

FACTS

South African Wine Industry

2008 Harvest Report

The report was compiled by Angela Lloyd for Wines of South Africa

OVERVIEW

If 2008 has been dubbed by many 'the viticulturist's harvest' due to the challenging weather conditions, an equal number of winemakers would claim it was also 'the winemaker's harvest', given its length and the dedication required in the cellar to ensure only 100% healthy grapes made it into the fermentation tanks. This in addition to the frequent occurrence of many varieties ripening simultaneously, which stretched cellar capacity and human endurance.

Winter 2007 was just what the doctor ordered with copious rain and cold from May, early in the season, which boded well for even budding. Dams were overflowing and ground water levels substantially replenished after years of drought. Only in the Klein Karoo did the heavy rain arrive later in November.

Continued rain in spring was accompanied by cooler than usual temperatures. Positively, Distell's viticulturist, Dirk Bosman notes: "A rainy spring and wet weather conditions that continued well into January benefited our dryland vineyards and those that would normally have received supplementary irrigation." These conditions also encouraged extremely vigorous growth; controlling this proved an early challenge for the viticulturists. Disease pressure was counteracted by the cool weather, wind in some areas and preventative spraying regimes which reflected lessons learned from the extreme disease pressure in spring 2002!

Rain was also an unseasonal feature across all the regions in the grape ripening period; most unusual was a mid-February thunderstorm, preceded by tropical-like humidity; Bosman sums up the challenge of every producer: "Rain and humidity did pose the threat of grey and sour rot, as well as downy mildew. This placed enormous pressure on viticulturists and vineyard staff to manage canopies with the utmost vigilance, ensuring sufficient aeration to curtail the likelihood of disease."

The remainder of February was fine, if cool, and on average the harvest started 10 days to two weeks late; these conditions allowed the grapes to ripen slowly and to full ripeness while retaining good acid levels.

Winemakers were kept on their toes as, in keeping with the very different weather, varieties ripened out of sequence and much sorting was required at the cellar to ensure only healthy grapes made it into the fermentation vats. The usual Cape summer temperatures eventually arrived in March, the ripening process gathered momentum and many varieties were ready for harvesting simultaneously, putting pressure on cellar capacity and stretching human resources.

While the SAWIS estimate of 30 April shows an increased crop in every region except the Klein Karoo and a total of 1 419 019 tons for 2008, individual intakes vary widely, depending on the negative effects of wind during flowering and rot, as well as the positives of new bearing vineyards.

Generally, white varieties did well, showing good fruit purity, freshness and structure. Many reds too had no problem in reaching good phenolic ripeness with purity of fruit and supple tannins. Possibly the best news, encountered across the winelands, comes from Dirk Bosman: "A very positive feature of this year's vintage is that we are able to produce many of our reds at lower alcohol levels, close to the 13% mark. This is thanks to a combination of climatic conditions and viticultural protocols established to promote ripening with a good balance between sugars, acids and tannins."

Flagstone and Kumala's Bruce Jack, who takes in grapes and wine from every region bar the Orange River, is well placed to summarise the 2008 vintage as a whole: "On the positive side there is amazing elegance common to most varieties across most regions. I think, in the right hands, we will see some exceptional, elegant and long-lived white wines out of the cooler areas - the best whites for decades and the most elegant reds for a very long time."

Below are alphabetically listed reports from individual regions.

REGION: BOT RIVER

CONTRIBUTOR: BEAUMONT

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Cold with ground-soaking rain, good dormancy.

SPRING 2007 Cool and wet with early vigorous growth.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Cool with more south-easterly wind than 2007. Rain after fruit set resulted in rapid growth of berries; dry till veraison, slowing down growth.

HARVEST 2008 Heat wave in early February followed by cooler weather and lots of south-easterly wind.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Constantly checking vines for mildew, especially around flowering; knowing each block's susceptibility; using softer products to control disease. "Each year is a challenge in the cellar to capture the essence of the grapes with as little fiddling as possible; no concentrators or the like, here, just the grapes as they are on the vine," advises winemaker Sebastian Beaumont. His 2008 annual 'new cellar invention' was a piece of shade cloth in the press drip tray, which he happily reports, "worked like a bomb catching solids".

POSITIVES A really great team of harvesters and cellar helpers; they can make or break a vintage. Fantastic grapes, despite the challenging season.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Chenin blanc - a little riper than wished for but fresh, lively flavours and great acid. Pinotage - stomped to a pulp, followed by a short, hot ferment, a most interesting result.

