

Vintage 2013

“When it rains it pours”

Pre-harvest

As the quote suggests, the 2013 vintage was preceded by one of the wettest winters we have had in recent years. All Swartland vineyards need good soaking rains during the winter months to provide a solid platform for the vines to grow on and to cope with the sun and heat stress that will follow in summer. Without good rains the ground water reserves are quickly used up and early stress can be evident (as was the case for 2011 and 2012). This affects the immediate vintage in any number of ways and is obviously then what makes each vintage different. There is nothing better in the Swartland than the sound of rain coming down on your roof, we all needed a break after the previous dry winters.



View from the top of the Paardeberg to the Kasteelberg

The growing season was, more than ever due to the high ground water levels, about tackling the weeds in the vineyard at the right time. More water, more life. August, (generally when the vines start coming to life again) was the wettest month of the year. This timed with warmer weather was a perfect start for the sleepy vineyards. The vines did take some time to wake from their slumber which we were thankful for as this meant we had more time to combat weeds. All the vineyards are “cleaned” by hand and spades, or in Afrikaans “skoffeled” which is a lot of work and needs to be done at the right time, whilst the ground is still soft and one can work around the vine. In the middle

of the rows we work with ploughs/ discs but it is the work around the vines that needs extra attention.

We only sprayed our vineyards three times this year and managed to put down very little copper (one spray) with the rest of the sprays being sulphur. Disease pressure was very low and we are definitely now seeing the benefits of our change in farming practices five years ago. Our ultimate goal is to replace copper entirely, but these things take time and patience and careful observation of each individual vineyard site.

The heat stayed away until December when we had a few very warm days which were actually beneficial as this sped up the growing season a lot. It was looking like a “late” harvest for Swartland 2013 (which is never the case). After veráison we had some severe heat but unlike 2012 we had no sunburn which had reduced crops drastically. The fact that we had no sunburn was due to the earlier heat in December which helped harden the green berries and speed up ripening. The vines were able to cope very well with the warmer, drier conditions (we had 22 mm of rain from November 2012 – January 2013) due to the ground water levels being very high and thus stress was not an issue as in previous years. The vintage was looking very promising as the yields were up considerably from the previous two years and finally we could hope to make more than one barrel of wine, perhaps two.

A concern was that because the vines suddenly had enough water and energy to ripen more grapes than usual, there may be an issue of lower natural acidity. For some vineyards this was exactly the case. Our pHs are stable and low which is fantastic and another sign of the hard work being done in the vineyard, but the acidity levels are slightly lower than normal (nothing out of the ordinary and still what most people would consider on the high side!). These are balanced by healthy alcohols, 12 – 13%.

Harvest commenced on the 18th January and finished on the 18th February. All grapes are sorted by hand over a sorting table. Sorting is mainly for leaves and any under-ripe bunches as we rarely see any over ripe bunches. This makes sorting a lot easier and softer on the grapes as there is less handling involved. Having learnt from the previous few vintages and being slightly more intelligent because we are all one year older, we were able to do a lot more volume in the cellar. We have a simple view on vintage: when the grapes are ripe they need to be picked and this can be any day of the week. It just means everybody needs to be on the same page and taking a day off is what happens after vintage.

The Wines

Initially the 2013 vintage reminded us a lot of the 2010 vintage in the fact that they were both preceded by excellent winters and volumes were on a similar level. This meant, with the benefit of hindsight, that one had to be aware of higher alcohol levels. As was the case in 2010 where grapes appeared “perfect”, they in fact needed to be picked slightly before “perfect” to obtain that slight edge which makes interesting wine. It may not make sense reading this but gut feeling (gut feeling acquired over time through travelling and learning from those more experienced as well as observation of your site) is probably the single most important tool to have in the vineyard and cellar.

Each vineyard is treated individually when it comes into the cellar based on its strengths and weaknesses and then for which range it is destined for, LAM, Lammershoek or Cellar Foot. We cannot force a vineyard to do something it is not capable of to “create” a certain wine. Observation is the principal factor. For example, for the past three years the LAM Rose has come from two specific sites on the farm. These were chosen because the vineyards here are slightly more stressed, ripen a lot earlier and give a very high acidity, which is why we simply pick and press them, forming our 11% alcohol Rose.

But probably the best example is the difference between our LAM Syrah and Lammershoek Syrah. They are both fermented in nearly exactly the same way with a high percentage of whole bunches (60-70%) and both are aged in foudre, yet they are completely different. We have observed that the vineyards at the bottom of the hill (we are in a valley with height above sea level varying from 75-300m) are slightly more forgiving; the wine is more accessible and drinkable early on and the acidity is less pronounced and therefore goes into LAM. The vineyards for the Lammershoek Syrah are on the top of the hill and are slightly more stressed (due to the higher elevation and more silica in the soil). This gives elevated perfume notes and a more haunting acidity; we feel these vineyards are better suited to wines for ageing. It's that simple.



Syrah stems at pressing

Quality was exceptionally high this year and the majority of the vineyards had very little to no sunburn or over ripe bunches. All the whites were again whole bunch pressed

either in our small bag press or by foot in the basket presses. Reds were all fermented with some variation of whole bunches, from 20 – 100%.

There is a lot of talk these days with people saying they are using a higher proportion of stems, but does it really add something to the wine? We definitely think so and firmly believe that in a hot climate like the Swartland we need stems as they add another dimension to the taste and aromas of the wines. On those vineyards which traditionally give lower acidities, we generally add more whole bunches (stems) so as to lift the perception of acidity which carries through to the final bottled wine. A lot of people reserve whole bunches for the “top cuvees” only but we have found that it is often our more “forgiving” vineyards, like a lot of those parcels that go into the LAM wines, that receive a higher proportion of whole bunches, giving the wine the lift it needs.

