

SOUTH AFRICAN WINE HARVEST REPORT 2005

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Compiled and written by Romi Boom

I GENERAL OVERVIEW

Despite severe drought and heavy rainfall this year's harvest produced outstanding wines. Winemakers in all the regions are excited about the quality of the 2005 vintage. (For quotations about conditions at individual cellars, see discussion of the regions.)

Autumn 2004: It was a late autumn with the first winter chill arriving in May; even then the rain stayed away.

Winter 2004: It was extremely dry in the winter rainfall regions, although it was definitely cold enough towards the end of winter. Soil moisture was low at the start of the new growing season.

The 2005 growing season: The 2004/2005 vintage presented the wine grower with enormous challenges. On the whole budding occurred earlier than in 2003 as a result of the warm spring. Thunder and showers in October resulted in vigorous growth. Suckering and tipping actions had to be repeated for quality production. Due to vigorous growth, bunch set was looser and smaller than usual. There was less damage from sunburn, because despite the drought there were fewer heat waves. High humidity in November and December, together with less southeasterly and other wind, caused Botrytis rot, resulting in crop losses. Vines were relatively disease free and there weren't any real problems, except for insect plagues in regions such as Stellenbosch and Paarl.

The harvest: Mostly earlier than previous years, with lots of grapes ripening simultaneously at the beginning of the season. In some instances the harvest was up to four weeks earlier.

The wines: An exceptional year for quality. Although 2005 appears to be a better vintage for red wine, with lovely colour in most cultivars, there are some good quality white wines. It is likely that there will be a shortage of good quality Chardonnay and Sauvignon blanc wines amidst a general shortage of white wine.

Crop size: Initially it looked like the crop would be slightly bigger than last year, but in due course it became clear that the drought would exact its toll. The crop is 11,8% smaller than in 2004.

Little Karoo: One of the most difficult vintages ever. Disease pressure was very high in the overly vigorous vineyards. Quality is looking good at present.

Olifants River: Despite severe water restrictions for the second consecutive year, a significant increase in the production of red grapes due to more blocks coming into full bearing. The quality of the wines is expected to be outstanding.

Orange River: Lighter and smaller bunches occurred everywhere. Long periods of heat waves in December and January resulted in an early harvest.

Paarl: A tough season with younger vines faring well despite circumstances. Fewer heat waves despite the drought. Top quality red wines.

Robertson: The season leading up to the harvest was one of the coolest ever. Widespread and heavy precipitation in December and January resulted in the wettest summer in Robertson in 25 years. The lighter crop and smaller berries meant that the wines are full-bodied, with good colour in the red wines. Watch the Shiraz.

Stellenbosch: A hot season with three times the average rainfall in January. The white wines are currently looking very promising. Good Sauvignon blanc with tropical flavours. Excellent Merlot, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Swartland: No problems worth mentioning. Smaller berries, but good quality. Lovely grape flavours. Chardonnay once again proves that it is well adapted to this region. Red cultivars display good colour.

Worcester / Breedekloof: There was a drastic decline in crop size and individual blocks were as much as 50% lighter than in 2004. The wines are looking fantastic, the red wines in particular, and display exceptional colour.

II MOST IMPORTANT WINE REGIONS

LITTLE KAROO

Production trends

The 2004/2005 season is certainly one that will be recorded in the history books, having been one of the most difficult vintages ever. The 2005 production amounts to 36 018 tons, which is 19,1% less than the 2004 production.

Climate

The beginning of winter saw a warm dormancy breaking period (end May, beginning June), but sufficient cold occurred later in winter. Winter was dry, although the eastern part of the Little Karoo had good rain late in winter.

Despite warm weather towards the end of May and beginning of June, budding was good, although it started seven days later. Initially growth and budding were uneven, then the vines started growing very vigorously – especially due to the thunder and rain that occurred in October and December.

