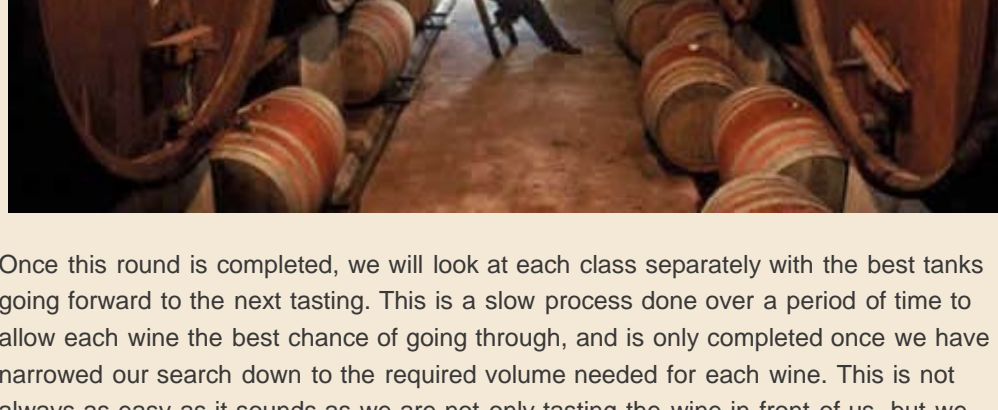


NEWSLETTER - SEPTEMBER 2013

A word from the cellar ...

Last time we wrote to you, our wines were just settling down after malolactic fermentation and we were starting to get a grasp on the quality of the 2013 vintage. Now all the wines have been racked off their gross lees and are "clean" and they are therefore much easier to evaluate. We (Marlize and I) have tasted through all the cultivars and tanks and have decided which wines we will be keeping back for our own label and which wines will be sold off in bulk. This decision on what to keep back is a process that we go through over numerous rounds of tasting, with fewer wines going through to each subsequent tasting. We will start off and taste all the wines in the cellar at one sitting. This will give us an idea of the general quality we have and also which cultivars have performed better. In our last newsletter I indicated that maybe the Shiraz as a class stood out. After our first round of tasting I can confirm that the Shiraz still stands out, but has been joined by both Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc. We are also very impressed with our niche cultivars, especially our Malbec and Petit Verdot wines. The only class where we found a few weaker or less inspiring wines was the Merlot class, but even here we are more than happy with our top tanks.



Once this round is completed, we will look at each class separately with the best tanks going forward to the next tasting. This is a slow process done over a period of time to allow each wine the best chance of going through, and is only completed once we have narrowed our search down to the required volume needed for each wine. This is not always as easy as it sounds as we are not only tasting the wine in front of us, but we have to consider its future potential and whether we can blend a few wines, whereas the end product will be better than the sum of the parts.

Once we have gone through all the cultivars and earmarked what we will be keeping, we then have to decide on how each will be matured until we are convinced it is ready for the final blending and bottling - the % new wood, how long must it be in barrel for, how often the wine needs to be racked, etc.

We have now just about finalised these decisions and have implemented most of them already. All that remains is to keep an eye on their progress while they slowly gain in complexity as they mature in (mostly) French barrels over the next 18 or so months.

John Faure - Cellarmaster

Winter at Vergenoegd

Pruning began in earnest on the 28th of June. We started off with a 25-year-old block of Cabernet Sauvignon that is technically at the end of its lifetime. We used a pruning method that allows for long bearers, more appropriately called "mandjievelg" by the workers. This method of pruning increases the yield, but puts great strain on the vines - almost like giving birth to sextuplets! Therefore we have to give extra loving care to these vines in the form of irrigation in summer, as well as weed control.

As the old saying goes, pruning should be done under a new moon because a full moon would pull the sap high in the vine where it would be lost if the shoot was cut. In our case it is not altogether possible, because you cannot prune 66 hectares in only a month! With all the rain we have had (185mm since end of June and still falling), there were also quite a few days that the pruning came to a complete standstill (you cannot prune in the rain as neither pruners nor vines benefit from this) and productivity also comes to a standstill.

A few times during August, the low-lying sections of the farm alongside the Eerste River, were flooded. This is often an annual event occurring when excessive rain falling in the catchment area, Stellenbosch mountains, floods the lower reaches of the Eerste River.

