

**Latest crop of exceptional quality**

**I GENERAL**

The South African wine industry is excited about a particularly promising wine grape crop, both in terms of quality and volume. The harvest season was characterised by healthy, ideal growing conditions and a cool, though lengthened, harvesting period without rain or prolonged heat.

Inland wine growing areas recorded some of the best crops ever, while dwindling water supplies in the coastal region caused a systematic decrease in the anticipated crop over the season. The consequences of flood damage in the Orange River region in 2011 are still evident.

The total crop estimate exceeds that of 2011, and high quality wines are anticipated for the 2012 wine grape crop. The South African wine industry is able to buffer large fluctuations in overall crop size and quality, thanks to the diversity of the respective cultivation areas.

**Crop size\*\*** – The 2012 wine grape harvest is expected to amount to 1 405 845 tons according to the latest estimate (30 April) of the SA Wine Industry Information and Systems (Sawis). This exceeds the 2011 crop by 8% and is only 10% smaller than the overall record crop of 2008. Paarl, Malmesbury, Stellenbosch and the Orange River will have smaller harvests, while the rest of the nine districts expect record harvests.

The 2012 wine harvest – including juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, wine for brandy and distilling wine – is expected to amount to 1 085 million litres, calculated at an average recovery of 772 litres per ton of grapes.

**2011/12 Growing season** – The 2012 season kicked off with sufficient cold, but a drier winter than usual – in the coastal regions especially. Sufficient cold units had accumulated by the end of June, and with August being warmer, bud burst was a week early in some blocks. Vineyards showed good growth in the ideal weather conditions at the start of the new growing season.

Abnormally cold and rainy conditions during the second part of flowering resulted in uneven flowering and berry set, with high disease pressure, which producers managed to control satisfactorily.

Weather conditions were back to normal in December, and less wind than usual resulted in less damage to grapevines than previous years. January was exceptionally hot, with heatwaves resulting in sunburn damage in some instances. This exacerbated pressure on dryland vineyards, which already had little soil water resources at that stage.

The ripening period in February and March was further characterised by ideal, cool weather conditions for slow ripening, resulting in good colour and flavour in red cultivars especially. Very dry weather also contributed to healthy grapes and the absence of diseases and rot.

Cooler weather delayed the start of the harvest by about two weeks and the last grapes were crushed two to three weeks later than usual.

**Wine potential** – Producers, viticulturists and winemakers are excited about the quality of this year's crop, and some districts expect the best quality in years. The cool harvest period and slow ripening resulted in smaller berries with intense colour and exceptional flavours – in the red cultivars especially – as well as optimal ripeness levels at lower sugars, which led to lower alcohol levels. Throughout the industry winemakers anticipate excellent white wines with good fruit and structure.

**Breedekloof** – An ideal year in terms of size and quality, with exceptional red wines.

**Klein Karoo** – An unequalled vintage, to be remembered for being huge, late, and healthy with exceptional quality.

**Malmesbury** – Despite dry conditions and a subsequently smaller crop, high quality wines, whites especially, are in the pipeline.

**Olifants River** – One of the better vintages, with bumper yields and good quality following a very temperate season.

**Orange River** – Quality is good throughout, but the crop is considerably smaller, with the impact of the 2011 floods still evident, and dual purpose cultivars being used for raisins.

**Paarl** – A slightly smaller crop due to dry weather conditions and a cold flowering period. Quality is nevertheless expected to be excellent, in the red wines especially.

**Robertson** – An incredible vintage with healthy weather conditions, a record crop and exceptional quality.

**Stellenbosch** – Limited water resources and adverse conditions during flowering resulted in a smaller though top quality crop without green flavours.

**Worcester** – An exceptional growing season culminated in a record crop with exceptional white and red wine quality.

\* An agricultural/viticultural report

\*\* Crop sizes are based on the Sawis estimate of 30 April 2012.

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## **II OVERVIEW PER DISTRICT**

### **BREDEKLOOF**

#### **Crop size**

250 930 tons, 25% higher

#### **Production trends**

This might well be an ideal year for Bredekloof in which we may look forward to good quality and quantity.