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, except for a few great batches, the most frustrating.

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Normal.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) A challenging year like 1997 but the wines will be lovely - fantastic!

REGION: BREEDEKLOOF

CONTRIBUTORS: BERGSIG, DEETLEFS, VARIOUS BREEDEKLOOF CELLARS

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 A typical cold, wet Boland winter with regular snowfalls; sufficient cold units to send the vines into dormancy, and irrigation dams at the highest levels in years.

SPRING 2007 Regular windy conditions alternated with rain. Good, even budding; disease- and frost-free.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Only towards the end of December did the daytime temperatures rise, but these were not as extreme as in other years; nights remained cold. Strong south-easterly winds during January, moderate temperatures. Ideal conditions prior to harvest.

HARVEST 2008 Rain at the start of harvest saw some botrytis develop. Unusually, March was warmer than February.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Managing rot early in the season and harvesting at an acceptable ripeness without quality negatively affected by rot. In the cellar, juice settling required a larger quantity of pectolytic enzymes due to rot (group report). Harvesting took a long time as grapes had to be carefully sorted, separating the healthy grapes from the rest. Several varieties ripened together (Deetlefs).

POSITIVES Excellent growth season, no excessive heat waves during harvest. Slow ripening, higher natural acid in reds and extended harvest allowed for each variety to be picked at a high level of optimum ripeness.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Chardonnay** (group report - particularly full, complex and concentrated; Bergsig). **Colombard** (group report - striking guava, apple and tropical fruit, balanced, medium body). **Cabernet sauvignon** (Bergsig - full bodied, elegant) **Chenin Blanc** (Deetlefs - fruity, good mouthfeel, backbone). **Pinotage** (Bergsig, Deetlefs - fruity, soft but well-structured tannins).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Chenin blanc** (group report - some blocks, due to rot; Bergsig - rot). **Sauvignon blanc** (group report - some blocks less full, complex; Bergsig - blocks harvested after 9 February less complex; Deetlefs). **Semillon** (group report - some blocks less full, complex). **Riesling** (Bergsig - rot). **Cabernet sauvignon** (Deetlefs - didn't reach full ripeness).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS 10% down overall, with Chenin blanc and Riesling 30% off due to rot (Bergsig).

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Very good to exceptional red wine season; average to under average white wine season (group report, Bergsig). Good fruit, balanced tannins and elegance in both whites and reds (Deetlefs).

REGION: CAPE AGULHAS

CONTRIBUTORS: LOMOND, QUOIN ROCK

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Cooler and wetter than usual.

SPRING 2007 Cool weather persisted, enabling late pruning and even budding. Higher humidity levels but mildew risk was offset by windier than usual conditions.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Persistent winds during growth controlled vigour and kept mildew under check during periods of regular rainfall. Temperatures were milder than usual.

HARVEST 2008 Mild weather and winds delayed the harvest by two to three weeks.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Sauvignon blanc suffered from rot and snout beetle, the latter residing in the mountain fynbos round Quoin Rock's vineyards. Two troops of baboons, numbering over 100 each, and birds caused the usual damage. Wind burn and stress occurred in south-east facing rows and slopes

POSITIVES Good fruit set with healthy bunches; lovely fruit purity with high natural acidities. "The 2008 vintage stood out particularly with the weather conditions experienced over the ripening period. This allowed the grapes to mature more slowly and naturally produced optimum ripeness," according to Wayne Gabb, wine-grower in charge of Lomond's vineyards.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Chardonnay** (Quoin Rock - from protected lower slopes, clean, quality fruit). **Merlot** (Quoin Rock - vigour was controlled, the fruit full of flavour.) **Sauvignon Blanc** (Lomond - great varietal character, high natural acids and maturation potential).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Sauvignon blanc disappointing due to natural enemies (Quoin Rock).

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Great varietal character in whites

REGION: CEDERBERG

CONTRIBUTOR: CEDERBERG CELLARS

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Highest rainfall in 10 years, all of which fell in a very short period.

SPRING 2007 Cool with little frost damage. Good flowering with little wind.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 High end January temperatures caused no damage since the harvest was delayed by two weeks.

HARVEST 2008 Moderate temperatures and no rain.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Attention in the vineyards is the clue to a successful vintage. Crop control and patience were necessary.

POSITIVES Not a sign of rot. Reds reached good phenolic ripeness.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Very good **Chenin blanc**. One of the best years for **Cabernet** and **Shiraz**. Last Cabernet harvested mid-April with excellent ripeness/analysis.