The result is that the vines in that area are completely submerged or just manage to poke their newly pruned heads above the water. If you need to check on them, or just to be adventurous, you need a canoe and paddles! As long as this happens during the vines dormant stage (winter) there is no lasting damage and in fact they actually benefit from the rich silt deposits left behind after the water recedes.

On a different note: I had the opportunity to do a Snake Handling Course in early August. Now, I have to confess that I used to be horrendously scared of snakes, bordering on a phobia. I decided to do this course to get rid of that said "phobia", so off I went on a Saturday morning to the Driftsands Environmental Centre, only to realise it is not just slides and lectures, but actual live snakes that you have to identify and handle. During the "handling" you start with a rope, and pretend it is a snake that you're handling. Then they bring out a mole snake, after that a Cape Cobra, boomslang and last but not least, a puffadder. These were not tame snakes - on the contrary, they get quite aggravated with everyone handling them.

I realised that snakes are very misunderstood creatures, but altogether fascinating! Each one has almost got its own personality - believe it or not!

Here on Vergenoegd we have quite a lot of snakes, and they often go where they are not supposed to, for example in the cellar where it is nice and cool. Now, with my newfound knowledge I can safely take the snake out of harm's way and avoid having to deal with a bunch of hysterical, screaming cellar workers (that used to include myself as well). There is after all no need to kill them, as they are very beneficial to us in nature.

Marlize Jacobs - winemaker/viticulturist



Duck Tales

Vergenoegd is known for its 600 to 800 strong Indian Runner duck flock that maintains pest control in the 66 hectares of vineyard on the Estate. This is a tough job for anyone but especially for a very skinny looking duck! Every year John Faure goes through the process of hatching about 400 ducklings in incubators and hand raising them until they are big and strong enough to join their older family members in the vineyard. Of course some of them also end up either sold or at poultry shows all around the country, where John has shown that over 30 years of experience in breeding all kinds of ducks has given him almost an unfair advantage on his competitors.

Whether you are 3 or 73 - a day old duckling is still one of the cutest things you will ever see! The hatching starts around middle August and continues until the end of December. Seeing that it takes a few months for all of them to hatch it gives us the perfect opportunity to share this exciting time with some of the school children in the Helderberg area. We give each school the opportunity to book a date they would like to bring their class and John takes them on an informative journey - from an egg all the way to being a "working duck". We also give the children the opportunity to witness ducks busy hatching out their shells and then the special moment of when they get to hold a beautiful fluffy duckling!



Here is what John has to say about it all: "It is now the start of the breeding season and much like we have done with the wines, I have gone through a similar process to determine which ducks will be producing the next years snail eaters. As a side line I also show some of the ducks so it is important for me to ensure I only breed with the best of the best in each breed and variety (colour) within those breeds. I first separate the breed I am going to look at and then divide them further into all the same colour and then again separate the ducks from the drakes. Depending on the breed and colour I am busy with, this will give me a group of ducks of between 10 and 60. I then split them into smaller groups and keep discarding the ducks that conform the least to the breed and colour standards - each breed has its own set of standards. I will eventually narrow each group down to probably 2 drakes and 4 ducks and they will be kept in separate breeding pens and only their eggs will be hatched. The rest of the eggs that are laid (by the working ducks) are collected daily, washed and sold! Like I say very similar to tasting through all the wines and keeping what we need for future bottling and selling off the rest!"

This process has also been completed and all the incubators are full of eggs with new ducklings hatching every week. Now the difficult process of raising all these ducklings till they are ready to join the big flock and go snail hunting. The main trick is to keep them dry and warm until they replace their duckling fluff with feathers - not as easy as it sounds as ducks love playing with their drinking water and will try their best to swim in it. Believe it or not, an incubator hatched duck is not waterproof until it is fully feathered - until this time they can get waterlogged and can either drown or die from the cold!



At the recent poultry show my Runner Ducks got top honours once again, with a White Runner Drake awarded best Runner on show. Got mixed results with my other breeds but also managed to win the Best Goose on show with one of my American Buff Geese. There was stiff competition at this show, as our club hosted the 100th championship show, held at Worcester, and attracted entries from all over the country. We even had a few international judges fly over to help with the judging.

We are also doing some research and hoping to start a conservation project to "increase diversity and abundance of indigenous water birds on farms". More on this exciting project once we have fleshed it out a bit more, but we are extremely encouraged by the support and participation we are receiving from the different conservation bodies we have approached and involved so far. We have already built a few bird hides alongside our dam and encourage any visitors to our Estate to use them to observe our already diverse collection of indigenous water birds. These range from the tiny Little Grebe, to the majestic Fish Eagles that occasionally fishes in our dam."

