

## 2023 Season overview

December is the time to reflect on the twelve months we've just seen. In winemaking, reflections on the last year are always tied up with the history of previous years, and the promise and optimism of the year to come. It can bring up some complicated feelings!

Here at WillowsAwake (and throughout greater New England) 2023 was a season marked by challenges and resilience. Our vines were put to the test, with weather and climate-related wrenches thrown at us throughout the year. In combination with big shifts happening simultaneously in the winery, we had our work cut out for us. With all the change and struggle that we've seen this season, I am even more grateful for the unique and expressive wines which we have resting in tank now.

For me, the year started in November 2022, when I joined the team here at WillowsAwake. I jumped in, determined to see the vineyard built up to its full potential as quickly as possible. With heavy focus on vine rehab and trunk establishment through the winter, we ultimately brought an additional 3 acres of vines up onto the training stakes and trellis wires before the growing season began. Successful changes made in vine structure are rarely reaped in the first season, but the time we invested this year will have big impacts on our yields for 2024 and well beyond.

During the growing season, difficult lessons were learned when we saw a hard freeze come through just days after our earliest varieties had pushed buds in May. Late spring freezes are a major risk factor for growing grapes in cool and cold climates, so when it happens it's not exactly a total surprise -- but we've been lucky in New England in recent memory, and at a 22.4F low there was really nothing we could have done to prepare. The damage was devastating, killing the primary shoots of most of our Itasca block. The freeze event was followed by one of the coolest and rainiest Junes on record, affecting everything from fruit development to disease pressure. These two events reduced yields and contracted an already-short growing season for our vines.

With persistence, hard work, and a heavy dose of luck, our vines recovered and managed to set and ripen only a slightly reduced crop. In late September, with the helping hands of many dedicated family and friends, we harvested one of our largest-to-date crops from our Itasca block, destined for the 2023 Temerity estate wine.

On the winery side, the year saw an official transition into our large winery building, the introduction of several pieces of commercial scale winemaking equipment, and the first vintage fully fermented in the new space. This shift has afforded us both the physical and mental space to spread out and explore new directions with our winemaking, and I've personally enjoyed the chance to get creative with our resources. We've got a few fun things in tank that I'm very excited to introduce in the spring, and I am filled with optimism for where we can grow in the future.

It's difficult to reflect on a full year and take away a singular message for everything that's happened. For me, I think this year has been about building, for now and for the future:

Building on the structure and integrity of our vines, which will soon be entering their seventh growing season. Vines hold all their history below the surface in their expansive root systems, and with each vintage we have the chance to shape that history by our farming choices.

Building our community, with friends, customers, and colleagues. We're passionate about spreading the news of grape growing and winemaking here in Maine, and it's been so rewarding to share our wines and our continuing story with all of you.

And most of all, building atop the foundation of Tony and Brenda's dream of a family-run estate winery in central Maine. Their dedication to making this dream happen has put all the pieces in place for the success we saw at WillowsAwake this year, and all the hope and optimism that we have for the years to come. I can't wait to see what 2024 will bring, and I look forward to sharing that joy with you.

Thanks so much for reading.

Wishing you a joyous season, and a very happy New Year.

Lindsay

Winemaker / Vine wrangler