



October 26, 2020

Dear friends,

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair”.

Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities (1859)

The beginning words of a novel during my seventh grade that foretold what might be a long and boring read. Throughout these last number of months, it became more relevant and accurately descriptive.

The challenges to our business this year were significant. In calendar order they were Covid, the smallest crop since 1998 and the threat of smoke taint.

The shuttering of restaurants nationally meant the loss of more than half of our accounts and locally resulted in the temporary closure of our tasting room. To compensate we focused on virtual tastings, free local delivery of wine (Evy and I spent several weekends motoring around the valley), enhancing our online presence and looking for new opportunities wherever they might be found. Our team has been very creative and resilient. My goal through it all was to keep our entire winery family together. Though we don't know what the next hurdle might be, so far so good.

We also focused on keeping our restaurant community as healthy as possible. During the two-month closure we had lunch catered by our local restaurants every day of the work week. They are all still in business and we were happy to be a part of helping get them through.

The growing season began in early/mid-April with bud break and we had beautiful weather in those first weeks that had us progressing well into the first stages of flowering the second week of June. From June 5th or so and over the following 10 days the temperature dropped significantly and it rained steadily. This weather had a profound affect on our fertility. Each berry is its own flower and has both male and female parts (hermaphroditic). Because of this we do not require bees for pollination, but cold and wet conditions do result in a loss of fertility.

Once the weather improved and the plants finished flowering, we were able to canvas each site and evaluate our crop levels. It became immediately clear that we were looking at one of the lightest crops in the modern industry's history. For the winery it is an economic challenge. Our farming costs per acre are essentially the same but there is much less fruit to show for it. Our farming costs, for every bottle

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produced, will be almost three times what we would expect in a normal year. Can we raise prices to make up for this loss? Not in today's environment.

Is there a silver lining to this low crop? In fact, there is. Part of the reason for the low weights from the vineyard is that the berries were extremely small. The clusters this year never really filled in. The "looseness" of the berries on the cluster meant good air movement which played a huge role in preventing disease. Over the entire harvest we sorted less than a dozen clusters affected by rot of any kind. We didn't have much but what we had was clean and beautiful. Of course, the small berries meant a higher percentage of skin to juice resulting in wines of intense color, aroma and flavor.

Now, onto the fires. Several things have happened this year that I have never seen before. It has been incredibly disappointing to see members of my industry cancelling contracts for fruit at the last minute without any attempt to negotiate a solution with the growers. Often these decisions were made based on a five-gallon bucket fermentation of unripe fruit. Most of these growers were uninsured and were left high and dry after a years' worth of farming cost had already been spent. This is a first for our area. Wineries and growers are first and foremost partners. In a true partnership you find a way to keep your partner whole.

A number of wineries have already proclaimed that they are not producing a 2020 vintage. In some cases, statements are being made that the entire vintage is flawed, and they would not *deign* to make wine from it. Be assured that many wineries who did not respond well to Covid have inventories that are making the banks cringe. Having an excuse not to produce a vintage is quite convenient for them at this time. Also, there are wineries that gave up after reading articles (not from experience) that smoke taint could be more pronounced after a period of months. The levels of guaiacol, 4 methyl guaiacol and cresol in our vineyards harvested, ***other than our experiment***, do not support this. In times past, no one would have thrown their fellow industry members under the bus to make an excuse for their own misfortune. Perhaps the combination of Covid, small crop and potential smoke taint was too much for some to bear.

To be sure, there were a few vineyards that **were** affected by the fires. Of the thirteen sites that we source, only one had detectable issues and it was minimal and isolated to one area of the vineyard. We were fortunate that our vineyards were located in areas that were so unaffected.

In fact, after harvesting all of our sites, we were interested in sourcing a truly smoke affected vineyard and did so purposefully to set up an experiment that would look at different protocols/treatments that might mitigate or fully eradicate the issue. It was a chance to learn.

We chose a vineyard that was near an active fire in the Chehalem Mountains that was without question affected by that fire. This was not a small trial. We picked 25 tons of fruit from the site. Everything in the experimental design was done in full sized commercial lots. Prior to picking we had a day and a half to read through the existing literature and research on efforts to reduce the effects of live fire smoke. One research piece out of Italy particularly caught our attention. In their research they showed a remarkable ability of ozone to remove the volatiles responsible for taint aromatics. We included ozone, low fermentation temperatures and early pressing in our experimental design.

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As we were processing the non-treated fruit, we could detect an ashy quality coming from the filling fermenter. Once we began processing the ozone treated fruit that ashy quality completely disappeared. At this writing, the treated wine is now in barrel and shows not a hint of corruption. We are immensely encouraged. The scale of this experiment will allow us to bottle quite a bit of each treatment for future tastings for industry members.

I cannot say enough about the determination and grit of our vineyard and winery teams. Not a “chicken little” among them. Everyone remained super positive and realistic about what we needed to do to succeed despite the challenges. They are simply the best. Whether it is 2020 or 1859, in the end it is human resourcefulness and character that are real strengths.

For you dear friend the proof is of course in the pudding. We are extremely excited to present the wine of 2020 for you to taste on the weekends prior to and following Thanksgiving. Like 1998, the wine is dense and rich but will be in short supply.



Private Barrel Tasting Event Information

Enjoy an intimate seated wine tasting experience at the Ken Wright Cellars barrel room! Your tasting will be guided by Ken and feature barrel selections of our brilliant 2020 vintage, current release wine and small bites. This event is in lieu of our traditional winery open house. Due to COVID-19 protocols and precautions, seating is limited. The experience is ticketed for all guests, \$50 per person, refunded with a minimum \$500 wine purchase. Reservations can be made online and are first come, first served.

Make a Reservation Online: <https://shop.kenwrightcellars.com/reservation-events>

[November 21 | 10-11:30am, 1-2:30pm, 4-5:30pm](#)

[November 22 | 10-11:30am, 1-2:30pm, 4-5:30pm](#)

[November 27 | 10-11:30am, 1-2:30pm, 4-5:30pm](#)

[November 28 | 10-11:30am, 1-2:30pm, 4-5:30pm](#)

[November 29 | 10-11:30am, 1-2:30pm, 4-5:30pm](#)

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