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### **California Drought Starts the Party Early in the Napa Valley**

*Harvest 2015 for Wilson Daniels Winery Partners Begins Two Weeks Ahead of Schedule*

St. Helena, CA (August 13, 2015) — Sparkling wine flowed at Schramsberg Vineyards last month as the first grape pickings came in during a remarkably early harvest celebration, a phenomenon that wineries all over the Napa Valley and California are experiencing as vintners move up their crush dates due to early ripening crops.

Grapes intended for sparkling wine production are picked earlier than those destined for still wines, which is typically around mid-August in the Napa Valley, according to Schramsberg's recently promoted senior winemaker Sean Thompson. This year, however, it was still July when members of the trade and media gathered to toast to the success of the winery's 50th anniversary harvest.



Photo courtesy of Schramsberg Vineyards.

Harvest in full swing at Schramsberg Vineyards in Calistoga.

Over at Hyde de Villaine, harvest has begun with Pinot Noir and is not far off for Chardonnay — two weeks earlier than usual, estimates winemaker Stéphane Vivier. “It is early when compared to the overall average for the past 16 vintages, but on par with the 2013 and 2014 harvests.” Grapes are sourced from the legendary Hyde Vineyard in the Carneros AVA and for Vivier an early harvest is not surprising. “The vineyards pushed out of dormancy very early and bud break occurred in the last days of February,” he says. “Warm weather continued and in



April we saw ourselves three weeks ahead of where we were in 2014, which was already an early vintage as well.” He also notes that the impact of the cool spells in mid-July will result in “extremely intense wines showing freshness and minerality.”



Photo courtesy of Hyde de Villaine.

Peter Hyde and Guillaume Boudet begin harvest at Hyde Vineyard with Pinot Noir, August 11.

The team at Grieve Family Winery feels similarly about the strange temperature patterns during this year’s growing season: Most days have been very hot or relatively cool, with fewer days in the mid-eighties than is normal for Napa County. “We are paying more attention to mildew in the cold times and stress in the heat. Getting sugar and maturity to be where they need to be will be the big issue,” says winemaker Vance Rose.

Nestled in the Mayacamas mountain range in the isolated Lovall Valley, the vineyards are at higher elevations and more vulnerable to spring frosts. This year, frosts in March resulted in delayed bud break and will subsequently push back the harvest, making the start date only slightly earlier than usual. “We believe we will have our first pick of Sauvignon Blanc approximately the second week of September and the second pick about 10 days later,” Vance estimates.

### Dealing with the drought

Though the impact of California’s drought on winegrowers has varied across the state, there are two common repercussions identified by Napa Valley vintners, now in their fourth year of low rainfall: early ripening and low yields. “We haven’t experienced a string of dry years like this since the late ’70s,” says Schramsberg owner and vintner Hugh Davies. “This is the earliest harvest of the four dry years in a row.” According to Davies, the two factors are interrelated: “An extended flowering period has led to uneven set and, in general, what look to be lower vineyard yields. With low crop levels, the pace of ripening has been hastened.”

Rose agrees that the drought has caused the vines to come out of dormancy earlier than normal; however, “it is not having a major impact yet.”

At Hyde de Villaine, harvest yields this year will be small, 20% below the average and around 40% less than last year. Vivier also sees effects of the drought among the older vines. “The drought has amplified virus symptoms for our oldest blocks that were planted back in the ‘70s and ‘80s,” he says. Thankfully, ample water resources around the Hyde Vineyard have mitigated the negative effects of the drought. “Used carefully, we have been able to maintain quality across the ‘drought’ vintages.”



Photo courtesy of Grieve Family Wines.

Vance Rose, new WD president Rocco Lombardo and Scott Diaz check out the grapes in Lovall Valley.

### No compromising quality here

Despite the slightly skewed timetable of 2015's growing season, the Napa Valley expects to bring in some outstanding fruit to the sorting tables. At Grieve, Rose expects to see “some amazing Sauvignon Blanc with very concentrated flavors.” The same goes for Hyde de Villaine: “Very small yields, healthy canopy and hopefully steady, mild weather through harvest will make the 2015 vintage an exceptional one,” says Vivier.

### **About Wilson Daniels**

Founded in 1978, Wilson Daniels is a family-owned importer and marketer representing a portfolio of luxury wines and spirits. Based in Napa Valley, Wilson Daniels upholds the high

standards set by founders Win Wilson and Jack Daniels — with a keen focus on long-term strategic partnerships with family-owned and operated properties that possess a profound respect for terroir.

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