The crop will be substantially bigger than in 2011, due to the number and size of the bunches, as well as the number of berries that set. However, the berry size is smaller, which bodes well for quality.

White cultivar yields increased significantly this year – Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc especially – while Chardonnay, Colombar and the red wine grape cultivars also yielded a higher tonnage, although not to the same extent.

#### **Climate and viticultural trends**

February to April 2011 will be remembered as one of the hottest and driest periods in many years, with no rainfall in February and March. Although sufficient irrigation water was available for post-harvest irrigation, some producers who are dependent on mountain runoff and/or underground irrigation dams experienced water shortages. The post-harvest period was relatively disease-free and the vineyards were generally looking good. On the whole conditions were relatively favourable for leaf retention and the accumulation of reserves, and winter kicked off with a relatively cold and dry month of May. Precipitation in May was only 27 mm compared to the long term figure of 59 mm.

Winter kicked off wet and cold, but ended dry and slightly warmer in August. June received three times the long term average rainfall (255 mm), whereafter conditions became warmer and drier, with rainfall of 48 mm compared to the average 87 mm in August. Sufficient cold units were accumulated during the winter months for normal bud burst.

The remainder of the season was characterised by mild temperatures, constant wind and low rainfall, apart from the two heat waves in January and early February, and there was little precipitation during the growing season and the ripening period. Bud burst occurred at the usual time or slightly later with a growth spurt due to lower soil moisture and warmer day temperatures at the end of August especially. In Chardonnay in particular bud burst was very good and even this year.

Although the September rainfall was slightly higher than the long term average, warmer day temperatures were probably responsible for even bud burst and vigorous initial growth in the later cultivars. Even shoot growth was another characteristic feature of this year. Despite the fact that the flowering/set period was cooler, good set was experienced overall.

Grapevines were not exposed to extreme temperatures until mid-January, with only 198 hours above 30°C from November to January. A heatwave that lasted seven days in mid-January did not have a significant impact on crop size, seeing that the canopies recovered sufficiently.

Apart from a less extreme heatwave at the beginning of February, conditions were considerably cooler until March – at night especially. This may explain the lovely red wine colours being observed in the cellars.

The absence of precipitation from November until the end of March depleted natural soil water resources to a large extent, with the result that irrigation scheduling became critical during the above-mentioned heatwaves.

### **General comments**

After slightly delayed bud burst, the harvest started about a week later than usual, and finished approximately two to three weeks later – the reason being higher yields and a cooler ripening period.

A fair amount of *millerandage* was observed, especially where cold winds prevailed during flowering. This was not as extreme as along the coast, however.

It was a very healthy year with few diseases and plagues. Oidium was problematic in some instances, but only occurred at a late stage and should not impact significantly on the crop. Although mealybug only became a problem late in the season, the tempo of multiplication was high.

Veld fires also caused considerable damage to certain vineyards, ranging from scorched leaves to total extermination.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The quality is looking good at this stage, the red wines in particular displaying very good colour. With slightly smaller berries and improved balance in canopies, the quality is likely to be good.

The heatwave in January impacted on the flavours of Sauvignon Blanc in particular, with the result that the aromas are slightly less pronounced than desired. It is too early, however, for a final verdict in this regard.

Since acid levels were definitely lower this year, it was interesting that the pH did not escalate accordingly.

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## **KLEIN KAROO**

### **Crop size**

45 398 tons, 26% higher

### **Production trends**

The 2012 harvest year will go down in history as the ultimate vintage – big, late, healthy and of exceptional quality.

Numerous blocks and even farms harvested record crops, partly because of good winter and spring rainfall, sufficient irrigation water, budding of fertile shoots only, good set on the whole and a dry, healthy harvest period.

White cultivars generally boasted higher yields, with Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay and Colombar in particular producing exceptionally big crops. Early cultivars especially ripened large crops, which might explain why the harvest started so much later.

Red wine grape cultivar yields remained more or less constant, apart from Pinotage, which recorded an above-average performance.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Autumn and winter of 2011 were exceptionally cold, the highest number of cold units in nine years. The chill was sufficient for complete dormancy breaking and good bud burst.