An interesting experiment was done this year where we fermented a section of our Mourvedre vineyard 100% whole berries (no whole bunches) to see the difference, because we have always fermented it with 100% whole bunches. The results were quite remarkable, the lift on both nose and palate is missing on the wine that was destemmed, and it’s just not the same wine.

2013 saw a lot more of the wines (white and red) being aged in concrete, particularly for the LAM range where 70% is now in our large concrete tanks. We have also purchased 4 x 5000L wooden foudre (15+ years of age) and which will be used for ageing. The move away from 225L barrels is in its final steps and the large majority of the cellar is now 500L, 2000L and 5000L wooden vessels as well as our large 9500L concrete tanks.

Why larger wood and concrete? The differences are astounding. The same wine in 225L is a lot more accessible early on, the amount of oxygen uptake into the wine is much higher and the wines are just missing that edge we want the wines to have. We still use 225L barrels for our Rose and a portion of our Pinotage which is blended with the concrete portion; we also use the 225L barrels for our “Underwater Wine” where the size of the barrel doesn’t really matter because of the limited amount of oxygen uptake underwater.

As usual, we have been playing around with new wines for the Cellar Foot range. There will be a non-vintage skin-macerated white released in the future and very soon our 2012 petillant naturel. We increased the production in 2013 and these will be lying down in bottle for at least 18 months.



Chenin Blanc press juice



Riddling racks for the 2012 pet nat (Thanks Haute Cabriere)



2013 pet nat resting for the next 18 months or so

The Vineyards

Good news is that we have finally received our organic certification from SGS Europe; the whole farm is now fully certified including the olives and grazing land. This is good news for meat lovers as our herd of 45 cattle are now growing rapidly and a portion of

them will be sold to selected butchers who only deal with free range/ organic meat. It will be a sad day as these were the first cattle to arrive on the farm but we are now renewing the herd and so the cycle continues. The job the cattle are doing is invaluable for the vineyards, apart from the grazing during the winter months in the vineyards and returning the organic material via their systems to the earth, they generate a lot of manure every night in their stable to be mixed with our wood chippings which in turn create our own compost for the vineyards.



The cattle “kraal” where they are kept at night (build-up of manure and straw from one month evident)

In the past we used to make long 60-80m long rows, 2m high and 4m wide for our compost making. We would then cover the piles of manure/straw and wood chippings with UV resistant plastic after soaking the mixture with a healthy probiotic spray which

stimulates break down of plant material. This worked well for the first few months in winter but because of the harsh winds we get in summer, time and the enormous size of the compost heaps the plastic quickly tore and became useless.

We observed the many wheat and cattle farmers in our region who dig silage pits into the ground and then fill the pits with silage material and compact it by driving on top of it with tractors to remove all the air pockets from the material. They then cover it with a thick plastic and tyres making the surface of the pit flat. This action of compacting and covering keeps the silage from decomposing and keeps it dry over the winter months.

We have decided to do the opposite – we have made a large pit in the ground as you would for a normal silage pit and will fill it with all the wood chippings, reeds, straw and kraal manure that we have. We will then spray it with a probiotic mixture and this, together with contact with the natural moisture in the soil from underneath and the sides and the "sweating" action from on top where it is in contact with the plastic (to keep gases/ nutrients from escaping) make a far more manageable and practical compost heap.



New compost pit

The vines have recovered well from the two previously dry years and we decided not to sucker (shoot thinning/ removal) the vines. We believe the above ground shoots replicate the underground root system and we wanted to leave as many shoots/ leaves as possible so that energy reserves can be returned to the roots during the winter months. There is a tendency to "over sucker" which can have a negative impact on the

vigour of a plant, especially in our climate. Compost has been put back into the vineyards and worked in to the soils and a rich layer of cover crops have been planted to put back what has been taken out of the soils during the growing season.



Seed bed for cover crop

Something we have observed is the variety of natural plant species returning to our vineyards during the winter months, the more variety the better. The cattle help with this as their selective grazing in the vineyards in the winter months help suppress/promote certain plant species over another.



Worms

The 2013 Team

The 2013 Cellar and Vineyard teams can be compared to the movie *Apocalypse Now*, where winning a fight is a lot easier having less people that are prepared to go the extra distance than a lot more people who don't give as much.

Apart from the stalwarts Jurgen Gouws, who's "award winning", "two thumbs up", "a classic" Intellego wines are taking the world by storm, and Pedro Hendricks, a former cellar specialist who returned to his more familiar territory after some time spent tackling the vineyards, as chief assistant to Jurgen, we took a small contingent of two "foreigners". These were:

- A regular and basically part of the furniture, Matthias "Ninja/ Danger" Warnung from the Kamptal, Austria who is making his own fantastic natural wines from old Gruener Veltliner vineyards. He was invaluable as he has been coming to work at Lammershoek since 2010 and has done vintages at Matassa (Tom Lubbe) so he knows the ropes and did all those jobs no one really likes to do.
- Our first Aussie and from the Barossa, was Dave "hulk/ chest of drawers" Geyer who works with fantastic 100 year old Grenache vineyards with his brother, and will also be getting an education from Mr Lubbe this year. Dave loved lifting heavy things with a smile just because he could. He was also very well mannered and his language was impeccable.



Dave and Matthias getting to grips with West Coast bokkoms (fish biltong)

- The vineyard/harvest team comprised of our seasoned veterans and heartbeat of the farm, without which we would be lost. Harvest time has become an occasion to

look forward to every year for our staff, and Anna Kretzel who sits all day in the hot sun on the tractor managing the staff, really needs some sort of a medal.



Some of our team at last year's Christmas party at Ratanga Junction