



Klein Constantia Harvest 2009- The BIG one

Winter rains arrived late in 2008 delaying the onset of vine dormancy and the plant's cycle for the oncoming season. When the rain finally did fall, it made up for the delay in terms of volume bringing the annual rainfall figure up to 2000mm. Cool, wet conditions well into August resulted in a delayed budburst and summer only really arrived towards the end of December.

In an effort to drain excessive soil water and so reduce vine vigour we decided to allow weed growth in the vineyard this year. Not pretty, but an effective strategy. The resultant reduction of plant vigour allows more sunlight into the leaf canopy thereby initiating the formation of berries for the following harvest. Aside from indirectly reducing vigour in the vines, the weeds use up a fair amount

of moisture from the upper soil layer thereby reducing humidity and incidence of botrytis rot, so not only do we avoid using herbicides but fungicides too.



Weeds: we're learning to love them.

The downside to our new biological approach in the vineyard was that when the hot and dry weather arrived towards the end of February, the weeds were not able to be killed by spraying, and so continued to compete for soil water with the vines, but thanks to carefully timed applications of water, the vines were able to function right through to harvest.

Whilst late spring and early summer were essentially cool months, we experienced very warm temperature spikes in late February and early March. (The rainfall figures since January are a fraction of the long term average.). The effect will be seen mainly on the white wines which seem to be showing very rich, full bodied characters, with wonderfully low pHs and excellent acidity.

Another feature of the dry, warm ripening phase was the exceptional health of all the fruit coming into the cellar this year. In a normal year we lose approximately 5-10% of the fruit to either botrytis or sour rot, but this year I think I might have seen a handful of rotten berries the entire season. Wonderful!



Garden acraea butterfly which is common to the peninsula.

In the cellar this year we have been fortunate to have a wonderfully eclectic team of winemakers. Reginald van Wyk is the resident stalwart and junior member of the team. His weekends are generally spent representing our provincial and national judo team or training for the Two Oceans and Comrades marathons. He can polish off a box of rusks a day, no problems.

From California we were visited by Jessica Tarcy who assists in the production of some of Napa's most sought after wines. She did not leave before making a giant pot of Gumbo and her mom's award-winning kiwi fruit bread pudding. We waited until almost midnight to tuck in, but it was worth the wait! From Ribeira del Douro come Francisco Barona and Beatriz Rodero – both Bordeaux trained oenologists who seamlessly combine theoretical knowledge with an amazing appetite for physical work. We've had a few memorable Paella's with them so far, but according to Francisco (or Paco as we call him) the best is yet to come. Local flavour has been provided by recently graduated Beyers Oosthuizen (who as a paediatrician, did locums in Holland to pay his way through Elsenburg College), and the irrepressibly cheerful and solid Matt Day.



A Silver tree (Leucodendron argenta) growing on the contour road above the Riesline block.

A new management structure in the vineyard sees Stiaan Cloete's appointment as viticulturist and Floricius Beukes as farm manager. Both have spent two year stints working in the winery, so understand the importance of each decision taken in the vineyard. Their use of precision viticultural methods such as infra-red photography to demarcate areas of similar ripeness within blocks at the time of harvest has been instrumental in maintaining the style and quality of our wines.



Vineyard aerobics

Harvest being the intense period that it is, having a team of such fantastic winemakers and vineyard specialists working in concert heightens the experience somewhat. 2009 will be remembered for more than just the great quality fruit.

A sneak preview of this year's efforts

MCC: 100% Chardonnay. Components in both barrel and tank at the moment. Acidity is fine and minerally with desirably neutral character. Already showing very good structure and a minerally backbone.



Chardonnay grapes ready for crushing

Chardonnay: Due to our preference for sauvignon blanc in the replanting program, chardonnay does not occupy as much vineyard land as it once did. That said, we remain focused on making a fresh, yet complex style of chardonnay, and this year the date of harvest was perfectly timed. Precisely cordoned sections of the various chardonnay blocks were harvested and whole bunch-pressed. Fermentation took place in approximately half barrel and half tank. So far the wine shows elegance and delicate floral aromas, but most importantly fine acidity and a really long, complex finish. We have inoculated the barrel components for malolactic fermentation, but not the tank fermented component as we want to retain its vibrant, fresh character.

