

Napa Valley harvest report: Harvest enters its final weeks

[Jesse Duarte](#) Sep 21, 2020 Updated Oct 6, 2020



Cabernet harvest last Friday at the Clif Family Winery Croquet Vineyard, located on Ink Grade Road in the Howell Mountain AVA. Laura Barrett photo

There are only a few weeks left in the 2020 harvest.

“There is a moment in harvest that feels like the first steep incline on a roller coaster,” said Elizabeth Vianna of Chimney Rock Winery. “There is a slow ascent and then the drop comes and there is no turning back.”

While the pace is picking up in Vianna’s Stags Leap District, Stuart Smith of Smith-Madrone Winery says the past week was quieter than the last one on Spring Mountain.

“Several of us are picking Cabernet Sauvignon this week but with this cooler weather there’s little urgency,” Smith said.

“While we did not detect any smoke taint impact on our Mount Veeder grapes, we continue to monitor sugar accumulation levels in our Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec, which are still most likely 2-3 weeks away from harvest,” said Lorenzo Dalla Brea of Hess Collection.

Here’s this week’s harvest report, organized by American Viticultural Area (AVA):

Calistoga — Matt Crafton, Chateau Montelena — “I caught myself staring at the blue sky multiple times this week. Welcome back. Picking continued in patchwork fashion across the AVA as large swaths of vineyard on the valley floor were harvested in rapid succession. Typically, we don’t see as many ‘clear cuts’ here in Calistoga as our variable topography and mesoclimates encourage smaller, more targeted picks. But in 2020, every option is on the table. Yields seem to be slightly below average but I haven’t heard any complaints.”

Howell Mountain — Laura Barrett, Clif Family Winery — “The theme this week has been blue skies and harvesting early ripening red varieties. While most Cabernet lots are still a few weeks out, I did harvest one block of Cab from our Croquet Vineyard at Clif Family Winery. A week earlier than 2019, and about 15% less yield, the juice is tasty with balanced acidity and lower than usual Brix at the crush pad. Sean Capioux at O’Shaughnessy Winery reports that they will finish their Merlot harvest this week. ‘Flavors are good and surprisingly the sugars at the crusher are not too high,’ he stated. Mia Klein, Winemaker for Cimarossa, noted that ‘canopies are holding up pretty well and flavors are developing. Good progression all in all.’ In the heat of this challenging vintage, Mia summed it up perfectly: ‘We take what we have and do our very best. It may mean everything from making some kick ass wines to passing on picking an obviously tainted block or two and a bunch of things in between.’”

Diamond Mountain District — Dawnine Dyer, Dyer Vineyards — “Vineyards in the Diamond Mountain District recovered well from the second round of record heat over the Labor Day weekend providing time to bring the fruit to full maturity, still a week or two out for most. Interestingly, at higher elevations, both Constant and Summit Vine reported

temperatures 10 degrees lower than in vineyards further down the slope. What has been harvested in the District so far is limited to vineyards with light crops- from 40-75% down from 2019. Mueller Vineyard picked Cabernet last week with only 50% of what they picked last year and the trend continued in the Sori Briquot Vineyard. The extended exposure to smoke at this time of the year is worrisome and there are lots of micro fermentations out for analysis but the lag in getting results back makes COVID-19 testing look rapid.”

Chiles Valley District — Alexander Eisele, Volker Eisele Family Estate — “Cool crisp evening air with overnight temperatures down to the mid to upper 40s. During the day a breeze, blue skies and not much action. The first Zinfandel as well as the first Merlot are being harvested this week.”

Spring Mountain District — Stuart Smith, Smith-Madrone Winery — “Unlike last week where everyone was harvesting one varietal or another, this week is decidedly quieter with many wineries waiting for more fruit development. Several of us are picking Cabernet Sauvignon this week but with this cooler weather there’s little urgency. Yellowing of the basal leaves has definitely arrived signaling the beginning of fall. Overall, everyone on Spring Mountain is pleased with the super clean fruit and the fermentations are showing very good color with clean sensory evaluations for smoke.”

St. Helena — Igor Sill, Sill Family Vineyards — “After walking our St. Helena Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard and tasting the grape berries from several rows, I’m very excited with our 2020 vintage flavors. They’ve developed beautifully. I’m anticipating harvesting this coming early Monday morning, Sept. 21. As we all know, determining a precise harvest date isn’t simply a matter of reaching a particular sugar or acid level — everything ultimately comes down to flavor. I rely heavily on the depth of flavors and the seed’s ripeness maturity. I’m anticipating a great harvest year for St. Helena!”