Abundant rainfall at the beginning of June – 300 mm rainfall in 48 hours, more than the annual average precipitation – put an end to the drought of recent seasons. Flood damage was mostly recorded in low-lying vineyards in the Ladismith area. Showers which ensued throughout winter were ideal for the establishment of cover crops. Most farm dams were full – as much as 75% in some large dams – and soils were fully replenished.

While bud burst initially occurred slightly earlier, it took place at more or less the same time in most blocks. Budding was very even and noticeably on the spurs only, with few infertile shoots, resulting in the canopies being more open with improved aeration.

November was the coldest in many years – 1°C colder than the past six years – with supplementary showers towards the middle and end of November. In some blocks which flowered at this stage, set was particularly poor, although it was exceptional in the majority of grapevines. Cool weather extended the flowering period and caused uneven ripening – even in the same bunch.

December was slightly cooler than average, but January was 1°C warmer than the past six years, which caused uneven véraison, but removed undesirable green flavours. Grapevines fared well despite the warmer weather and a heatwave in January, possibly due to improved soil moisture, higher humidity and cloudy conditions.

The harvest started much later this year. The sequence of ripening and the sugar content at which the respective cultivars ripened, also differed from other years. Chardonnay, for example, ripened very late this year, and at higher sugars than usual. On the other hand Merlot ripened earlier at lower sugars. No undesirable green flavours were present in red grapes.

Rainfall was minimal from December to the end of March, which was ideal for the crush. Despite an abundance of water, growth was normal to vigorous. Regular moderate wind, open and divided canopies, as well as a bigger crop probably hampered vigour. Canopies were beautifully balanced.

Towards the end of the crush the grapevines appeared to suffer from the large crop and late harvest, but temperatures remained sufficiently high for gradual ripening of the large

crop. The late harvest grapes, which ripened under cooler conditions, were conducive to the retention of colour and flavour in the grapes.

### **General comments**

Pressure from oidium was high – especially from the middle of the growing season onwards – but grapevines had been protected by means of preventative spraying. Some leaves were infected during the harvest, but at that stage grapes were already immune to infections. No downy mildew occurred and rot had no impact, which further promoted a large and healthy crop.

Unusual vineyard plagues such as snout beetles and boll-worms occurred, but were not responsible for any economic loss. There was an outbreak of mealybug at a late stage, which did not cause much damage.

### **Grape and wine quality**

It was an exceptionally healthy season, with good quality grapes and wine. Surprisingly acids and pH were retained, taking into account that the grapes were harvested very late.

All red cultivars produced very good quality this year, with intense colour (even better than in 2011), ripe berry flavours and no undesirable green flavours. White cultivars display lovely tropical flavours, and for Sauvignon Blanc it was an exceptional year. All blocks achieved higher sugars with good pH and acid. Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay also produced very good quality grapes.

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## **MALMESBURY**

### **Crop size**

92 057 tons, 16% lower

### **Production trends**

After an initial estimate that the crop would be the same as in 2011, the eventual size was 10% smaller. This can be largely ascribed to extremely dry conditions and moisture stress which has prevailed in certain vineyards for several seasons. With the exception of a few cultivars, the quality this year may be deemed good.

The yield of white wine grapes this year is between 15% and 20% lower than in 2011 – in the Malmesbury dry land areas especially – and these grapes were harvested slightly earlier to retain acid. Many small berries in Chenin Blanc resulted in a large decrease in crop size.

The amount of red grapes crushed is approximately the same as in 2011, with Shiraz again producing good yields under the warm, dry conditions. The yields of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon were lower, however, especially in dryland vineyards.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The 2012 season was exceptionally dry, but the weather was generally cooler in the period before the crush, which extended the ripening period slightly.

The Malmesbury district accumulated sufficient cold units in May and at the beginning of June to satisfy the requirements for good budbreak. Precipitation during this period was sufficient, with exceptionally warm and dry weather in July and August. Several dams were not sufficiently filled, and the subsoil did not reach field capacity.

