

FROM CAMEL VALLEY VINEYARD

As the Autumn sun sits lower in the sky and shadows lengthen, so the vinegrower's year draws to a close. The vines are showing little new growth, and the tops and sides have been trimmed to keep the air flowing through the foliage to reduce any risk of disease. The earliest ripening varieties have been netted against birds, and helium filled balloons are flying above the vineyards to protect the rest. The kite we are using for the first time this year is used to scare birds on airfields and prevent bird strikes on aircraft engines, and so far seem to work well for us. On the rare occasions when the kite is grounded due to lack of wind we see plenty of birds flying about, but none when it is airborne.

Leaves have been removed from around the grapes to expose them to maximise sunshine, and the weeds beneath have been mowed and cut back to make life easier for the pickers during harvest. The last treatments have been sprayed on to keep mildew and rot at bay, and grapes must be checked on a daily basis for ripening. Pickers must be identified and contacted to check on availability for the harvest. The final task for the vinegrower is picking.

However the year is just beginning for the winemaker. Tanks must be emptied of wine from the previous vintage to make space for this year's juice and then cleaned and put in position. The winery walls, floors and ceilings must be thoroughly cleaned to avoid any contamination when the grapes come in, pipes and picking boxes must be sorted and cleaned. The crusher and press have been wheeled out and cleaned and checked to see they are in good running order – broken equipment is a potential disaster during harvest.

Plans must be drawn up on which grapes will ripen first and the potential quantity of each variety so the best use can be made of the available tanks – always remembering that there will need to be spare capacity for racking. Yeasts must be ordered in good time, as it's no good having a tank full of juice with no yeast to ferment it. Adverts must be placed within winemaking circles for additional staff to work for the vintage, and dates and accommodation will need to be organised.

The whole thing must be planned like a military campaign, and nothing must detract from the plans, not even the winemaker's own wedding! Sam will marry the lovely Kathryn Richards from Wadebridge on 5th September, with just enough time to enjoy a honeymoon before getting down to the business of vinifying 200 tonnes of grapes at the end of the month. Of course a selection of his own wines will be served at the reception, where Kathryn, a girl who knew nothing about wine when she met Sam but certainly knows what she likes now, will enjoy her very favourite wine – Camel Valley Bacchus 2007.