Le Riche

STELLENBOSCH | SOUTH AFRICA

HARVEST REPORT 2018

The year of the drought…

The winter of 2017 was late and for the third year running we had more than 30% less rain than the 15 year average. Our cover crops struggled to grow, the dams were not able to fill, and our water allocations were reduced to 50% for the season. A nervous energy reigned within Stellenbosch about the coming vintage as water restrictions ravished the Cape Town community.

The growing season kicked off with a warm spring and budding commencing late September, as usual. October had above average rainfall, which was great for the soil moisture. This, combined with the thunderstorms adding nitrogen to the soil, gave rise to fast, uneven shoot growth. Shoot removal was essential to ensure reduced water usage and bring the vines into balance through November.

Warms days with cool nights were prevalent throughout December. This, coupled with open canopies after suckering, helped to develop the precursors for exceptional colour and flavour development and started to turn the vintage quality forecast. With careful supplementary irrigation over the veraison period, the bunches changed colour in reasonable evenness.

Only a few short heat spikes in January and February, combined with cool evenings allowed for very little sun damage. A great thunderstorm delivered 20mm of rain two weeks before harvest, saving the dry vines and extended the ripening period by several days.

We picked our Cabernets from the 19th of February until the 22nd of March. The longer picking season allowed ample time for slow extraction in the winery. This, coupled with smaller berries and bunches, gave rise to wines with great depth of colour, ripe, grippy tannins and good fruit complexity.

In general, 2018 was a very good vintage, but the detailed management of our vineyards and water was essential to ensure that we produced wines that matched our quality demands.

Christo le Riche

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Cellarmaster