Bud burst occurred two weeks earlier than usual and despite the warm conditions in July, bud burst was very even. In grapevines that suffered the previous season, bud burst occurred at the tips, in Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay especially. In dryland grapevines in the coastal regions bud burst was uneven, Shiraz especially, for some inexplicable reason.

An exceptionally hot January, combined with the prevailing low soil water content, impacted on the dryland grapevines in the district. Moisture stress during berry growth was very clearly reflected in the smaller berry sizes at the time of the crush. In instances where producers had access to irrigation water, they were able to mitigate the effect of the heat and moisture stress.

Cooler nights and mornings during the harvest resulted in improved wine grape quality.

### **General comments**

Despite the negative impact of the dry and hot season on grapevines, very few diseases and plagues occurred.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Despite the lower than average rainfall at the beginning of the growing season, the quality of the wines from the Malmesbury district is expected to be very good, with excellent flavours, colour and structure.

Grape analyses did not produce anything unusual, except for slightly lower acids and higher pH in some white cultivars – in dryland vineyards especially. Early indications are that the white wine quality will be very high, with particularly fruity and tropical flavours. Red cultivars generally displayed good colour, with good colour extraction by winemakers in the cellar. Shiraz in particular may be singled out, where the timing of the harvest played an important role.

Heatwaves at the onset of the harvest caused simultaneous ripening in all cultivars, resulting in a slight bottleneck, which could nevertheless be managed.

Exceptionally low water supplies caused sugars to accumulate slowly, and in red cultivars especially optimal ripeness was achieved at a low sugar content, resulting in a lower alcohol content.

Despite the good quality of the harvest, producers are concerned about the declining crops which will further exacerbate the existing pressure on their cash flow.

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## **OLIFANTS RIVER**

### **Crop size**

225 249 tons, 4% higher

## **Production trends**

This was one of the better seasons in the Olifants River both with regard to quality and yield, with a harvest process that proceeded smoothly without any hitches or heatwaves which ripened the grapes prematurely.

Yield is definitely higher than in 2011, probably due to favourable weather conditions during bunch initiation and the set period, as well as a number of young grapevines that came into production.

The production of red wine grapes is still declining compared to white, with red grapevines being replaced by higher yielding white cultivars such as Colombar. Only Shiraz and Hanepoot produced a smaller yield this year.

The season will be characterised by a mild climate with even and delayed ripening at times, excellent colour in red cultivars and a struggle to ripen Chardonnay.

## **Climate and viticultural trends**

The post-harvest period progressed without incident. The grapevines were relatively healthy and retained their leaves long enough to accumulate sufficient reserves.

Winter kicked off with good precipitation, whereafter it was relatively dry. Irrigation water was sufficient to irrigate the grapevines throughout.

The beginning of June saw the best cold in years, which should theoretically have resulted in very good bud burst. Unfortunately temperatures shot up in July and probably neutralised the good accumulation of cold units during the first part of June. The remainder of the winter proceeded without incident and with low rainfall.

Although higher temperatures were recorded in September 2011 than in the corresponding period in 2010, the average temperature was approximately 1°C lower. The large fluctuation in temperature was probably responsible for the occurrence of *millerandage* in Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin Blanc especially, as well as very uneven bud burst in cultivars such as Shiraz.

The growing season was mild with a few extremely hot days only, for example in December and January. Considerable sunburn damage was observed in Hanepoot especially towards the middle of January, when temperatures spiked above 40°C for two days, but on the whole this did not represent more than 1% of the crop.

Throughout February temperatures were exceptionally mild with cool nights, from the end of March especially. In general this caused grapes to ripen gradually (slowly) and not overnight due to excessive heat. The moderate temperatures from bud burst onwards probably also contributed to the harvest being approximately two weeks later and the fact that the last grapes were delivered two weeks after Easter weekend only.

## **General comments**

Disease pressure this year was the lowest in a long time and only towards the end of the season did oidium cause problems in certain blocks. Mealybug numbers are increasing on an annual basis.

No abnormal weather conditions prevailed during the crush, and growth was generally more balanced, with spontaneous arrested growth in blocks at the end of January. Grapevines have also retained their leaves and are in a very good condition.