As a result of the vigorous growth, bunch set was generally looser and smaller than usual. Good irrigation management between set and véraison resulted in smaller berries, which may have been partially responsible for the smaller 2005 crop.

Disease pressure was very high in the vigorous vineyards, with the result that the early cultivars such as Chardonnay, Pinotage and Steen started to rot. Late incidence of downy mildew, especially on the older leaves and bunch stems, caused drastic crop reductions in Colombar and the later Shiraz and Cabernet vineyards.

The ripening period was warm, but without continuous heat waves. A few exceptionally hot days forced the temperature up to the high thirties and low forties. Due to the more moderate summer and smaller harvest, the ripening of the grapes was early and in some instances up to four weeks earlier.

Grape and wine quality

The initial analysis of the grapes was very good, especially with regard to the presence of higher acids. Later analyses pointed towards high malic acids and in a cultivar such as Pinotage malic acid comprised up to 50 % of total acid.

Quality is currently looking very good. In many instances grapes from downy mildew vineyards were delivered as rebate. Due to the red wine surplus the cellars in the Klein Karoo used certain marginal red wine blocks for other products.

Meyer Joubert, Joubert-Tradauw: “The Little Karoo is a wonderful place to farm grapes, because it hardly ever rains during the harvest. This year was different, because the rain went on and on, in the Tradouw Valley in particular. We had to be wide awake to control mildew, and Botrytis was the order of the day. The early white grape varieties lasted very well under the circumstances, but the red grape varieties sacrificed colour and flavour. Certain

tanks look and taste promising nevertheless, especially from vineyards that are established against well drained slopes.”

OLIFANTS RIVER

Production trends

The crop showed a decrease of 1,2%. Vredendal and Lutzville harvested slightly more than in 2004, but large decreases were reported in Citrusdal, which has a significant amount of dryland vineyards, as well as Klawer/Trawal, traditionally the warmer parts of the region.

Hanepoot, Chardonnay and Sauvignon blanc gave better yields, while Chenin blanc shows a decrease, firstly because of the drought, secondly because of the age of the blocks. Colombar fared well on heavy silt soils, less so on Karoo soils.

As far as the reds are concerned, there was a marked increase in production, mainly because more blocks are coming into bearing and full bearing.

Climate

Temperatures were initially lower than the long term averages. As from January it became increasingly hot and the warm periods succeeded each other with monotonous regularity. Producers were entitled to less than half the allocated quantities of irrigation water and towards the end of February and in March lots of vineyards started to suffer, causing shrivelling, especially in Shiraz.

The season was further characterised by the almost complete absence of diseases and plagues. The only disturbing trend is the increased occurrence of mealybug – the infections are mostly so light that they are not always noticed by producers.

Producers remain hopeful that the Clanwilliam Dam will fill up this winter. Another season with severe water restrictions will probably have a seriously negative effect on some vineyards. Increased salinity in the soil due to insufficient fresh irrigation water is cause for concern.

Grape and wine quality

Despite adverse climatic conditions, wines of exceptional quality can be expected. Improved production facilities at all the cellars ensured that the harvest process runs smoothly. Selection of grapes in the vineyard meant that the better quality grapes were pressed at optimal ripeness and vinified separately.

Pieter du Toit, Cederberg Private Cellar: “We had to start picking two weeks earlier than our ‘normal’ Cederberg time because of the warm, dry weather. Early-ripening cultivars like Sauvignon and Chenin blanc look promising because we managed to pick basically everything prior to the heat wave in mid-February. Late-ripening Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon were only picked at the end of March, but show above-average quality. The smaller harvest (20% less red and 15% less white) yielded smaller berries with concentrated aromas and the reds are deeply coloured. We’ll definitely bottle less wine to maintain the quality of previous years.”

ORANGE RIVER

Production trends

The 2005 wine grape harvest is 21,3% smaller than the record crop of 2004 and 162 274 tons of grapes were pressed. Colombar, Chenin blanc and Ruby Cabernet gave smaller crops than the previous season. This year will be remembered for the smallest Sultana crop in decades.