Showtime

The winter months in South Africa give wine estates like Vergenoegd the opportunity to help people realise what a fantastic time of the year winter is. We love visiting our trade friends and reminding them of how important it is to serve a great Vergenoegd Bordeaux blend with the right venison casserole or roasted lamb dish and how to end their customer's evening off with a dessert and a small glass of Vergenoegd Old Cape Colony Cape Vintage 2005!

Our trade visits usually take us all over the country, but in the last few months it was mostly Gauteng. While the Capetonians are trying to get their gumboots dry from this years heavy and frequent rainfall, the Gauteng people just have to make sure their jackets are warm enough and then they can enjoy sunny lunches outside and enjoy sipping on their white wines!

After presenting a few Gourmet wine evenings at different restaurants in Gauteng, it was time for the Western Cape wine shows. The Taste of Helderberg (held on the 6th June this year) is always a fun event as it is a short, one-night-only event and people come from far to have the opportunity to taste the new releases from their favourite producers. Next up was the "We Luv Wine" festival at the Cape Gate Mall. Cobie and Bjorn van Oort managed to once again produce a great platform for the wine farms to strut their stuff and we had fun doing it. Wine shows are not all hard work because we enjoy meeting and interacting with our clients ... and of course answering the occasional strange question.

Another interesting event we attended was "Wyn Oppi Rooiplein" that was hosted by Matie Life and the University of Stellenbosch Wine Culture Society. They set up beautiful white tables for the wine farms on the Rooiplein grass (which is super green this time of year) with relaxed seating everywhere for the visitors. The students pack the area within minutes of the gates opening and you realise soon enough that the Maties are there for "business"!

Whether it is finding out more about wine or just enjoying the wine they do it with 100% dedication! It is absolutely crazy and fascinating at the same time!



Coming up in the next few months, we are combining our efforts all over the country. Marlize is heading to Mpumalanga to help our longtime agent, Maggie Colman, with some wine evenings. Marlize will also make a quick Sunday stop at the Cellar Rats Spring Festival in Magaliesburg on 1 September.

Nannie de Villiers Nieuwoudt will be spending 4 days at the Homemakers Expo from 31 August to 1 September at the CTICC and try to speak to as many as possible of the 40 000 visitors expected (I hope she has some throat lozenges!) John Faure will be entertaining/educating some local trade at the Vineyard Hotel on the 2 September. Nannie will be off to Kwa-Zulu Natal for a week where she will join our newly appointed Rep on an exciting tour of Durban, Ladysmith, Pietermaritzburg, Zululand, Mkuze and even Ponta de Oura in Mozambique! All this in a Nissan X Trail with Vergenoegd written all over it!

On 19th October, teams will be competing in the Amazing Race at Vergenoegd. This event, as well as the Helderberg Wine Festival (14 - 16 November), are two of only a few events during the year that are actually held on Vergenoegd Wine Estate. You can also see us on the 9th and 10th November at the "Magic of the Vine Festival" in Pretoria along with Kelvin Grove Club in Cape Town on the 13th November. Last but not least, we will be back in Sandton, Gauteng for the Winex Show from the 23 - 25 October!

If you have read the "Duck tales" part of this newsletter you will understand a little bit better why we decided in 2009 to launch our Runner Duck Range. We have just heard that our Runner Duck White 2012 and Runner Duck Red 2011 has once again won Best Value award for 2013! Our ducks are very special to us and we enjoy sharing their interesting lives with our local friends as much as we enjoy having our friends drink our wine. Make sure you take the opportunity to come see our new ducklings yourself and why not buy some fresh duck eggs in the tasting room to make a champion creme brulee!

Remember, you are always welcome to contact us to find out where we will be next or even to arrange a wine tasting for a group of friends. We always enjoy hearing from you!

Tasting room opening times:

Monday to Friday 09h00 - 17h00
Saturday and Sunday 09h30 - 16h00

ALL TOURS BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.

The tasting room can be reached on taste@vergenoegd.co.za.



Pomegranate restaurant opening times:

Tuesday to Saturday for lunch from 11h00
Dinner by appointment only.
Sunday lunch only. Closed on Monday.

Also available for conferences, weddings and functions.



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