Clanwilliam dam has sufficient water for normal irrigation and there were no breaks in the canal in the course of the season.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The early white cultivars appear very promising, with low pH and good acids which bode well for lovely, fruity wines. The cooler weather in February should produce excellent Sauvignon Blanc wines. As far as the reds are concerned, the Cabernet Sauvignon grapes will probably produce excellent wines once more.

The bigger crop placed considerable pressure on fermentation space at the end of the season, and the respective cellars had to close for delivery several times in order to handle the crush.

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## **ORANGE RIVER**

### **Crop size**

118 004 tons, 8% lower

### **Production trends**

Although the intakes of all wine grape cultivars, with the exception of Hanepoot, increased slightly compared to 2011, the yield was lower than expected. The flood which caused damage during the harvest last year still impacted significantly on the 2012 crop, with some blocks having recovered better than others.

The average yield of Chenin Blanc and Colombar was considerably lower than expected, possibly due to uneven berries which impacted negatively on bunch weights. Bunch numbers per vine did not deviate much from the average, however.

Variation in berry size and ripening may be ascribed to abnormally cool conditions from October to mid-December. Average yield also varied considerably from producer to producer – in some instances as much as 35% increase and decrease between neighbouring farms.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Leaf fall commenced at the end of May 2011 only due to moderate temperatures at the beginning of the month. Cold weather set in gradually, with a concentration of chill during the most important dormancy breaking period from the end of May to mid-June. At the end of July the cold units in certain areas were the highest in a decade. Rainfall was normal, and showers in June increased humidity.

Bud burst in the earlier cultivars started during the first week of September. It was even in most cultivars with a good budding percentage. Grapevines with canes had an especially good budding percentage, which may be ascribed to the chilly weather. Shoot growth

dwindled, however, due to low temperatures during the week of 18 - 24 September, and light frost occurred in low-lying areas without any significant economic damage. Some blocks with a low reserve status displayed symptoms of growth arrest after these cold conditions.

Temperatures remained average until the first week of October, whereafter the usual levels for that time of the year were reached. In blocks which had been submerged during the flood at the beginning of 2011, there was a decrease in yield. In extreme instances individual grapevines and at times even complete blocks died back, but in most cases the blocks recovered better than expected.

### **General comments**

The dual purpose application of table grape cultivars such as Sultana and Merbein Seedless – for the production of juice on the one hand and raisins on the other hand – make it practically impossible to estimate the crop on a year on year basis in this district.

The highest payouts in the history of the raisin industry were realised this year which, together with a lower than expected yield from the above-mentioned cultivars, meant that practically all dual purpose cultivars were dried, regardless of obligations towards the wine cellar. This impacted negatively on the 2012 crop.

With little rain occurring during the harvest and in the post-harvest period, grapevines were healthy, with few signs of fungal diseases.

### **Grape and wine quality**

On average pH was higher this year, with low acids in Chenin Blanc especially. The same trend was observed in late-ripening red cultivars, such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Ruby Cabernet. Wine quality is good throughout in the cellar, with recovery being slightly lower than in 2011.

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## **PAARL**

### **Crop size**

134 202 tons, 9% lower

### **Production trends**

The 2012 crop showed a decrease compared to 2011. It was an exceptional season with slow ripening and excellent quality, in red wines especially where alcohol content should be slightly lower.

Although the crop was initially estimated to be bigger, the absence of rain, little irrigation water and direct damage because of sunburn were the most important reasons for the smaller crop.

Pruning practices were adapted to obtain higher yields by pruning more and slightly longer spurs. Large numbers of flower clusters were observed during flowering, although smaller bunches occurred in Chenin Blanc, Pinotage and Shiraz especially. The biggest losses occurred in late cultivars on dryland vineyards, such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Mourvèdre

and Cinsaut, due to berry shrivelling. Shiraz appears to be particularly sensitive to sunburn, resulting in many losses. Better than expected yields were the order of the day in Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinotage and Merlot.

