



Klein Constantia 2010- Small Yields, Big Quality

Vintage 2010 has been an unbelievable learning curve. From the late rains in 2009, wind during flowering in October and the double rainfall in November through to the incredibly hot, dry month of February, we knew we were going to be tested. Coupled with our ongoing changes towards more sustainable viticultural practices (i.e. no herbicides, less pesticides and fungicides, full cover cropping, no-till and no chemical fertilizers) these conditions resulted in a magnificently small crop and a harvest that just flew by.

Despite the inconvenience to the farm resulting from such a small crop, there are several positives that can be drawn from the situation, most importantly an increased understanding of our soils and individual vineyard blocks. Their requirements in terms of nutrients and whether or not they are in a state of balance, is now without question known to us, whereas previously it was uncertain. This enables us to tailor specific viticultural practices for individual blocks in the future.

We look to 2011 with a sense of excitement, and as I write this are in the throes of implementing strategies to improve next year's yields whilst maintaining the high level of quality which has been a feature of this year's crop.

KC RANGE (our second label made from bought in grapes).

KC Sauvignon Blanc

Long hours of travelling dusty back roads has paid dividends with this year's KC blend. From four very different but equally exciting vineyards in the Hemel and Aarde Valley, Bot River, and Elgin plateau comes a firm, juicy, classic Sauvignon. With aromas driven by zesty citrus notes, and a full, mouth-watering palate this is a wonderful example of how multi-layered Sauvignon Blanc can be.



Peter Davison, one of the growers from whom we purchase Sauvignon Blanc for the KC brand.



KC Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot

It is hard to believe that we are now in the 8th year of production of this blend, and every year I like to think we refine it somewhat. For the last three years we have sourced the Merlot component from a very promising vineyard on the Elgin plateau which benefits from the high altitude and later harvesting date mainly as a result of cooler night time temperatures. Its vibrant fruit and fresh acidity complements the warmer Helderberg Cabernet Sauvignon component of the blend.

KC Cab/Merlot...only the best!

KLEIN CONSTANTIA ESTATE RANGE

Klein Constantia Sauvignon Blanc

The small crop made amends with wonderfully healthy acid levels, low juice pH and fruit maturity at a low balling which has resulted in a textured, aromatic Sauvignon Blanc with a moderate alcohol level of 13,5%.

What impressed me most about this year's fruit was its amazing mineral character. This is the direction in which I would like to see our wines proceeding. Not all showy aromas, but real palate depth and complexity. This wine is a sleeper, and will be one to set down for a few years in order to savour its true potential.



Perdeblokke Sauvignon Blanc grapes arriving at the weighbridge



Young vines growing at 350m altitude on the Klein Constantia vineyards

Chardonnay

Over the last few years we have been in the process of phasing out Chardonnay plantings in favour of Sauvignon Blanc.

Given the slightly warmer 2009 winter and poor dormancy, our remaining Chardonnay vineyards did not produce much crop this harvest. With the success we've enjoyed from our Klein Constantia Brut MCC, we have taken the decision to use what little Chardonnay produced from now on for this express purpose. Partially barrel fermented, then matured for almost a year on its lees, it is a classically styled bubbly with the emphasis on richness and palate weight. For those who enjoy a serious style of MCC.

Riesling

A tiny crop this year due, in part, to renovations of the ageing Riesling vineyard.

The 2010 Riesling was harvested at just below 20 balling, and fermented just shy of dryness. With lovely balance between the fruit, acid and sugar components, this wine should evolve quite slowly.

Whilst this is taking place, we are bringing a new vineyard of Riesling into production. Situated below the viewing deck of the top dam, Block 343 has a south easterly aspect and a row direction running roughly East/West in order to keep the sun running overhead the vine rows. Klein Constantia viticulturist Stiaan Cloete has used some very sophisticated technology to map the soil types of this block, and for the first time that I know of we have not only different rootstocks matched to the different soil types within the block, but different plant spacings too. The result should be a very homogenous, balanced vineyard.

Semillon

Very little crop this year, but as with 2009, we are now harvesting fully ripe Semillon. Over the last few years we have been steadily moving in this direction, but it has been a slow road. Unripe Semillon in cooler areas such as Constantia gives really green, herbaceous characters. We prefer the contribution to our wines that a fully ripe, slightly oily, but beautifully textured Semillon can make. As with previous years, a riper portion of the Semillon vineyard is set aside for production of the Mme Marlbrook, whilst the remainder is vinified and incorporated into the Klein Constantia Sauvignon Blanc blend, providing added longevity and complexity.

Reds

I have grouped these all together simply for the reason that we only produce two red wines for now, the **Marlbrook** (which is a blend of the Bordeaux 5) and the **Cabernet Sauvignon**. Our overriding ambition at this stage is to achieve a degree of ripeness in our red vineyards exclusive of green, vegetal aromas, but avoiding the consequence of high alcohol. This is a bit of a conundrum, as even with our relatively cool climate, we can easily achieve alcohol levels of over 15% whilst waiting for these unripe characters to abate.

More attention to irrigation scheduling, balancing crop load and improved sunlight exposure of berries has resulted in very attractive reds this year. As luck would have it, one of the features of the 2010 vintage throughout the industry has been riper flavours at lower balling for most wine types.



Basket press and drainage mats are handy for small, top quality parcels of reds.

Note: I find the use of various descriptors for red wines quite interesting. Greenness in red wines is generally negative, and terms such as weedy, thin, mean, vegetal, green pepper (capsicum, bell pepper) and leafy are commonly used to describe this style of wine. On the other hand, terms such as menthol, minty, mineral, herbaceous and austere seem to denote characteristics not necessarily unripe, but certainly not negative if found to be in balance in the wine, and often allude to an attempt to find that fine line between ripeness and moderate alcohol levels.

Vin de Constance

The real tragedy of this vintage has been the appearance in our Muscat de Frontignan vineyard of a devastating disease called Bacterial blight. Caused by the pathogen *Xylophilus ampelinus*, it affects the vascular tissue of the plant and results in necrosis of the shoots and bunch stems as well as drying out of the leaves. It originates from plant material that has not been correctly heat treated at the nursery before dispatch, and can lie dormant in the plant for many years before conditions giving rise to its growth prevail. 2010 presented these conditions which include sustained high humidity in the growing season (October to January) and wind damage in the early growing phase. We have been forced to revisit our vineyard sanitation practices as the principal vector responsible for the spread of this bacteria is pruning secateurs. Lastly, and possibly most importantly, Muscat type varieties are particularly susceptible to the bacteria, and historically Constantia with its moisture laden climate has been affected by outbreaks of the disease. Essentially the affected vines need to be removed and destroyed in order to arrest its spread.



The young MdF bushvines at the entrance to Klein Constantia.

Quite fortuitously we planted a new Muscat de Frontignan bushvine vineyard at the entrance to the farm last year, and this should be in production by 2012 so continuity of Vin de Constance is not under threat.



Tramping hand-picked MdF raisins. One person can pick up to 10Kg a day, yielding 1litre of concentrated juice. This is then used as a component of the Vin de Constance.

The 2010 Vin de Constance harvest, whilst small, has provided something very special. Super acidity, good extract of dry tannins, and a solid residual sugar in the final wine of close to 140g/l. For the first time this year we experimented with fermentation of the ripe bunches in open top wooden fermenters (called Cuvons). I guess this is as close to the original method of production as it gets, besides the addition of ox blood as a fining agent which I thought would be best left as a footnote in Cloete's 18th century almanac.

Written by Adam Mason, Klein Constantia winemaker.