

Vintage 2014

The Harvest

What a difference a year makes.

We were very fortunate to receive soaking rains for the 2013 growing season and just when you think it can't get any wetter, we had more than double our annual rainfall for the 2014 growing season (2013 as a whole year was one of the wettest on record). We had 890mm of rain in 2013, numbers more common in places like Austria or Burgundy. However, with the soils being soaked for the second consecutive year and the roots showing great development, like a good joke, timing is everything.

A large majority of the rain fell over the growing season for the vines (August – November).



Full dams again

We don't believe in rain being untimely, it just means us humans need to be able to match the timing of rain with our sprays. The growing season was a particularly challenging one as the soils were once again saturated and this elevated the instances of disease pressure (mildew in particular) in the vineyard.

The 2013/14 growing season was one of the most vigorous growing seasons to date. This meant that combatting the weeds was even more intensive than in

other years as we all know how much they love water. We are, however, getting our systems in place now for tackling weeds on a large scale organically, and timing of weed removal was spot on for us.

We have three different methods of combat: these are machine, by hand (human) and by animal. All three systems work hand in hand and work on a rotational basis according to the different years and necessity. Before the winter rains appear we sow selected vineyards with cover crop (either legumes or nutritional plants such as wheat). Then towards the later stages of winter send our growing herd of 60+ head of cattle into vineyards demarcated by electric fencing (these are normally the trellised vineyards). The cattle will eat through about 1ha of weeds in a week, cutting it down from 40+ cm to under 5cm. This same plant material is then recycled through 60 sets of 4 stomachs (a total of 240 stomachs) and then deposited back into the soil as urine or manure. It's amazing to watch 1ha of weeds and grass disappear in this way.

Once the cattle have done their thing we move them on to different vineyards and in comes the "interceptor" – a hydraulic metre long blade attached to the side of a tractor. The interceptor has a sensor on it and when it touches the vine it retracts and then pops back into its perpendicular position 5cm below the soil surface, removing any plant material as it goes. The machine wouldn't be half as effective were it not for the cattle mowing the plant material beforehand.



"Weed eating" with a strimmer before and after in spring time

For the rest of the old bush vines we have 3 high-powered “weed eaters”, which run through 25-30ha of vineyards mowing a meter either side of the vines obliterating any weed growth but not removing any soil. For the rest of the farm we use our team of highly skilled workers with spades and hoes to remove the weeds by hand. They will also move in behind the team of cattle as the grass is much shorter this way to work in the soft wet sand.



Old Chenin Blanc before cattle



With Cattle



After Cattle

Timing is everything and you only need to look at the 2013 growing season as an example: we had a lot of rain in the growing season but the timing of the rain was good for us and didn't interrupt our spray program whereas in 2014 the rain came and went with no mercy, and often one deluge followed another. The key difference in rainfall was the November month of 2013 was far wetter than the November month of 2012 and this is where the added pressure came from. This meant mildew populations had time to proliferate and there are only so many hours in a day in which one can spray. In 2013 we sprayed 3 times over the whole season (which is literally nothing), whereas this last 2014 growing season we sprayed a total of 9 times.

We only spray sulphur and copper (both contact, i.e.: non-systemic that don't enter the "blood stream" of the plant), and these act like a sunblock does on the leaf of the plant and after every rain you need to reapply the sprays to protect against spores of mildew which proliferate with wet humid weather. We were fortunate to have only certain red grape vineyards affected by mildew on the bunches and this resulted in a small loss, whereas our white wine vineyards looked magical and yields were up and back to where they should be (around 4ton/ha) for old dry land bush vines.



Tying up our Syrah vineyards in the "Rhône" fashion

As always we rely heavily on the South Easter wind to blow over November/ December to aid us in our organic farming as wind is a natural drying agent and reduces pressure significantly. The winds were later than usual and this added to the pressure. The other factor we need to negotiate in the vineyards is heat as this has a significant effect on the quality of the vintage. We had some very

warm, dry weather in December and early January and this helped dry the soils out until mid-January when we had 45mm of rain in two days, something that is nearly unheard of for that time of year. Funny as it may seem the vines actually needed the water to tide them over the harvest. This was one of the reasons why the harvest was quite a late vintage for South Africa as a whole.