The season will definitely be remembered for the lengthy ripening period. Practically all cultivars could be picked at the ideal degree of ripeness. Some producers had to wait for the sugars to increase, however, and a few loads were picked too early.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The season kicked off dry and hot, with mild temperatures in the growth phase and an extremely dry ripening period.

The post-harvest period was very dry and hot with abnormally low rainfall in April and May. Conducive to leaf fall was a decrease in night temperatures to below 10°C from May onwards. Good cold units were accumulated until June, which impacted positively on dormancy breaking and created expectations for good, even bud burst. Shoots were properly ripened. From May to August the rainfall was the lowest since 2003, with very little run-off. Most farm dams were only filled to 30% and 50% of capacity. Regular snowfall occurred on the mountain peaks.

Day temperatures fluctuated in September, resulting in slightly later, but even bud burst. Uneven bud burst was prevalent in Shiraz, except where dormancy breaking products were applied. Growth was slightly delayed and flowering and set were seriously compromised by cooler temperatures and regular showers in October. On a positive note, less wind prevailed in spring.

November and December were mild, with wind picking up in December. Regular maximum temperatures during the growth phase did not match the long term average, and approximately 53 mm rainfall was recorded in these two months, whereafter no further rainfall occurred until the end of March. The ripening period was therefore exceptionally dry. Although heatwave conditions occurred in January, prevailing temperatures were generally cooler than usual, resulting in slow ripening.

The harvest was lengthy and protracted and optimal ripeness in red cultivars especially was achieved at a lower sugar content, with the corresponding lower alcohol content.

### **General comments**

On the whole it was a very healthy season, especially due to the low rainfall during the growth phase. Wetter conditions during flowering resulted in high downy mildew pressure, but with normal control, problems were avoided. Snails proved problematic in certain areas, and with long-horn grasshoppers being widespread, certain producers had to act accordingly. Warmer and drier conditions from December onwards caused early outbreaks of mealybug.

Vigorous growth from the beginning of December necessitated late tipping and topping actions in some instances, but generally moderate vigour was experienced. During a mid-January heatwave temperatures soared to above 42°C for three days, which, combined with drought conditions, caused severe sunburn on bunches and leaves. Dryland blocks in the Paarl/Perdeberg vicinity, as well as blocks facing the morning sun in north-south rows,

suffered the biggest crop losses. Producers with more available water supplies irrigated more regularly and longer than usual due to the late season.

The water levels in catchment dams dropped quickly and some were empty before the end of the season.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Early cultivars such as Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay boast lovely grape analyses and flavour profiles. The quality of Chenin Blanc, as well as mid-season red cultivars such as Pinotage and Merlot, was initially good, but grapes from blocks that were harvested later had low total acids with high pH – to the extent that acid adjustments had to be made in the cellar.

Cellar space seldom came under pressure thanks to the slow, even ripening of all cultivars. Juice recovery appears to be normal. Good ripeness occurred at sugar levels below 25°B and expectations are that the 2012 red wines will be full-bodied, soft and fruity with excellent colour.

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## **ROBERTSON**

### **Crop size**

244 623 tons, 23% higher

### **Production trends**

The Robertson district had an incredible season with excellent, healthy weather, a bumper crop and good quality. A vintage to remember!

Reasons for the bigger crop include sufficient irrigation water – especially where producers are dependent on mountain runoff – an exceptionally healthy growing season without any noteworthy diseases or plagues, numerous bunches and good set with small berries. Producers also made an effort to increase yields, since profitability remains under pressure.

Practically all cultivars yielded bigger crops, in particular Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot and Pinotage.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The post-harvest period was characterised by late outbreaks of oidium and leaf fall commenced earlier than usual. The rainfall for April was 50% below the long term average. Proper chill and plentiful rain in the critical period for dormancy breaking from mid-May to mid-June resulted in considerably more cold units than normal. From May to July the Robertson experiment farm recorded 26% higher precipitation than the long term average and in August 32% lower. In the Langeberge producers who depend on run-off, kicked off the season with sufficient water, thanks to considerably higher precipitation. Good and timely showers also impacted positively on the cover crop area.