Climate

The late harvest of 2004 and widespread downy mildew after the harvest meant that there was insufficient accumulation of reserves, even though the first frost occurred as late as 9

June. Budding occurred later than the previous year. The budding period was characterised by relatively cold periods without obvious frost damage. Delayed and poor budding occurred in all the cultivars where minimum pruning had been practised. Serious growth arrest symptoms were observed and the humidity was low throughout.

October was very hot and 10 mm rain on 20 October brought welcome relief during the flowering period. Vines were healthy; there was hardly any oidium and downy mildew until the harvest. The end of December and the first half of January were characterised by long periods of heat waves.

Widespread showers fell on 11 and 19 January and ranged from 8 – 30 mm. The warm conditions at the end of December and in January were detrimental to berry development and the bunches were considerably lighter and smaller. In Vaalharts and Jacobsdal serious hail damage occurred towards the end of December. The Vaalharts area measured more than 400 mm rain from December to April.

Irrigation water was readily available throughout the season.

Grape and wine quality

The harvest was earlier than the previous season and producers were harvesting full steam as from 24 January. The entire crop had been picked by mid-March, whereafter it started raining sporadically and downy mildew affected the entire region, with the worst leaf drop in the Vaalharts area.

The analyses and quality of the grapes delivered to the cellars were very good and the quality of the wines is most promising.

PAARL

Production trends

Despite the drought the final crop size of $\pm 140\ 000$ tons in the Paarl region is expected to differ little from the previous vintage. Poor berry set occurred in older vineyards (>18 years). On the whole these vineyards struggled more to handle the demands of this season's climate and produced smaller crops. Cinsaut noir with bigger berries also showed drastic crop losses of up to 50% as a result of the dry, warm season. Younger vineyards fared well despite difficult conditions. Merlot gave exceptionally good yields.

Climate

For the second consecutive year the region experienced a severe drought. The previous season was described as one of the driest in 15 years, which means that the 2005 season has to be the driest in 16 years! This season was drier and warmer than the long term figures for the region. The 2004 winter was dry, but towards the end it finally became sufficiently cold. Budding, which generally occurred earlier than in 2003 due to the warm spring, was even and definitely less problematic than the previous season. In Shiraz, Merlot and Chardonnay in particular budding was more even than in 2003.

Producers had to irrigate judiciously, firstly because the irrigation dams were very empty after the dry winter, secondly because groundwater levels were insufficient. Thunder and good rain in October (40 mm – 70 mm) caused vigorous growth. Approximately 80 mm rain was measured for the rest of the season until the end of April 2005. Vigorous growth necessitated repeated suckering and tipping/topping actions, especially with a view to quality production.

Slight crop losses occurred due to downy mildew and oidium – the latter occurred throughout the season. Producers managed to control mealybug and ants, but snails, snout beetles and long horn grasshoppers were bothersome.

Grape and wine quality

There was less sunburn damage, because despite the drought there were fewer heat waves. Berry shrinkage and shrivelling occurred, especially in bush vine Chenin blanc that was

harvested at high sugars ($\geq 23^{\circ}\text{B}$), as well as in Cinsaut. Ripening was approximately 10 - 14 days earlier than usual.

Grapes harvested in the first half of the season had higher than expected acid analyses at the desired sugar levels. Initially grape pHs were low, but there was a steep increase towards the end of the season. Cabernet Sauvignon took longer to reach the desired sugar levels and low acids and high pHs were measured at the time of pressing.

Sauvignon blanc is looking good with abundant tropical flavours, but 2005 appears to be a better vintage for red wine. The red wines have lovely colour and expectations for Cabernet, Pinotage and Merlot are high.

Marcel van der Walt, Veenwouden: "We were very lucky this year. We made elegant wines with very good aromas. Eighty per cent of our crop was in before the big rain, because we hired extra pickers to harvest the grapes. We then waited a long time for the Cabernet to ripen."

