



Like all Great Wines, the 2010 Vintage from Arizona will be Defined by the Weather

SUMMARY – Southeastern Arizona’s winemakers experienced crisis and blessings during 2010, a year of unpredictable and unusual weather. Lawrence Dunham Vineyards anticipates a rich and bountiful 2010 Petite Sirah and Viognier as a result.

(November 1, 2010; Pearce, Arizona) Light begins to peak over the Chiricahua Mountains in Southeastern Arizona on a late September morning. Already the Lawrence Dunham Vineyards are buzzing with activity. Picking bins have been moved into the fields, the winery is prepped, equipment sanitized, and the vineyard work crew are ready to bring in one of Arizona’s bountiful Petite Sirah harvest. As this vineyard was on schedule to harvest, wine regions around the world have been challenged by this year’s unpredictable weather. The cloudy, cool temperatures in California and the Pacific Northwest causing a very late harvest and a freak hail storm right before harvest in the Sonoita AVA of Southern Arizona devastating wineries within 50 miles of Lawrence Dunham Vineyards.

Lawrence Dunham Vineyards, one of Arizona’s newest winery and vineyard experienced a bumpy ride to its 2010 Petite Sirah harvest. According to Curt Dunham, winemaker “the difference between a good year and a mediocre one is not just the weather in the fall as many believe. Both spring and summer hold risks as well – especially with respect to yield.” On October 25, 2009 more than 2,000 Syrah, Grenache, and Viognier vines were lost to an early hard freeze and saving the remainder of the vineyard became critical. However, the unpredictability of the weather hit again on May 1st when Lawrence Dunham Vineyards experienced one of the latest freeze ever experienced in the area. Two nights were spent in the vineyard watching the temperature and lighting fires to heat the air in an effort to save the grape buds.

The first half of July was unusually dry with very little monsoon weather action. However the second half of July the monsoon activity brought three inches of rain. The Petite Sirah “fruit set” was very good enabling us to “green harvest” or remove some of the grape clusters, which concentrate the fruit flavor of the remaining clusters.

Veraison, when the coloring of the grapes occurs as they enter the ripening phase, began in the Lawrence Dunham Vineyards in mid-August. The ripening phase will differ depending on the amount of light and heat, which are additional weather variable. The Viognier similar to other white wine berries take on a yellowish tinge while red berries such as the Syrah, Grenache, and Petite Sirah turn reddish-blue. When a certain level of sugar is reached in the berry it triggers veraison. Since sugar is produced in the leaves and then stored in the fruit, the more light and heat the leaves receive, at this stage in the growing cycle, the higher the level of sugar stored in the grapes.

From veraison to harvest, the real skill of the vineyard manager come into play as the weather is closely monitored. In August 2010 alone, the Lawrence Dunham Vineyards received over ten inches of rain, a great deal more than the typical rainfall allowing us to reduce the irrigated water application.

The harvest is the culmination of the grape growing season and the transition to the winemaking process is the most critical point. Only through carefully planned picking is it possible to bring the grapes into the winery without

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losing some of the perfection the vineyard produced. It is crucial that the grapes reach the winery quickly and without damage.

As perfect weather through July and August increased the sugar levels close monitoring of the brix level began. The Petite Sirah was picked at 27 degrees brix. The Grenache was picked at 25 degrees brix and Viognier was picked on August 26th at 21.5 degrees brix.

With all the challenges, the 2010 harvest was bountiful at Lawrence Dunham Vineyards. Approximately 3.1 tons per acre of Petite Sirah were harvested. Weather was kind at key points in the grape growing process at this one vineyard, while fingers are still crossed as other viticulture regions are still waiting to harvest. Time will tell if the journey from the vine to the wine exceeds the winemaker's expectations. But one thing for certain, the quality of the wine produced was heavily influenced on the unpredictable weather changes that occurred along the journey from the grape to the glass.

Lawrence Dunham Vineyards creates hand-crafted Rhone-varietal wines that reflect its unique Southeastern Arizona environment. Our philosophy of winemaking is to choose the right location, select the perfect grape varieties, meticulously care for the vineyard---and then let nature work its magic. Our wines let the fruit speak for itself. The 5000' elevation provides warm days, cool nights, mountain breezes, and four-season climate essential for quality wine production. The 2010 harvest is the first one being fully processed at the Lawrence Dunham Vineyards winery.

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