Bud burst in vineyards was good and even due to the proper winter chill. Timing varied depending on the clean pruning stage, but in the first blocks bud burst was approximately a week earlier. Initial growth was good thanks to ample soil water content and little wind early

in the season. Favourable weather conditions for flowering and set prevailed from September to November, with up to 67% below average rainfall.

Conditions from October to December were initially cooler than usual, but January was the hottest and December and January the windiest months in seven years. Due to the cooler spring and early summer, as well as the bigger crop, véraison happened two weeks later than usual.

Dry conditions prevailed from December to February, with rainfall being 42% lower than the long term average. Early cultivars ripened approximately two weeks later, with certain blocks ripening up to a month later than usual. The later cultivars were only a few days later than usual.

### **General comments**

Due to dry conditions and a lot of wind in December and January, the 2012 growing season was very healthy. No downy mildew occurred, isolated outbreaks of oidium were under control, and few instances of botrytis and acid rot were recorded.

Although extremely hot temperatures and high humidity were experienced in mid-January, sunburn and heat damage were less than in 2011 and with a few exceptions grapevines coped well with the heat. Due to the bigger canopies, hot January and relentless wind, water consumption was high. Irrigation water barely sufficed and producers managed these conditions well through proper scheduling.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The quality of the wine grapes was good, and wine quality will be better than in 2011, despite the fact that pH was high and acids low in the early cultivars.

The quality of Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay and Colombar appears to be very good at this early stage. Red wines have better colour than last year despite the higher yields and the quality also looks promising at this stage.

Cellar space was under pressure due to the large crop and some cellars were compelled to store their wine at other sites. The intake of grapes this year proved a big challenge since the early cultivars ripened much later and later cultivars were more or less on time. Fortunately there were hardly any rainy days and consequently no interruptions during the crush. According to the winemakers the recoveries are normal.

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## **STELLENBOSCH**

### **Crop size**

119 405 tons, 5% lower

### **Production trends**

The yield from the Stellenbosch district this year is less than in 2011. Reasons include inclement weather conditions during flowering and set – in Cabernet Sauvignon especially – as well as sunburn damage in January and an overall decline in the total surface planted to grapevines, which impacts negatively on crop size.

## **Climate and viticultural trends**

The 2012 harvest year will be remembered as being a very dry season with ideal, cool weather conditions during the ripening period.

At the beginning of winter sufficient, and even more cold units accumulated than in 2011 to satisfy the grapevines' requirements, although temperatures during this period were higher than the long term average. The Nietvoorbij weather station recorded 82 mm less rainfall than the long term average from June to August, with the result that several irrigation dams did not have sufficient water supplies.

This season bud burst occurred about seven days earlier than usual, depending on the location of the vineyard. Bud burst was even except for certain Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Shiraz blocks. Cooler conditions after bud burst caused initial shoot growth to be slow, followed by warmer conditions that boosted shoot growth. At the end of September rainfall still lagged 176 mm below the annual average, while spring was characterised by lower temperatures.

Inclement weather conditions prevailed during flowering and set. From mid-October to November temperatures were below normal. November was 2°C colder than average, with 140% of the average monthly rainfall. These conditions resulted in a long, protracted flowering period and weaker set. Loose bunches and *millerandage* were observed on Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot especially.

Favourable, cool conditions prevailed from the pea bud stage to véraison, and December was characterised by less wind than usual. The advantages of these circumstances were less water usage by the plant, easier canopy management and less input required to manage vineyards.

The beginning of the ripening period was very hot, with the mercury spiking above 35°C for four days in mid-January. This was followed by the same conditions at the end of January and beginning of February. Grapevines that already displayed symptoms of water deficits before these hot conditions, suffered from sunburn damage.

The crush commenced one week later than usual, after cooler weather in February delayed ripening. The second half of the ripening period was accelerated by above average temperatures in March. During this period cellar facilities came under pressure, especially as a result of the quick ripening of Shiraz. Good showers during the last week of March further exacerbated the pressure, because grapes had to be crushed before the rain to prevent rot.

## **General comments**

Abundant rainfall in November caused high disease pressure, and producers had to keep up intensive fungicide spraying programmes. Insect pressure was also high during the growth period, necessitating the control of long-horn grasshoppers and snout beetles to mitigate the economic impact.