Anthony de Jager, Fairview winemaker: "The season was difficult. Just prior to harvesting the Sauvignon Blanc we had a heat wave of up to 42°C , which left the vines stressed. This was immediately followed by 60 to 80 millimeters of rain, which meant waiting again for the moisture to dry while the sugar levels rose dramatically, so we were under severe pressure to pick. Generally however, it was an extended season with a smaller but healthy crop."

ROBERTSON

Production trends

The 2005 vintage posed multiple challenges to producers, viticulturists and winemakers. The crop was 16% smaller than in 2004 and 154 640 tons of grapes were pressed.

The smaller harvest is mainly due to smaller, looser bunches with smaller berries. This trend was noticeable in all cultivars, but especially so in Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. Several thunder storms in December and January caused Botrytis rot, resulting in further crop losses, especially among early cultivars.

Climate

The harvest was again preceded by a dry winter with sufficiently cold temperatures not occurring until later in the season. Water restrictions were imposed because the level of the Brandvlei Dam was very low at the start of the irrigation season. Producers were initially entitled to a 50 % allocation and later to a two-thirds allocation. Full allocations were only granted from 13 December to the end of February, whereafter restrictions were once again imposed.

Budding took place approximately 7 - 10 days later than usual, but growth was good right from the start. Irrigation had to be very judicious. Two periods of good precipitation accompanied by thunder occurred at the beginning and middle of October, consequently growth was vigorous to very vigorous at the onset of flowering. Set was compromised, resulting in smaller berries.

On 22 December 2004 Robertson fell prey to a cloud-burst – 180 mm rain in six hours – more than half the region's annual rainfall! This was followed by widespread rain from the southeast on 14 January, with heavy precipitation against the Langeberge and in Bonnievale and Ashton. On 20 January and again on 28 January widespread and heavy showers occurred throughout the entire region. This period was also characterised by very humid conditions.

The summer was mild compared to other regions. Temperatures seldom exceeded the mid-thirties. Botrytis as well as sour rot were problematic at the start of the pressing season. Chardonnay, Chenin blanc, Sauvignon blanc, Pinotage and Shiraz were affected. Aggressive downy mildew late in the season caused partial to total leaf loss, resulting in desiccation of berries in late cultivars.

Grape and wine quality

Once again harvesting started unusually early. Cap Classique producers received the first grapes very early in January. The first part of the pressing season was characterised by very high acids and low pHs. Later on sugars normalised with acids on the low side and high pHs.

The quality of the wines is surprisingly good in most instances. The lighter crop and smaller berries made for full-bodied wines, with lovely red wine colour. Shiraz in particular is looking very good.

Pieter Ferreira, Graham Beck Wines: "The base wines for our Cap Classiques are world class. The Chardonnay is medium potential, although quite elegant at this early stage, so too the Viognier. Shiraz is looking good to very good. The Cabernets are quite disappointing."

Roelf du Preez, Bon Cap Organic Wines: "What a pressing season! In a nutshell, very small, very early and very good quality! Our crop is about 30% smaller. We kicked off with sparkling wine on 6 January. We were fortunate in that no damage was caused by untimely showers. The must analyses were great and the wine is already looking very promising."

Danie de Wet, De Wetshof: "In 2005 nature gave us great wines, but this year's grapes had to be selected in the vineyards. January saw weekly rainfall of between 20 and 30 mm, which caused a fair amount of rot. The sound grapes were very sound, however, with high acids and the quality of the wine is truly magnificent. Our crop is a lot smaller, and the juice recovery per ton was also less than normal."

STELLENBOSCH

Production trends

The crop is expected to be either the same size, or perhaps 1% bigger than in 2004. Warm climatic conditions, as well as the occurrence of Botrytis rot, played a role in the size of the crop.

On the whole white cultivars produced good crops with compact bunches. Botrytis had a negative influence on Chenin blanc and Chardonnay. Sauvignon blanc fared better than last season.

