

## PLUMPTON COLLEGE ESTATE 2009 VINTAGE REPORT

The 2009 harvest was set for a record start, with an early spring and a warm and sunny April; perhaps 2-3 weeks ahead of a normal vintage. However, like in 2007 and 2008, a cool and wet early summer put paid to that! Luckily, the rains didn't hit the vines till after flowering was complete and the berries had set, and Kevin Sutherland and the students put in lots of hard work over the summer to ensure the good quality of the fruit.

Although the late summer months were generally cool, they were mainly dry and there was enough sunshine and warmth for the grapes to ripen. It was the warm and dry September that really made the difference; with relatively low disease pressure and a substantial sugar increase in the fruit. The late summer and early autumn nights remained mostly cool and this meant that grapes were again harvested ripe and clean, with fresh acid levels.

The College grape harvest began on September 28th with the Regner and Ortega varieties and finished on October 21st with the final loads of Seyval Blanc. The early autumn harvest period remained mercifully warm and dry and helped ensure that fruit was generally in very good condition throughout. Two days of heavy rain in mid- October did cause some concern, but the weather turned dry and warm again to keep rot at bay.

Grape quality was very good overall; particularly excellent were the aromatic white varieties (Ortega, Bacchus & Schonburger). As the vintage progressed, and the weather conditions held, the Reichensteiner yielded well and, along with Seyval Blanc, will form the basis of our Cloudy Ridge Dry White wine. Rondo, Triomphe and Dornfelder all yielded much better than they had for the last three years. Pinot Noir for red was amazingly ripe at 13.5% potential alcohol. The fruit for sparkling production was clean and with perfect acidity and sugar for the base wines.

All in all, the Plumpton College Estate vineyards (5.6 ha now in production) yielded 20.4 tonnes (compared to 13.5 tonnes in 2007 and 8.0 in 2008). This, together with 6 tonnes of grapes contracted in, will make up to 18,000 bottles of wine.

In the winery, the fruit was (as usual) lightly pressed to optimise quality and yielded 15,000 litres of must for fermentation. Particular care was taken when processing the varieties destined for sparkling wine (Pinot Noir, Pinot Meunier and Chardonnay), which were pressed uncrushed. The red wine varieties (Early Pinot, Rondo and Dornfelder) were given gentle pump-overs and short skin contact times during fermentation to optimise soft fruit flavours.

At the time of writing (November 10th) all the fermentations are complete and most of the wines have been racked off their fermentation lees and are now undergoing a natural clarification settling. The red wines and the sparkling base wines have been inoculated to initiate the malolactic fermentation, which will reduce their acidity and increase their complexity.

As in the past, we fermented the Ortega in American-oak barrels this year and, in consequence, the Plumpton College winery hopes to reproduce the excellent 2007 and 2008 vintage 'Fumé', which sells exclusively in Hakkasan's Michelin-starred restaurant. We are also giving the Bacchus a short period on the Ortega lees in the same American oak, intending to enhance its flavour and improve the mid-palate. This will help add an aromatic quality to the Cloudy Ridge dry white blend (5000 bottles). Additionally, we hope to produce 4000 bottles of our award-winning Rosé. Our premium range will centre around 2500 bottles of our Pinot/Chardonnay (white and 'blush') sparkling wines and 600 bottles of 'oak-aged' Pinot Noir. This year we will also re-launch our soft and fruity 'Cloudy Ridge Red' with around 3000 bottles being made.

There was considerable success in competitions for the 2008 wines and other previous vintages. Our 2008 Cloudy Ridge Dry White won a bronze medal at this year's Decanter World Wine Awards. Our non vintage Sparkling wines, The Dean and The Dean Blush, both achieved silver medals at the annual UKVA (United Kingdom Vineyard Association) Wine of the Year Competition, the presentation of which was held at the House of Lords.

This year, at Rock Lodge vineyard we planted more of the noble Pinot Noir variety for red wine production, Regner (which makes a delicious, peachy base for our Rosé), and Riesling, on our most favourable south-facing slope.

Investment in the winery focussed on the full implementation of our chilling system and thermal control for our larger fermentation tanks. This definitely enhanced the quality of our white ferments, with temperature monitoring allowing us to control rates of fermentation.

The Wine Centre benefitted from the formal opening of the IOC (Institut d'Oenologie de Champagne) Tasting Room. Thanks to the support and sponsorship from many friends of Plumpton College there are now 27 custom-designed tasting booths, complete with back-lit glass for the improved evaluation of wine. We are hoping to extend it to a full 32 booths, so we are still accepting sponsors who wish to take up the opportunity to have their name displayed on their own tasting booth. For more details, please contact Peter Morgan ([peter.morgan@plumpton.ac.uk](mailto:peter.morgan@plumpton.ac.uk)).

The Vintners events room has been well used again this year, especially for short courses designed specifically for the wine industry, notably Oddbins, Hakkasan and the WSET. The Wine Centre was recently visited by the Duke of Kent, who was impressed by the facilities and achievements of former students.

The student intake for this 2009/2010 academic year is the highest ever, both in Wine Production and for the Foundation Degree in Wine Business.

To find out more about all full time or part time wine courses at Plumpton College, visit our website: [www.plumpton.ac.uk](http://www.plumpton.ac.uk)

The Wine Department team has been further enhanced and strengthened by the arrival of Jo Cowderoy, who has extensive production and commercial experience in the wine industry, having contributed to the development of Rock Lodge Vineyard and Chapel Down Winery with her husband David Cowderoy. For the last five years, Jo has been managing Domaine de la Bouscade in the Languedoc. Alongside her general teaching duties, Jo will coordinate the Wineskills project, which, supported by EU and DEFRA funding, will deliver training to the wine industry throughout the UK in the form of workshops, masterclasses and mentoring. A new website [www.wineskills.co.uk](http://www.wineskills.co.uk) will soon have full details of this project.

It is thanks to our student vinegrowers and winemakers that Plumpton College Estate wines have become, and still are, extremely popular in the local area, appearing as house wines in at least two of Brighton's top restaurants ('Due South' & 'Riddle & Fin'). We hope that the good volumes of 2009 wines will allow many more of you to enjoy 'Cloudy Ridge' wines wherever you are. Enquiries can be made to Paul Harley on [paul.harley@plumpton.ac.uk](mailto:paul.harley@plumpton.ac.uk).