Water supply levels were low throughout the season – according to Nietvoorbij weather data, it was the fourth driest year over the past 44 years. Soil water supplies were therefore low and grapevines had to be irrigated at a much earlier stage than usual.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Although water supplies were under pressure, exceptional quality wines with good colour can be expected.

Smaller berries have a positive effect on wine quality, and so far very good colour has been observed in all the red cultivars especially. Shiraz in particular is outstanding. Moreover, the warm days in January and February succeeded in burning away greener flavours in the grapes, which also had a positive effect on quality.

Grape analyses indicate slightly lower acids and higher pH. On the whole good sugars were easily obtained and optimal ripeness was achieved at a lower sugar content. Cultivars arrived at the cellars at opportune intervals.

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## **WORCESTER**

### **Crop size**

175 976 tons, 24% higher

### **Production trends**

A bigger crop was predicted for 2012 right from the start of the season, but at present it appears likely that the Worcester district might even boast a record crop.

As far as the whites are concerned, the yield of Chenin Blanc – the most important cultivar in the district in terms of tonnage – appears approximately 20% - 25% higher than in 2011. While Chardonnay yield did not increase as much as that of Chenin Blanc, more Sauvignon Blanc was also crushed this year.

For the time being the red – and therefore later cultivars – appear to be closer to the estimated yields, with a very promising Cabernet Sauvignon crop. Furthermore 2012 will be remembered as being a very late season with relatively smaller berries. The sequence of ripeness varied among cultivars. Merlot was especially late and struggled to achieve the desired sugar content. Red cultivars consistently achieved optimal ripeness at lower sugar levels.

Adjacent blocks differed considerably from each other, albeit the same cultivar, rootstock and management – from lovely green canopies to vineyards that appeared utterly spent, with brown leaves and early leaf fall.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The post-harvest period until April was reasonably warm and dry. Leaf fall occurred fairly late and resulted in high grapevine reserves. Snow at the end of April heralded dormancy.

Winter rainfall arrived relatively early. From May to July the Nuy weather station recorded 153 mm rainfall – considerably more than the 88 mm in 2011. Ample cold units were also recorded in this period, which impacted positively on dormancy breaking in winter buds. From July to September 53 mm rainfall occurred, which was considerably less than in 2011, and from November to February 2012 no precipitation was recorded.

The soils were fairly dry in spring and warmer than usual. Bud burst was therefore earlier and far more even than the previous season.

In the flowering period there was relatively little wind and the customary gales stayed away. Most cultivars were therefore exposed to almost ideal weather conditions during set. Some of the late cultivars were subjected to cold winds and *millerandage* occurred. Conditions during the crush were dry, with 12 mm rainfall at the end of March only.

Picking started 7 to 10 days later than in 2011, due to the substantially higher yield and milder climate that prevailed throughout the harvest season.

### **General comments**

It was a healthy year with sporadic incidences of oidium and downy mildew on the leaves, which did not entail any economic losses. Thunderstorm conditions in January caused signs of botrytis, although these were not problematic. Plagues were limited to slight damage from snout beetles.

Growth in grapevines was less profuse as a result of hardly any rainfall during the growing season, as well as higher yields. Grapevines on outlying soils especially suffered, and in some instances growth arrest occurred as early as December. The brackish soils could not be sufficiently controlled or leached, which impacted further on vigour.

The customary heatwaves were limited to a few days early in January, with minimal damage from sunburn. Many vineyards were further compromised by the large crops, with the result that management during the post-harvest period will be critical for the next season.

### **Grape and wine quality**

This year's harvest comprised two widely divergent periods. Initially grapes with excellent analyses were delivered, namely high sugars, high acids and low pHs. The second half of the harvest saw acids plummeting dramatically.

Despite the bigger crop, very good white wines were made, Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc especially. This can be ascribed to the cool growing season and smaller berries. The colour of the red wine grapes was exceptional and good red wines may be expected.

Cellar capacity was under pressure from the third week onwards, although this was alleviated due to bigger rebate quotas.

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