As in 2013 the concern would be that the pH's would be quite high because of all the water around but this was strangely not the case for the majority of the wines. In fact, they are as close to perfect as one could be happy with. After malo the pH's look great and much lower than 2013 on the whole.

There was one factor that played a huge role in the 2014 harvest and this was the arrival of the heat wave. And we had heat! From the 14-17th of February we had temperatures in excess of 40 degrees Celsius, peaking at 43. Luckily 85% of our grapes were inside the cellar at 14 degrees Celsius. Once the temperature exceeds 36 degrees the vine literally shuts down and stops assimilating nutrients properly. The result is acids drop and pH's sky rocket, thus it was no surprise that we were done with picking 2 days after the heat wave ended.



Old vine Chenin in all its glory

Harvest commenced on the 23rd of January and finished on the 19th of 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.



Freshly Picked Chenin

The Wines



Picking the first Chenin Blanc grapes at 300m (cellar on opposite hill)

The vintage had a lot of similarities to the vintage of 2013 in the beginning but as the vintage quickly unfolded and the grapes started coming in we realized that

there were major differences. The first and most obvious being the yield per hectare was up dramatically from the previous 3 vintages. This meant we were under pressure in the cellar to keep up with the tide of white grapes flowing in. Good balanced yields are never a problem and are always something to be embraced; besides sleep is what happens after harvest. It was the first time that we have filled nearly all our concrete tanks with fresh Chenin juice that resulted in balanced 12- 12.5% alcohol wines with pH's after malolactic of around 3.2-3.4 and acids between 5.5 – 6.5.

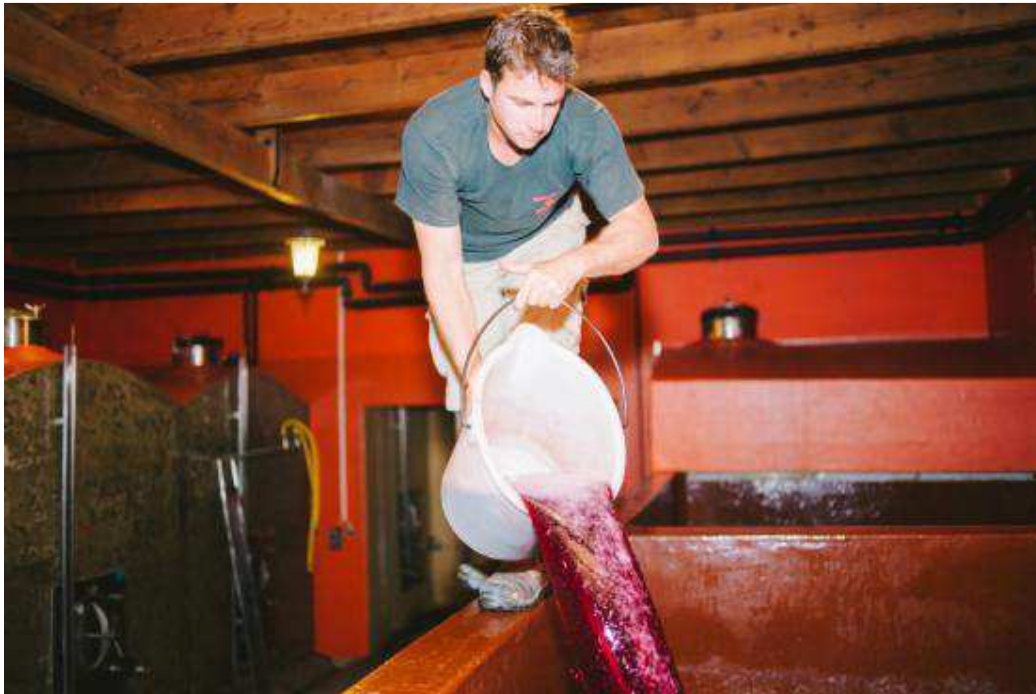
Big yields were order of the day throughout the Swartland and in fact the whole of the Cape. However one trait of the vintage was the assimilation of sugar or rather the lack thereof. For some it was a very late vintage as sugars were just not climbing. However, because we pick entirely on taste and rely on feeling and taste rather than numbers to guide us on our picking dates, we were happy with the balance in the grapes and ultimately wine even if it is at a lower alcohol. The key factor for us is balance of acid; we love acidity and get upset when acidity starts falling in the grapes. We prefer to pick before it loses balance. So one could say we pick when the acidity is ripe. And in 2014 it meant balanced low alcohol wines.



