



Dear friend,

Wakey-wakey

For the last few weeks I have been trying, just like most other winemakers, to come to grips with what is happening in the vineyards at the start of the new vintage. At the end of July, we all thought winter had left our shores, only to see it return with a vengeance bringing cold, wet spells in August which then continued into September and October. Because of the cold, the vines in most vineyards started budding later than usual and then also unevenly. Some buds got the message from the slight increase in temperature that the time had come for action. Other dozed on. Luckily, at this time of year, the soils are also getting warmer so the roots become active and start sending messages from below to the sleepy buds upstairs to get a move on.

My earlier visits to our producer-farms left me thinking we're in for an interesting vintage. It's going to require a lot of careful sampling and many vineyard visits to taste the grapes and get visual confirmation when will be the right time to pick. Fortunately, the last visit brought me a little more peace of mind when I noticed that the late buds had been spurred into action and were now playing catch up. Now it is a question of keeping our fingers crossed that cold, strong winds will stay away and that in their absence we shall enjoy balmy warm weather until the grapes are ready for picking (what, at the Cape? Forget it!).

Global warming or climate change?

Global warming or climate change? Many people seem to think the term global warming implies it is getting warmer everywhere, both as far as winter and summer temperatures are concerned. Given the pretty severe winter we have just had up here in the Hills one could argue global warming is just a fantasy.

However, call it climate change and suddenly you have a captive audience, as 200mm more than the average annual rainfall is certainly different. Factors associated with climate change include changes to the mean temperature, changes to the extreme temperatures such as heat waves at one end of the scale and ice and frost at the other. The frost that recently caused such extensive damage to vineyards in Chile is a prime example. According to reports it was the worst frost in 84 years, forcing the government to declare a state of emergency. Crop losses in respect of early varietals such as Chardonnay and Pinot noir are estimated at 30%.

Other changes include the change in the time and the amount of rainfall and here one is immediately reminded of France's "Vintage from Hell" earlier this year when hail and flooding caused extensive damage to vineyards over a large area.

Many of us only really became aware of what awaits us with Al Gore's 2006 graphic documentary An Inconvenient Truth. It showed the effect of greenhouse gases on the melting Antarctic ice core as well as the influx of fresh water from the melting ice sheet in Greenland. The latter, according to Gore, can halt the warm currents that cause temperatures to rise in Northern Europe. Do I hear Ice Age? Suddenly we have all become terribly aware of our carbon footprint and we are planting more and more vegetation to compensate for our sins. I sleep more or less OK as we have 770 hectares of vineyards consuming their fair share of carbon dioxide!

What defines cool climate?

There are so many references being made these days to cool-climate wine-growing regions that the question now regularly comes up: So what defines cool climate? That is not an easy one to answer for the cool-climate classification for viticulture has so many definitions that it confuses rather than clarifies.

Let us start by saying cool-climate areas are seldom large regions, but are mostly smaller pockets within bigger regions where a range of factors can influence the style of a wine to be more elegant, refreshing, lighter and have food-friendly characteristics that enhance the meal rather than kill the palate.

Some of the key elements that often get mentioned as contributors to cool climate are: cool nights in the growing season with a big difference between day and night temperatures, proximity to big water masses, the effect of cooling winds, , four distinct seasons, altitude, slope and a host of other smaller contributing factors. Here in the Hills we are fortunate in being able to tick most of these boxes.

These are all factors that ensure slower ripening, allowing for full phenolic ripeness in the case of red grapes and longer hang time on the vine. The opposite would be warm climate where the heat causes a quick upsurge in sugar levels and an accompanying drop in acidity, often forcing the winemaker to pick before phenolic ripeness has been achieved. If not, the fruit can become more raisin-like with even higher sugar levels, lower acids and less balance.

What the eye can't see

Most of our vineyards in the valley can be scanned for patches that are different from the rest simply by driving up on the opposite hill and viewing the land from there. When you don't have the luxury of being able to do this it becomes slightly frustrating. The solution is NDVI or Normalised Difference Vegetation Index which sounds terribly technical, but which comes down to a form of photography where near-infrared and visible wavelengths are used to differentiate between denser and sparser vegetation. We use aerial photography from a small aircraft. We have just commissioned the latest aerial report on the new growth and I've warned all the farm workers to look up and smile when they spot the plane.

The little bottle does it again

Our Durbanville Hills Rhinofields Sauvignon Blanc Noble Late Harvest has done it again. You can image that a long name like that would take up most of the space on a fair sized label, but then you still have to add a Veritas Gold sticker to the Michelangelo Double Gold and International Wine and Spirits Competition Gold Outstanding already there. So if you really want to appreciate the greenish yellow colour of this sweet sensation, you have to turn the bottle around and look at it from the back ... Hang on there, now that really sounds like bragging!

Yes, yes, I know that at the time, Al Gore got a Nobel Peace Prize for his famous documentary and I don't even know whether the man drinks wine, but nevertheless, let us raise our glasses to the awareness he brought through his timely wake-up call of just how fragile our world is.

Prost!

MARTIN MOORE

Cellar Master

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

Latest News and Upcoming Events

Summer Picnics



The scenic views of Table Mountain, Table Bay, the rolling hills and adjoining vineyards from our cellar is the perfect setting to soak away the winter blues under the olive grove with the beautiful bespoke throws and comfy pillows that come standard with each picnic booked.

The hand-woven wicker basket includes a bottle of Durbanville Hills Merlot Rosé and a wonderful selection of picnic treats. The kids can tuck into the "5 Ants" before shedding some energy on the free-form jungle gym.

Picnic season: October 2013 – April 2014

Cost: R310 per two people sharing and R75 per child

Bookings are required at least 48 hours in advance during the week and for weekend picnics, please book on the Friday by 12:00.

Have a cracking Christmas lunch



Join us for a merry four course Christmas lunch with scrumptious dishes whilst the kids enjoy their special Christmas snack platter. The lunch includes a welcome drink, Christmas crackers and a complimentary bottle of Durbanville Hills' Extra Virgin Olive Oil per table.

Date: 25 December 2013

Time: 12:00

Distance: 5km or 10 km trail

Cost: R395 per person and R145 for children under the age of 12.

Happy New Year



Toast the New Year with your friends at the cellar with a gourmet six-course dinner, award-winning wines and music to get you dancing. With the sun setting across Table Bay and Table Mountain enjoy a glass of Durbanville Hills Sauvignon Blanc before sitting down for the inspiring and creative gourmet menu prepared by chef Louisa Greeff. Then count down towards midnight with a glass of Pongrácz as you make your wish for the coming year.

Date: 31 December 2013

Time: Arrival at 19.30 with dinner served at 20.30

Cost: R595 per person

To book or for more information contact 021 558 1300 or send an email to info@durbanvillehills.co.za

For more information on any of these events or to book contact (021) 558 1300 or by sending an email to info@durbanvillehills.co.za