Red cultivars, Merlot and Shiraz in particular, produced bigger crops. Pinotage and Cabernet Sauvignon crops fluctuated, the latter mainly because of lighter bunch weight due to the warm, dry climatic conditions late in the season.

Climate

The preamble to the 2004/2005 season was characterised by relatively dry and warmer winter conditions. Intermittent rain was not sufficient to fill irrigation dams. Temperatures were above average. Dams benefited from heavy showers and thunder in October. The rainfall in November and December was far below average. December temperatures (maximum and minimum) were above average. In January minimum temperatures were higher than the long term average and three times more rain than normal fell. February and March were dry and warmer than usual.

Budding was poor in some of the older Chardonnay blocks. Shoot growth was uneven in Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Shiraz especially; consequently there was uneven ripening of bunches on the same vines. Strict crop control had to be exercised to obtain more even ripening.

Growth was vigorous after the thunder and rainfall in October. Repeated suckering and tipping were required to ensure quality production. Insects were bothersome, in particular snout beetles and snails. Minimal downy mildew occurred early in the growing season. Flowering and set were good, with big bunches in Pinotage, Merlot and Shiraz especially. High humidity, particularly in November and December, accompanied by less southeasterly

and other wind, caused Botrytis rot, which mostly affected Chenin blanc and Chardonnay, resulting in crop losses. Because of the dry, warm conditions bunch weights were lower.

Grape and wine quality

Ripening took place \pm 10 days earlier than usual. The exception was Chardonnay, which was harvested much later than usual. In most cultivars sugars were higher than usual when optimal ripeness was achieved. Colour in red cultivars was particularly good. Due to the dry and warm ripening conditions, grape pH was higher with lower acids.

The white wines are looking very promising at the moment. Despite the warmer conditions, Sauvignon blanc wines are looking good with more tropical flavours. The quality of Merlot, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon is very good. Despite the climate, an exceptional year for quality, with wines that differ markedly from those of other years.

Johann Krige, Kanonkop: "The crop at Kanonkop is about 20% smaller than last year, but the quality is outstanding, thanks to the grapes having ripened at a slower tempo as a result of showers in January."

Eben Archer, Distell: "We are very satisfied with the red harvest on all the Lusan farms, and the better white wines are really superb. We were saved by the rain at the end of February and the beginning of March."

Coastal Region: An overall impression of conditions in the Coastal Region is provided by Martin Meinert, who worked with grapes from his own vineyard in Devon Valley, Ken Forrester's farm in the Helderberg area, Morgenhof in Stellenbosch and Eagle's Nest farm in Constantia: "It is a mixed vintage in which careful selection, both at picking and when buying wines, will again prove to be crucial, but many very good wines will be taken to bottle. While being one of the most difficult vintages I have come across due to adverse weather conditions, many of the wines are surprisingly good, in particular those from grapes harvested relatively early in the season. At this stage it appears that the cumulative heat was less kind to the later varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon. Chenin blanc was problematic due to rot caused by the January/February rains, and the grapes from Constantia were less affected by heat due to milder conditions there."

Constantia: According to Klein Constantia's Lowell Jooste, all varieties were a step up on quality compared to last year. "We were fortunate that our vineyards were not yet at full ripeness at the time of the late January rains, which gave the unirrigated vineyards a boost after a dry summer and helped us harvest fully ripe healthy grapes. Nature was on our side this year!"

SWARTLAND

Production trends

In the Malmesbury district the crop was approximately 6% smaller than the 2004 crop, which was again approximately 4,7% smaller than the 2003 crop. Smaller berry sizes occurred in the dryland vines.

Climate

The winter rainfall was once again below average and soil moisture was low at the start of the new growing season. Budding and véraison were both very even. Véraison occurred about a week before the expected time.

