

The latest issue (number 172, August 2007) of *The Wine Advocate* makes positive mention, in many instances, of the wines of Santa Maria Valley. Add to that the acclaim we've garnered in the esteemed *Los Angeles Times*, as of late, and it finally seems to appear as though Santa Maria Valley is being considered alongside some of the most acclaimed growing regions in the area.

It took a while to get there, and many of you may wonder why. Well, I'm a firm believer in the adage "Slow and steady wins the race," and the Santa Maria Valley is the epitome of that wonderful saying. We're not trendsetters, by any means. We like to do things authentically, with a lot of heart and thoughtfulness and with a certain dose of low-key charm. We're not ones to jump on bandwagons with the press, and tout our growing region as the only place of merit for good grapes in the county. This positioning with the media does not take into account the big picture. While trends fade and die away, and growing areas that come out strong and lustrous like rock stars, soon fall from grace with the press, our valley and its members have taken their own sweet time to learn how to make and market great wines. This has resulted in a story and a community that can best be described as "keeping it real." To that end, I often feel that our growing region is being launched and promoted like the great villages of France that grow in fame and acclaim gradually over many years.

The strength of Santa Maria Valley wines is their consistency, their ability to showcase typicity with a number of varietals, and its rare and dazzling terroir. It also doesn't hurt us at all to have local, colorful characters, in the culinary and agricultural realms that boost our flair and personality. Try imagining a Santa Maria Valley without Chef Rick or Dale Hampton. I think you get the picture. In short, we have a valued, singular commodity; our people and our vines. And, it was just a matter of time before those who know and appreciate quality would come to know Santa Maria Valley.

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