Henrik Poulsen, Alpha Omega – “At Alpha Omega, it is all about physiological ripeness rather than Brix. With elevated sugars after the latest heatwave, we have been patiently waiting for skin maturity and seed ripeness to catch up in our St. Helena sites. Similar to past vintages, the western side of the St. Helena AVA is further along in ripening than the

eastern part along Silverado Trail and down from Howell Mountain. With a couple of hot days in the forecast, we will probably bring in Cabernet Sauvignon and Petit Verdot beginning next week, roughly three weeks earlier than last year.”

Rutherford — Kristin Belair, Honig Vineyard & Winery — “With the first day of fall upon us, the beginning of shorter days and longer, cooler nights are a welcome respite from the summer’s heat. Most, if not all the whites in Rutherford are already in and the reds, which have been trickling in, will soon become the main feature. Chris Phelps, at Inglenook reports that they are approaching 70% completion of harvest and that the color in red varieties is ‘extremely concentrated and impressive.’ At Honig we have successfully brought in all of our Sauvignon Blanc and are just now dipping into reds. With the anticipated warm up over the upcoming weekend, harvest could ramp up to a furious pace!”

Stags Leap District — Elizabeth Vianna, Chimney Rock Winery — “There is a moment in harvest that feels like the first steep incline on a roller coaster. There is a slow ascent and then the drop comes and there is no turning back. In Stags Leap District that steep ascent is about to end as we all start picking up the pace. Marcus Notaro, winemaker at Stag’s Leap Wine Cellars, was picking Cabernet Sauvignon from his oldest block and then proceeding into SLV and Fay vineyards this week. Exciting day there – they spotted a mountain lion in the hills above us! Jon Emmerich, winemaker at Silverado Vineyards, was getting busy adding more tanks of Cabernet Sauvignon to his cellar. At Chimney Rock, we will have Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot gracing us with their presence on the crush pad. There is no turning back.”

Mount Veeder – Lorenzo Dalla Brea, Hess Collection — “Last week, we completed the harvest of our Estate Chardonnay and Albarino on Mount Veeder. Fruit was perfectly ripe, with good acidity and brix on target. While we did not detect any smoke taint impact on our Mount Veeder grapes, we continue to monitor sugar accumulation levels in our Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec, which are still most likely 2-3 weeks away from harvest.”

Oak Knoll District — Jon Ruel, Trefethen Vineyards & Winery — “Tres Goetting, winemaker for Robert Biale Vineyards, says they are 80% in and very happy with the

quality. He mentioned Zinfandel with ‘big, bright, fresh red fruit’ as well as some OKD Sangiovese and their Greco di Tufo, which he is fermenting in clay amphorae and Acacia barrels. Scott Meadows says Silenus is getting into the reds two weeks earlier than usual and they ‘taste fantastic.’ Steve Moulds is half-way done picking Cabernet Sauvignon and said the results of their micro-ferments (checking for potential smoke impact) have been very positive. Some OKD growers are in limbo as wineries evaluate their fruit but hopefully that situation improves soon allowing for a smooth finish.”

Coombsville — Tom Farella, Farella Vineyard — “Harvest has been a challenge up and down the valley and Coombsville is no exception. The trend is for harvesting a little earlier than normal and trying to work around possible issues with smoke. All of the whites are done and we are midway through Merlot harvesting with most of the Cabernet still on the vine. We are grateful the skies have cleared up and it will be very interesting to see the various strategies emerge as Cabernet nears the finish line. All the best to everyone!”

Carneros — Christopher Hyde, Hyde Vineyards — “This week in Carneros grape harvest approaches the end of its second month. We had a breath of fresh air with any residual second hand smoke dissipating last week, only to reappear in a diminished capacity this week. At Hyde Vineyard, Merlot harvest is in full swing this week, and Syrah harvest is wrapping up, with Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc harvested on Tuesday night, as the end of our early harvest season draws near.”

For real-time harvest photos and updates, visit the Napa Valley Vintners’ Harvest 2020 website at harvestnapa.com.

https://napavalleyregister.com/community/star/news/napa-valley-harvest-report-harvest-enters-its-final-weeks/article_4a3edc5c-b540-5ee7-ac1f-ed7625aa6ceb.html