Ripening was initially very even, then it was delayed by warm and dry conditions at the end of January. The rain at the end of January brought relief and allowed vines to reach physiological ripeness.

Vines were relatively disease free and no real problems were encountered. There was very little rot.

Good rain in the second week of April improved conditions for the accumulation of reserves in the post-harvest period.

Grape and wine quality

Bunches were smaller, but the quality was good. Certain blocks, especially on the more shallow soils, experienced excessive moisture stress as a result of the dry summer. A considerable amount of sunburn occurred on leaner vineyards, Chenin blanc in particular.

Chardonnay once again proved that it is well adjusted to this region and handled the warm conditions with ease. The desired degrees of ripeness were achieved and good grape flavours were observed. Red cultivars coloured nicely with the exception of the older Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards, which did not colour well as a result of leafroll virus infection.

Abé Beukes, Darling Cellars: "Once again this is a vintage characterised by variation. It is a soft, drinkable vintage, but don't try to keep the wines five or ten years in the bottle. I am very satisfied with the Sauvignon blanc and the Pinotage, because they were picked relatively early, before the heat wave and the rain. The Chenins took a knock, their pH is relatively high and the acids low. They are currently drinking well, but they will not necessarily last. I have tasted a few Chardonnays from this area and they are exceptionally good, and there are some really nice Merlots. With regard to Shiraz – this area produces such great wines! Even when you expect nothing much, the wines are still fabulous. Our Shiraz this year is elegant, yet full-bodied, not wishy washy at all. Our crop is about 10% smaller, but it was planned that way in view of wine prices being under such pressure."

Pieter du Toit, Kloovenburg: "The mid-February heat wave initially caused us to be very negative about the 2005 harvest, but since then we have had a complete change of heart. The red wines display abundant fruit at the moment and they are very well balanced. They remind me of 2002, when we had a similar heat wave in the middle of February, and eventually the wines were outstanding."

WORCESTER / BREEDEKLOOF

Production trends

After the record crop of 2004, this year saw a much smaller crush than had been forecast. Berry set in the region was not very good. The bunches either had few berries and/or did not undergo the normal berry growth. Certain cultivars such as Chardonnay were characterised by very small bunches. The crop was dramatically smaller and individual blocks, especially older Chenin blanc, were up to 50% lighter than in 2004.

The final crop amounted to 274 993 tons, which is 19,3% less than in 2004.

Climate

For the wine grower, the challenges posed by the 2004/2005 vintage were enormous. The 2004 winter was initially warm, which had a detrimental effect on dormancy breaking of winter buds. It was a relatively dry winter and at the start of the growing season the level of the Brandvlei Dam was quite low (about 45%). At the time of budding, the groundwater level was lower than the previous season.

Budding was not even throughout and caused unevenness in blocks, especially at the time of ripening. There were good showers on two occasions in October. These were accompanied by thunder, resulting in very vigorous growth.

More rain and thunder occurred just before Christmas, resulting in larger berries and dense canopies. Certain areas had downy mildew, which was further encouraged by humid conditions. Botrytis and to a lesser extent sour rot occurred.

Grape and wine quality

The harvest was 7 – 14 days early, but thereafter the grapes ripened quickly and simultaneously. The sugar in many rebate blocks was almost too high at the time of pressing and some of the cellars were under pressure to keep up the pace.

The red cultivars often had good sugars but unripe tannins, which made it difficult to establish a pressing date without allowing the sugars (and alcohol) to become too high. Late cultivars struggled with low acids and high pHs.

Despite difficult conditions the wines are looking excellent, in particular the red wines, which have very good colour.

Pieter Carstens, Slanghoek Winery: "Although the 2005 season will be remembered for being very dry, exceptional fruit was received by the winery this year and we could make outstanding, rich, full-bodied red and fruity white wines. At the beginning of the season the dam levels were acceptable to ensure enough water for the growing season, although the groundwater levels were low. This enabled our growers to manipulate berry size during the period from set to véraison, thus obtaining a better skin to juice ratio. The dry season ensured that we had very little vineyard disease, resulting in a significant decrease in fungicide and pesticide usage. Optimal ripeness was obtained early in the season, making our season shorter than usual and ensuring that the grapes had very good chemical analyses."