Typical old vine Chenin Blanc bunch on harvest day

As with previous vintages, we have identified our LAM, LAMMERSHOEK and CELLAR FOOT vineyards (bar a few barrels here or there that can move around

the ranges) and these are pretty constant throughout the vintages. The LAM vineyards are generally at the bottom of the hill where the soils are more forgiving and make less complex wines. The LAMMERSHOEK vineyards are higher up on the slopes or on the more exposed rocky soils which result in deeper more complex wines. The CELLARFOOT vineyards are either small individual vineyards (like 0.75ha of Hárslevelü and 0.9ha of Mourvedre) or a mixture of different vineyards (Grenache/Carignan/Mourvedre) for the Underwater Wine for example.

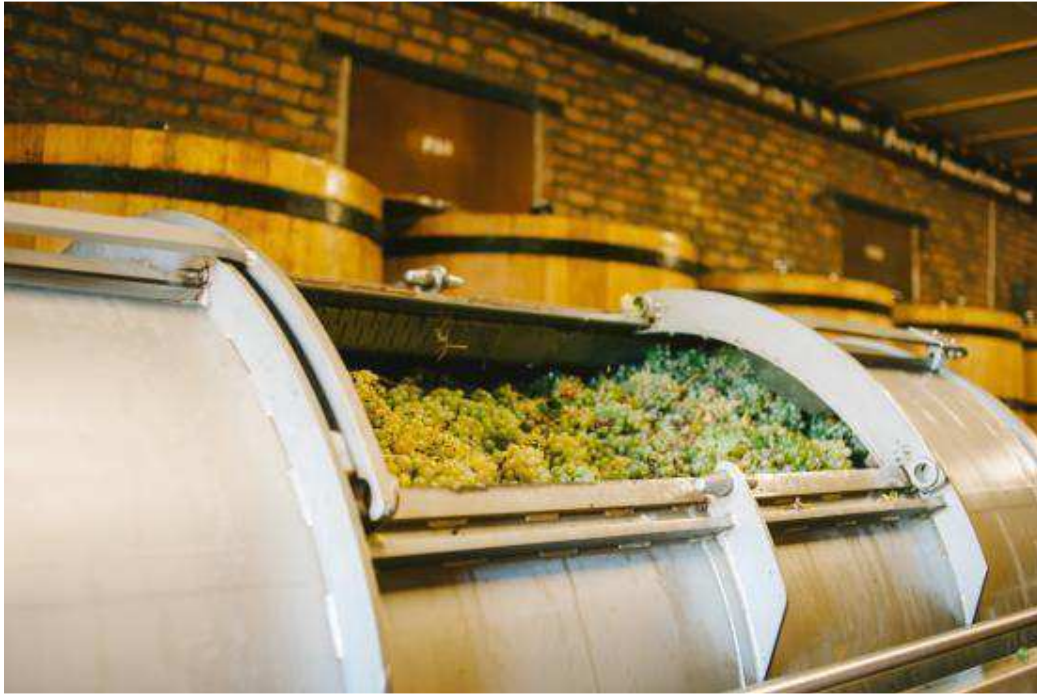


Bucketing over the Pinotage

It was a fantastic year for white wines and we believe the wines, even at this early point, will go on to prove this through drink and ageability, it's very exciting.

