



DURBANVILLE HILLS

wines shaped by the landscape

Dear friend,

We are already fully immersed in the harvest and I'm anxiously planning the flow of the white grapes from bin to tank. So much so, that I found myself including February 29 and 30 in my planning as well which is why you're only now receiving this month's news. Why I was keen on gaining extra time is because in March the stream of white grapes is joined by a parallel stream of red grapes. That complicates the planning slightly when it comes to allocating presses, pipes and tanks. Kind of reminds me somewhat of the warmer Agulhas current joining the cold Benguela current to produce a great confluence. The slight difference is that these currents have the wide big ocean to flow in, while our red and white streams have to be funnelled through the narrow entrance of the same cellar.

Friends, Romans, countrymen... Why is February so short?

The Romans obviously felt no sympathy for future New World winemakers when they placed the shortest month of the year right at the start of our harvest – and as far away as possible from their own. I'm digressing now and I know you want to know more about the harvest but let me just say this: Our troubles as winemakers started as far back as the 7th century BC when Numa Pompilius, the second of Rome's seven traditional kings, added January and February to the city's original lunar calendar. Even then February was shorter than the other months.

Six centuries later, Julius Caesar made his own changes to the calendar, this time linked to the sun's journey through the heavens. Did he do anything to restore February to some kind of respectability? No, he didn't. He kept it to 28 days and we have been stuck with it ever since.

Maybe there is after all some truth in Obelix's oft-repeated litany: "These Romans are crazy!"

A time of extremes

I hear that in neighbouring Stellenbosch, December was the warmest month in 48 years and that the average temperatures in October and November were also way above the long-term average. We experienced some of that heat as well, but the fresh south-easterly winds blowing off False Bay helped cool us down. The excellent rainfall we received this past winter saturated the soil so that the vines stood up extremely well to the heat while sucking away at the underground water reservoir. Coincidentally, in the last days of both November and December the winds changed from a breeze to almost a gale so that the trellised vines had to hang on to the wires for dear life, grateful for something to cling to. Any fungal spores intent on settling on the vines had themselves blown off to the north and are now probably residing somewhere in the vicinity of Dakar. Unlike what we experienced the preceding three months, there were few really hot days in February, generally considered the hottest month. The result of this cool weather has been slow initial ripening and a trickling start to the harvest.

Since the beginning of February, nervous farmers and winemakers alike have been keeping a close watch on the weather stations and websites as there were several unseasonal showers disrupting the flow of grapes coming in. If one station predicted rain we simply put our faith in another which promised clear skies. I have come to the conclusion that if you were to base your predictions on ten different websites and then took an average we wouldn't have any weather at all!

Rosé - bled, concocted or made?

Merlot for our popular Dry Rosé is being delivered to the cellar on a daily basis albeit a little bit later than in previous years. I remember so well when we made this wine for the first time and the volume of grapes was so small that it could be picked in one day – Valentine's Day as it turned out to be. It has been a favourite companion for that auspicious day ever since.

Proper rosé is made by selecting fruity red grapes with, in our case, lovely mulberry flavours. The grapes are crushed and left on the skins for a few hours until we are happy that enough colour has been extracted. Then it follows the same path as white wine.

However, there are also other ways of making rosé. The French make it through a process called "saignée" where they bleed off some of the juice with the sole purpose of changing the juice to skin ratio of what remains in the tank to produce a darker, more intensely coloured wine. The rosé produced is then simply a by-product.

Another way of making rosé – and I'm happy to say it is only allowed in certain countries – is to simply mix red and white wine. You will notice I say "mix", not "blend" for this silly concoction does not deserve to be described using a term which denotes one of the winemaker's highest skills. The end result is neither fish nor fowl. Rosé is quality wine type. It deserves better than to be made as an afterthought.

Sending the apple back up the tree

Isaac Newton would be baffled by the techniques used by wineries these days. Traditionally and then particularly in the case of aromatic varieties, settling takes place when the particles in the wine sink to the bottom because of gravity. Various flavours are still being extracted from these particles during this time – it's almost like a continuation of skin contact but on a very small scale. We allow settling for up to three days before sucking the clean juice off the top and sending it to a fermentation tank in a process known as racking.

As some varieties don't benefit from settling, we clean them as quickly as possible using a process known as flotation which turns Newton's theory on its head. Flotation is based on the tendency of dissolved gas to form bubbles that adhere to any suspended solids in the liquid. Turned to foam, the lees join the bubbles in their journey to the surface where they can either be skimmed off or the clean wine underneath can be racked out.

Getting used to new stuff

We have been steadily keeping up with the Joneses as far as cellar equipment is concerned. To achieve perfect fermentations we have installed automatic temperature control on most of our fermenters. The red-wine tanks have always been equipped in this way, while those for white wine were controlled by hand. The more open the valve, the faster the cold water rotates through the cooling jacket, the lower the temperature of the wine and the slower the rate of fermentation. Now we have temperature sensors inside the tanks monitoring the wine temperature. By comparing it to the desired temperature selected in the monitor it gradually opens or closes the valves. The challenge now is to remember to babysit the tanks which will only be fitted with the sensors in the next stage.

So, to whom shall we lift a glass on this occasion? Despite what I've said about them, I propose the weather watchers without whose timely predictions we could easily run into trouble!

Prost!

MARTIN MOORE

Cellar Master

Please visit our website on www.durbanvillehills.co.za

Latest News and Upcoming Events

All Things Green



Whether you're Irish or not, find something green to wear and celebrate **St Patrick's Day** with us. Join us for Irish folk and contemporary music, wine tasting, Irish inspired foods and entertainment for the kids.

Date: Sunday, 17 March

Time: 10.00 – 15.00

Cost: Entry is free. Wine tasting is R40 per person.

Chocolate and Wine



Satisfy your sweet tooth this Easter with a **chocolate and wine tasting**. The tasting includes five Durbanville Hills wines paired with an assortment of decadent chocolates. The cost is R60 per person and booking is advised for groups of eight people or more.

If you'd like to book contact Laura Carswell at ljacarswell@durbanvillehills.co.za or on 021 558 1300.

Olive Oil



We have produced our own olive oil! The **Durbanville Hills Extra Virgin Olive Oil** is harvested from a 6 ha olive grove at the Durbanville Hills cellar and is produced in partnership with award-winning olive oil producer and neighbour, Hillcrest. Proceeds go towards our Workers' Trust to fund projects aimed at improving the quality of life of our workers and their children on surrounding farms. The oil is natural and unrefined, rich and tangy, with a distinctive peppery aftertaste and is available from the cellar at R75 for 500 ml.