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Adapt to survive

IAM, BY NATURE, AN OPTIMIST, particularly when it comes to man's ability to invent, explore and adapt. So if, regardless of the cause, global (not regional) warming does result in broad-based temperature increases of 1.5°C to 4°C by 2050, what are the practical implications for Australia's grape growers and winemakers?

Vignerons are actively choosing from a range of options. In no particular order of importance, first up is picking at lower sugar levels, paradoxically making more elegant wines. Next is trialling varieties from the south of Italy and other arid, hot climates. This is one of Brian Walsh's suggestions in his paper that I mentioned last week.

Next, in the southern hemisphere, north-facing slopes have always been favoured on the basis that the sites in any given region that ripen the grapes first are the best. If the climate warms, an obvious response is to move to south-facing

Continuing lower rainfall would facilitate organic viticulture and biodynamic practices

slopes, replanting northerly slopes to later-ripening varieties previously unsuited to the region.

A less drastic response is to heavily mulch the soil under the vines with straw (Henschke is a prime example) to minimise evaporation, and simultaneously build the microbial population in that soil. This also operates to moderate the temperature within the canopy on hot days.

The outlook for weather patterns in South East Australia is for continuing lower rainfall. In a water-starved continent that is not a good thing. But it facilitates organic viticulture (which sharply reduces the need for fungicide and insecticide sprays) and biodynamic practices. Equally beneficial is the ability to keep a relatively dense canopy (to protect the grapes from sunburn) with a much-reduced risk of mildew.

Assuming the need for irrigation will increase, underground dripper lines will replace sprays or above-ground drippers. Permanent, high clearance netting is predominantly used by orchardists, but Robert Channon Wines in the Granite Belt, Phillip Island Wines, and part of the Mount Langi Ghiran vineyard, have permanent high-span netting. The rationale for those vineyards was variously predator and wind protection; appropriate shade cloth would provide those benefits while also reducing ambient temperatures and slowing ripening.



2008 MAVERICK WINES TWINS BAROSSA SHIRAZ

The Barossa Valley has an MJT (Mean January Temperature) of 21.4°C and a Heat Degree Day (HDD) of 1710. Its record heatwave from March 3 to 17, with temperatures above 35°C, was just that: a record. Yet the Barossa produced many high quality shirazes, many harvested before March 3. Deep crimson; ripe blackberry and plum fruit on the bouquet, the medium to full-bodied palate showing very good restraint; likely picked before the heatwave; the finish is full of character. 14% alc/vol; screwcap

Rating: 94 points **Drink:** to 2023 **Price:** \$27



2008 MOUNT LANGI GHIRAN VINEYARDS LANGI SHIRAZ

The Grampians has an MJT of 20.2°C and an HDD of 1460, reflecting its continental climate in summer – warm days and cold nights. This wine sits comfortably alongside the best of the Northern Rhône Valley. It has a fragrant, almost floral bouquet, its multi-spice and cracked pepper overtones setting the scene for its elegant, medium-bodied palate, with blackberry and a touch of raspberry fruit at its core. 14.5% alc/vol; screwcap

Rating: 96 points **Drink:** to 2023

Price: NA (it isn't released until next year)



2007 TYRRELL'S SINGLE VINEYARD OLD PATCH 1867 HUNTER SHIRAZ

The Hunter Valley has an MJT of 22.7°C and an HDD of 2070. The '07 vintage was an outstanding one, with dozens of wines rated 94 points and above. This has vibrant colour; bright red and blue fruit bouquet with lots of spice and a seriously engaging mineral core; medium-bodied with silky tannins and vibrant acidity; the focus, poise and length are admirable. A deliberate move to earlier picking has resulted in a wine with the elegance normally found in cool-climate shiraz. 13.5% alc/vol; screwcap

Rating: 96 points **Drink:** to 2020 **Price:** \$100