As is usually the case (except for Pinotage as it is already evident it will be a cracker), the red wines need a bit of time to relax, breathe and express themselves. Less stems were used on the reds (except Mourvedre and Grenache which both got 100% whole bunches during ferment) in 2014 which was due to the health of the stems. Because of the high disease pressure during the growing season, many of the stems were not perfect thus we left them out, we didn't want any negative tannin in the wine. Fermentation time on the skins was also kept very short this year for the same reason as omitting the stems. The wines also seemed more developed a lot earlier than in previous vintages and the levels of extraction were great.

Like all the previous vintages the wines are only gently bucketed over before being basket pressed and then laid to rest in either larger 2000/5000L foudre or a combination of 9500L concrete tanks and 500L demi muids.



Full whole bunch Chenin Blanc press

The Vineyards

A year ago we had just received our official SGS organic status and we spoke of selling some of our cattle to selected butchers who only deal in organic/free grazed meat. Well we have good news for Cape Town meat lovers, and not such good news for the first small herd of cattle that were slaughtered: we sent some of our meat to Riley's in Cape Town and newly renovated Frankie Fenner Meat Merchants in Church St., Cape Town who specialize in high quality meat. We have also just purchased 20 young Nguni cows (Nguni being the traditional African bovine with the beautiful hide). These will be used as a breeding herd for the years to come. The cattle really are an invaluable part of the farm and a major cog in the Lammershoek engine.



New herd of Nguni cows for breeding

Our compost pit which used to be above ground and has since moved subterranean was filled and subsequently emptied out into the selected 40 ha of vineyards on the farm where it has already been ploughed in and a selection of cover crops planted in the same rows where the compost was thrown. We are extremely happy with the maintenance of our vineyards and it is obvious that root and shoot development has been phenomenal over the past 2 seasons, this and also the variety of natural plant species returning to our vineyards during the winter months. The cattle help with this as their selective grazing in the vineyards helps suppress and promote certain plant species over another.



Young Mourvedre vineyard being “disced”

We have planted 1 ha each of Viognier and Mourvedre and have uprooted some Chardonnay that has not been working for us over the past few seasons. We will be planting a further hectare of Marsanne, and some Maccabeu and Grenache is in the pipeline.

The 2014 team

We had a great bunch of people over to help with the 2014 harvest. It was a large team and some were only here for a couple of weeks but each brought with them something special. As usual the foreigners were kept in line and on the straight and narrow by Mr Jurgen “the Stormers can score tries” Gouws who is part of the furniture now and Mr Pedro “I’m not Spanish” Hendricks who knows the cellar and each individual barrel as if they were his children.



2014 Harvest team

These were:

- Matthias “I’m never leaving” Warnung from the Kamptal, Austria, whose wines are ridiculously good now and for me one of the brightest lights to come out of Austria. He has been re-visiting here since 2010 so we say he is now a Lammershoek veteran as even our workers don’t look twice when he returns.
- This year Matthias brought a friend from Austria’s Kamptal region named Christoph “I never fall off bakkies” Heiss, and we weren’t disappointed. He was never scared and always on top of his game, but not always on top of the bakkie.
- We had our first American from new Orleans/Oregon and this was Claire “one more ‘gain” Jarreau, who brought with her a few Americanisms that will surely stand the test of time. Muchly appreciated.
- Then we had our very first beer brewer from The Kernel London Tanya “straw berry blonde” Gretschel Marsh. She was a key member of our sorting table and loved to stand on the right hand side. We look forward to more beer.
- Last but not least was Sylvestre “Jy, Julien” Mosse from Anjou, France. Sylvestre brought with him a wonderful sense of humour with a French accent and the ability to make amazing tortillas on a Sunday morning. He will be sorely missed.

The A Team – our seasoned farm veterans once again toiled in the heat and we managed to get everything off on time without delay. This was the first year that Anna didn’t drive the tractor during harvest and young Godfrey was more than

capable of taking over the reigns as chief in charge. We would be lost without our farm families and the unity that is shown on the farm is very special to see.