

A unique vintage

BY MEGAN VAN DER MERWE

The 2022 vintage would be the product of inputs made during the 2020 winter season. Limited by the all-sobering prohibition on the sale of alcohol in South Africa during that time, the parent season saw us make some tough decisions in the vineyards to minimize costs.

Harvest 2022 started with the first pick at Beau Constantia on 24 February and came to a close with the last red press on 5 May. At current the white wines have been topped and sulphured and the malolactic fermentations are still slowly ticking away on the reds. Our soils have been fed and sown, and as they come alive with germinating seedlings we finally have the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on the past season as a whole.



Quick facts

- WE PICKED OUR FIRST WHITE GRAPES ON 24 FEBRUARY, EXACTLY A WEEK LATER THAN THE PRIOR YEAR.
- OUR BLANC DE NOIR PICK HAPPENED ON 16 MARCH, TWO WEEKS LATER THAN THE PRIOR YEAR.
- FIRST RED (MALBEC B5/4) PICK WAS ON 22 MARCH, 4 DAYS LATER THAN THE SAME BLOCK'S PICKING DAY IN 2021.
- LAST GRAPES (PETIT VERDOT) WERE PICKED ON 14 APRIL 2022 – THE SAME CALENDAR DAY FOR THE LAST PICK (OF THE SAME BLOCK) OF THE 2021 SEASON. THE 2022 PICK WAS SLIGHTLY RIPER THAN THE 2021 PICK, SHOWING JUST HOW SLOWLY THE SEASON STARTED AND HOW QUICKLY IT PICKED UP PACE TOWARDS THE END.
- THE FINAL PRESS HAPPENED ON 5 MAY 2022, CONCLUDING THE SEASON.



The winter leading up to the 2022 harvest was warmer than usual, though the season provided sufficient cold units and rainfall to fill soil reserves. August temperatures were far cooler than the last five seasons and we entered Spring on the back of an intense cold front. On 28 August Table Mountain even received some snow. These wet, cold soil conditions led to bud break being around 10 days late. Further supported by short internodal lengths, the initial growth throughout September was slow. A warmer October accelerated growth and by the time of flowering (end October to mid-November) reproductive growth was only around 5 days behind. Both October and November brought bucketloads of rain at nearly 60mm each, scattered, with a hail storm at the end of October.



The combination of rain and heat in October and November led to increased vegetative growth and resultant increased humidity within the canopy – not ideal for the flowering microclimate. This meant increased suckering (and resultant labour expenses) to allow for air movement as well as better penetration of fungicidal sprays in the bunch zone. The increased water and heat also meant a strenuous management plan for the vineyard floor in terms of eradicating competing weeds. Early-flowering varieties managed to escape the wrath of November’s gale force winds, but later flowering varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon showed inadequate berry set. December brought high levels of humidity, and by that stage Downey mildew had caused industry-wide panic. We managed to escape this serious disease by applying an incredibly strict spray program, with our team during some parts of the season spraying every week.

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Come January (veraison) we experienced rolling heatwaves with specific severity for the period 21-23 January. Our mesoclimate, which is more Oceanic than Mediterranean, managed to provide us with a slight buffering capacity, but it was still far warmer than for that same period in prior years. We also experienced strangely inconsistent cold spells breaking the various heat-cycles.

Vineyards are pretty drought tolerant plants. They can withstand very dry seasons and still produce quality grapes, but with a heat wave the vines experience increased moisture loss through perspiration. Vineyards can in serious circumstances (such as this season) lose more water through perspiration than they can absorb back through their roots. To survive, the vine then starts to draw water from the grapes, which indirectly affects the acidity of the grapes as well as their flavour profile. Something to expect from this season could therefore be wines that are perceived as more “plush”.



We experienced scattered showers through March and April – our peak harvest intake period. With limitations to the class of spray chemicals available to us so close to picking (due to potential issues with fermentation kinetics) we again had to utilize more hands in canopy management along with the permitted sprays.

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