

Klein Constantia Harvest 2018

It has been some time since we experienced a harvest like we did this year. The last 5 years have been characterized as hot, early and fast. Our first impression of the build up to harvest was that it would be similar to previous years, a warm dry winter that stimulated very early growth in the vineyards. However, shortly after the fruit set, we experienced cool nights and sporadic rainfall which resulted in slower ripening and therefore a later and longer harvest. All in all, the 2018 harvest lasted 2,5 months and allowed us to wait for optimal ripeness in the grapes.

Upon reflection, we noticed a few interesting points regarding this vintage. Not only did we receive our highest summer rainfall for the past 6 years, we also experienced some of the coldest average nighttime temperatures in the past 10 years. This year's harvest was approximately 2 weeks later throughout the whole wine industry and it was Klein Constantia's second longest harvest since 1986. Crops were down by 15% amongst the wine farms in South Africa – we too had a lighter crop, however we had smaller berries with immensely concentrated flavours which resulted in a much higher quality juice recovery.

In the vineyard, the season started on a particularly dry note as everyone prepared for another dry year in the wake of one of the driest winters in a long time. The industry was warned of the intensely hot summer and the prospect of little to no water, in this light we are grateful that Klein Constantia's water supply is self-sufficient and not dependent on the city's water resources. Together with the fact that we practice dry land farming and therefore not reliant on irrigation meant that the effects of the drought was less dramatic than other areas. With this in mind we approached the year with caution and put measures in place to enable the vines to manage the anticipated hot summer. To this end we reduced the crop and left more leaves to protect the bunches from the sun. Towards the end of March our top dam had reached its lowest point, despite not having utilized any for irrigating the vines. The long season was likely due to the regular rains we received from January, conveniently falling mostly on weekends. This slowed the sugar ripening process, creating the ideal conditions for flavour development. Ultimately, we continue to farm as sustainable as possible with the vines expressing themselves better and better each vintage.

In the cellar, we are delighted to announce that up to 70% of our wines underwent spontaneous fermentation, using the natural yeasts from the vineyards. We have put a lot of effort into refining the treatment of our wines. On average we have used substantially less sulphur during crush and are now only using organic nitrogen food sources during fermentation. The results have been incredible and all this effort is helping us to better express the unique terroir in our wines. More and more you can pick up hints of salinity and minerality in our wines, a characteristic of the subsoil of decomposed granite in the vineyard.





With the cooler nights, an extended ripening period allowed the vines more time to develop concentrated flavours. Together with smaller berries, it has resulted in wines with high natural acidity, low pH levels and complex flavours - an exciting vintage. Our new Chardonnay blocks have produced a great first crop. The high-altitude Sauvignon Blanc blocks also came into production this year changing the style of our Sauvignon blanc blend. We continue to improve our approach to the Single Vineyard project, breaking down the blocks into pockets of micro climates. This has allowed us to better understand each one, to truly express their full potential and better understand the Klein Constantia terroir.

The 2018 vintage of Vin de Constance looks to be another textbook vintage with perfect balance. We harvested in 21 different batches, ranging from parcels with a high acidity picked in early February to parcels with high sugars picked up until mid-April. Sugar development this year was very slow due to the long harvest. Each of these batches forms a building block to create a wine that has the perfect balance between alcohol, acidity and sugar. In order to achieve this, we blend on numerous occasions during and post fermentation. The wine is now in barrel and our challenge starts to ensure they age in perfect conditions.

In our endeavours to further improve the quality of our Metis Sauvignon Blanc, Clement Jolivet, son of Pascal Jolivet from Sancerre, joined us for the harvest season. Not only was his input vital, he became a great team member assisting with all aspects of winemaking throughout the season. Clement has become a close member of the Klein Constantia family and I'm sure we will be seeing more of him in the future.

As we look back over the vintage, it's astounding to think that we have 5 years of experience in our 'not to newly renovated cellar' - gradually we are unlocking all the possibilities it has to offer. It seems like just yesterday that our vineyard replanting program begun, planting the cultivars that best suit our terroir. 2018 brings so many of the changes full circle, with the first vintages of so many of the new vines coming into the cellar. It also sees the opening of our newly renovated tasting center & latest addition, The Bistro @ Klein Constantia. We look forward to your visit, to experience what Klein Constantia has to offer.

-Matthew Day.