OTHER REGIONS

Walker Bay

Hannes Storm, Hamilton Russell Vineyards: "The 2005 vintage kicked off with a number of challenges for both the winemaker and the vineyard manager, since grapes from different cultivars often overlapped. Our pressing season was characterised by many late nights and even more challenges, but the fruit has been reaped – the boss is satisfied and so am I, more than satisfied!"

Peter Finlayson, Bouchard Finlayson: "In the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley we experienced one of the driest winters ever. Conditions were saved by timeous rains in October and November 2004. The showers during the crucial month of February did us a great favour and helped our season when others were desperate. The summer season was generally moderate in temperature which ensured that the fruit arrived at the cellar in excellent condition. Another feature of the vintage was the fact that the grape acidities were higher than the previous two years, this is normally a positive quality indicator. The different varieties all performed well, with Pinot noir looking very promising, having excellent colour and good mouth feel. The late red varieties for the Italian-styled Hannibal are encouragingly pleasant."

Great Karoo

Heimie Schoeman, Prince Albert Valley: "We are the only wine ward in the Great Karoo. This was not a very cold winter and the snowfall on the Swartberg mountains melted quickly. Winter rain was sufficient for us to start the summer with full irrigation dams. In summer we had disappointingly little rain; from November up to the harvest in February there was hardly anything. The winds were exceptionally warm and younger vines in particular suffered, having fewer leaves and little shade. The quality of the grapes was really good though thanks to the dry air. The balance between sugar, acid and pH was excellent because no rain fell during the harvest and ripening could occur gradually and constantly without any delays. The volume of our crop was approximately 25% less than the previous season. With increasing costs, reduced production and improved quality I suppose one would need about R10 000 per ton to survive! And so we dream on here in the Great Karoo..."

III ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Australia

A 3% drop in production is expected in Australia this year. Around 1,83 million tonnes of grapes were crushed (source: The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics).

For the viticulturalists 2005 was a battle against the elements and severely tested the vineyard management teams across Australia. The weather was cooler and drier than normal with reduced fruit set. Disease and pest pressure was low.

The year having generally been cooler than most, wine quality should be good.

New Zealand

After last year's bumper crop – an all-time record and over 50% up on 2003 – this year's production levels are definitely on the low side of average.

Yields were reduced due to the cold weather and heavy rains in December and early January during flowering and fruit set. Spring was also cooler than usual, resulting in a slower start to the season, with moderate growth.

The slightly lower crops mean good concentration of fruit, which bodes well for the wines.

IV VINTAGE GUIDE

Although it is commonly held that South African wines from even vintages are better than those from uneven vintages, this has not been the case in recent years. This is yet another uneven year that has produced wines with great potential. The number of wine regions, their geographic distance and climatological diversity defy generalisation, but the overall characteristics of the previous six vintages may be summarised as follows:

2004: The harvest seemed to drag on forever, but it was well worth the wait. Elegant wines with greater maturation potential due to a cooler season. Lower alcohol and soft tannins characterise this vintage.

2003: An excellent vintage, one of the very best in recent years. White as well as red wines impress with full-bodied structure and complexity.

2002: Pay attention to individual cellars, rather than general trends. Downy mildew caused widespread havoc. Good Sauvignon blanc, Chardonnay, Shiraz, Merlot, Pinotage and new clone Cabernet Sauvignon wines.

2001: The summer was very hot and dry with few diseases. Wines were high in alcohol, with very concentrated flavours.

2000: The crop was small. Some excellent red wines that will keep well. Big, alcoholic white wines.

1999: Large crop, warm summer. Excellent ripening conditions. Reds high in alcohol, will develop in time. Fruity whites.