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc**, but will be a good average.

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Controlled anyway, so normal.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) David Nieuwoudt sums up 2008 as "A long, tiring harvest but one I won't mind having again."

REGION: CONSTANTIA & CAPE POINT

CONTRIBUTORS: CAPE POINT VINEYARDS, CONSTANTIA UITSIG, GROOT CONSTANTIA, KLEIN CONSTANTIA, STEENBERG VINEYARDS

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Highest rainfall in 10 years, "which fell in biblical proportions", as Klein Constantia's Adam Mason graphically describes it. Cold, wet weather started in May, ideal for even budding, good dormancy.

SPRING 2007 Cool with a lot of rain and wind, negative for flowering. Budding was even and good but late, cool soil temperatures delaying start of root growth.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Still cool which delayed growth. Cape Point's Duncan Savage reports main growth surge happened in January as opposed to early December. Wind his side of the Peninsula mountain chain was contrasted by high humidity with a few heavy showers in Constantia; disease pressure was high. February, usually the hottest month, was very cool; March was much drier and hot.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Controlling vigour, mildew and rot was the general focus, though Savage says the wind his side prevented rot until March. At Steenberg's end of the valley, Ruth Penfold says wind at flowering, as well as disease and erratic ripening, caused a loss of crop. Generally, 2008 presented more challenges in the vineyard than the cellar, though berry sorting was necessary at both ends.

POSITIVES At Cape Point, quality looks good all round, with lower alcohols. For Constantia producers, cool conditions led to slow ripening which resulted in awesome fruit expression on both whites and reds. Warmer conditions later in the season allowed full ripeness on the reds; good tannin maturity was achieved at lower alcohols.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc** for all contributors is concentrated with good natural acids. **Semillon** (Constantia Uitsig - excellent fruit quality). **Shiraz** (Groot Constantia - very spicy/peppery). **Merlot** (Klein Constantia - balanced, elegant; Constantia Uitsig - complex, good character).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Chardonnay** (Constantia Uitsig - difficult to reach required sugar levels); **Pinotage** (Groot Constantia - less concentration/complexity than previous); **Cabernet** (Cape Point - due to later ripening).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Sauvignon 35% up; Chardonnay 50% down (Constantia Uitsig). Overall 20% down, more on reds (Groot Constantia). Reds up, Sauvignon, Chardonnay and Semillon down (Klein Constantia).

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Good but challenging, cool vintage (Cape Point). Exceptional but challenging (Constantia Uitsig). Exceptional whites, good reds (Groot Constantia). Whites and reds promising; a vintage that will be approachable on release and definitely one to put away (Klein Constantia).

REGION: DARLING & SWARTLAND

CONTRIBUTORS: CLOOF, LAMMERSHOEK, SWARTLAND WINERY

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Rainfall 50% more than the past 10 year average.

SPRING 2007 Higher rainfall, lower temperatures interspersed with warm spells, resulting in vigorous growth and uneven budding in earlier varieties.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Cool with high rainfall but plenty of wind helped prevent rot.

HARVEST 2008 25mm total rain spread over the harvest (Lammershoek), once again ideal for dry-land bush vines. Normal extreme heat at the start of harvest but in much shorter spells than in 2007. Mild February which is unusual but welcome. Very good season. Slow ripening

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) For the Swartland Winery team, harvesting at proper ripeness was a big challenge. At Lammershoek, uneven ripeness in early varieties, pinotage particularly, necessitated more sorting. Lammershoek's Albert Ahrens reported that 'Keeping focused during a very long harvest...' was a cry heard around the winelands.

POSITIVES A long ripening period for mid to later varieties, resulting in superb phenolic ripeness at lower sugar levels. Healthy grapes at Lammershoek allowed for the whole crop to be fermented on wild yeasts.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Both Lammershoek and Swartland Winery single out **Chenin blanc** and **Shiraz**. Swartland is also very happy with **Cabernet sauvignon**. The longer ripening period

was influential in all these good results.

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Pinotage was problematic for both Lammershoek and Swartland, the latter mentioning the bigger crop. (But for the same reason, it was a positive for Cloof which had lost 100 tons in the 2007 heat wave!)

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS At Swartland the crop was about 10% higher thanks to high yields on Chenin and Pinotage.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) The whites generally are good. Reds fresher and slightly lower in alcohol.