Sauvignon blanc: From our range of different vineyard sites at Klein Constantia we have such a spread of sauvignon blanc styles in the cellar this year. From piercingly mineral, austere (the Perdeblokke's current

'phase'), intensely green components right through to robust, mouth filling tropical fruit bombs. If I had three words to describe the personality of this year's sauvignon blanc it would have to be.....rich, complex, powerful.

Semillon: The best I have seen at Klein Constantia to date. We actually managed to pick it ripe this year! Often we are forced to harvest it a little earlier than I would prefer due to the onset of botrytis rot. It is such a soft-skinned berry that it is very susceptible to rot. This year we were able to watch it turn from green to beautifully golden, and even lightly rose coloured on the best bunches. Needless to say that Mme Marlbrook this year will have a healthy dose of rich, succulent semillon providing the weight of the blend.



Beautifully ripe, healthy Semillon grapes

Riesling: Benefited from the dry conditions, so a very healthy crop. I always find it hard to predict what will happen with this variety as it matures in tank and in barrel. At the moment we have curious aromas of white pepper and coriander mingled with litchis. Very exotic....most importantly though is the acid backbone of this wine. I believe it's going to hold together very well and will benefit from cellaring in order to reveal its true potential.

Merlot: Aye Caramba! Merlot in the flesh, not just on paper this year. The wine has great colour, body and firm, mouth-coating tannins. If it will just go through malolactic fermentation now so that we can baby it into barrels I will be a lot more relaxed.

Cabernet Sauvignon: Very exciting. Classic structure, fine tannins, bold, ripe fruit profile. Most of the fermentations lasted 3 weeks, so plenty of maceration on skins and nice slow evolution of fruit tannins.

***Malbec:** For its second vintage, this is showing a lot of promise. Great colour, wonderfully spicy aromas and very good acidity and tannin structure.

***Petit Verdot:** Also second crop, and equally impressive. This is just finishing off its fermentation so perhaps a little premature to give it a verdict.

* At present these two varieties account for less than 5% of our vine plantings and whilst their wines look promising, the plan is not to bottle them as separate varietal wines, but rather to include them as components of the Marlbrook blend.



Muscat de Frontignan for Vin de Constance: After harvesting almost four tons of raisins berry by berry, our sorting table arrived and allowed us to sort in a day what had taken a team of 20 pickers approximately 5 days to collect. I think they prefer the relative luxury of sorting raisins in the coolness of the cellar, whilst listening to music to hand-picking individual berries out in the vineyard....The crop is a little smaller this year, perhaps due to the drier season, but I am happy with the level of acidity and the wines fermenting in

barrel are showing expressive muscat aromas with high concentrations of pithy tannins which bode well for the wine's further evolution in barrel.



Raisined Muscat de Frontignan grapes on the day of harvest.



After hand picking individual raisins, the remaining bunches are picked.

KC range: Now that the new cellar at Anwilka has been built they are able to process more of their own grapes, and so have had to enter the 'game' of grape purchasing. Our findings surprised us more than a little in that we managed to secure top grade grapes from several leading producers, as well as some very promising new vineyards. It seems that there are a lot of producers out there with good fruit to sell, which translates into the wonderful value we aim for in this range.



KC Range

Throughout vintage the global recession has been part of our daily discussions. One wonders how it is going to affect the sales of our own wines. In a way I feel that this is going to be a true test for the strength of the Klein Constantia brand and the distribution channels through which we sell. I have to mention though, the resultant decrease in numbers of foreign trade guests this year gave me more time to spend in the cellar (where I should be) making wine, although I do miss the lunches! I took childish delight in the daily monitoring of fermentations, getting my hands dirty again during pumprovers and, best of all, driving the tractor and trailer of skins to the composting area. A chance to get out in the vineyards, to cast an eye on the grazing

cows, our majestic mountain and to share passing ripostes with the vineyard workers, those are the great joys of harvest.

Adam Mason
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