REGION: DURBANVILLE

CONTRIBUTORS: ALTYDGEDACHT, DE GRENDEL, DIEMERSDAL, DURBANVILLE HILLS, HILLCREST, NITIDA

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Ideal with plenty of rain and cold.

SPRING 2007 De Grendel reported very little wind which was beneficial for fruit set for 2008 and crop size for the following 2009 vintage. On the inside of the Tygerberg Hills, Durbanville Hills and Hillcrest experienced strong, cold winds during flowering which reduced the size of the crop to average, unlike the foliage which Durbanville Hills' Martin Moore remembers "kept sprouting for ever".

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Heat spikes as well as regular rain brought constant threat of rot. De Grendel missed this problem, thanks to the drying effect of the strong south-easterly wind.

HARVEST 2008 Due to cooler weather, harvest started on average two weeks later than usual.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Martin Moore's heartfelt declaration is that "the 2008 season is not for sissies!" Harvesting sequence was all over the place, few varieties sticking to their usual order. Both Altydegdacht and De Grendel agree, De Grendel's Charles Hopkins noting: "Alertness in the vineyards and timing had to be spot on." The unsettled weather did cause some rot in Nitida's Semillon, a variety which is notoriously susceptible to this problem.

POSITIVES "An exceptional vintage for red wines, especially for those who had the patience to wait," claims Hopkins. Ripeness achieved at lower sugars, resulting in lower alcohols.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Sauvignon blanc (De Grendel, Altydegdacht, Durbanville Hills - thanks to the cooler season and our climate). **Viognier** (Altydegdacht). **Riesling** (Altydegdacht). **Chardonnay** (Hillcrest, Diemersdal, Durbanville Hills). **Merlot** (De Grendel, Diemersdal). **Shiraz** (De Grendel). **Pinotage** (Altydegdacht, Diemersdal).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Malbec (Hillcrest - rather thin).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Down between 10 and 15% on Altydegdacht. Down also at Durbanville Hills due to strong, cold winds during flowering and overcast weather during cell differentiation, which resulted in smaller bunches. Generally lower at Hillcrest, with Sauvignon blanc 30% down. De Grendel was up 15% on 2007.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Hillcrest's Graeme Read is confident that all his wines are medium bodied, elegant and show typical varietal flavours. Charles Hopkins mentions quality whites and "more workable alcohols" in the reds.

REGION: ELGIN

CONTRIBUTORS: ELGIN VINTNERS, IONA, OAK VALLEY, SOUTHILL, TOKARA

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Enough cold and wet to achieve good dormancy and soil moisture levels.

SPRING 2007 Iona experienced a warm October; rain and cold followed. Elgin Vintners' Paul Wallace recorded rain every 10 days.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Still cool and wet, with rain every two weeks, brought in by the south-easterly wind.

HARVEST 2008 Warm, with occasional showers, some heat spikes and exceptionally high humidity. Iona recorded glorious weather from January, with only three days over 30°C and the odd shower helping to prevent vine stress.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Disease pressure due to the damp, humid conditions. Excessive vigour in the vine canopies due to the moisture, uneven ripening due to poor weather during flowering and veraison. Bird damage. Oak Valley's Pieter Visser's biggest challenge was in the cellar, when all the grapes ripened almost at the same time.

POSITIVES Clean fruit despite mildew pressure always being a threat. The cool ripening period produced fantastic flavour and good acidity in the whites, great colour in the reds. A gratified Pieter Visser also mentions that, possibly because neighbouring vineyards are in production, the baboons left alone Oak Valley's Pinot noir mountain block, which produced five tons/ha for the first time ever.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Viognier** (Elgin Vintners - ripe fruit with great flavours). **Merlot** (Elgin Vintners - benefited from the occasional rain, making irrigation unnecessary). **Sauvignon blanc** (Southhill - great flavours and good acid). **Chardonnay** (Iona, Oak Valley, Southhill and Tokara; the latter also enthusiastic about a botrytised Sauvignon dessert-style wine). **Pinot Noir** (Oak Valley).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc** (Elgin Vintners - picked a little green with very high acid as botrytis was setting in). **Shiraz** (Elgin Vintners - where grey rot was a major problem). **Merlot, Cabernet sauvignon** (Iona - 'Wait and see'). **Chardonnay** (Tokara - due to uneven ripening and much millerandage).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Whites average, reds higher, as vines mature (Elgin Vintners). Down on Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet sauvignon (Iona). Good size crop with total up from 100 tons to 165, due to younger blocks coming into production (Oak Valley). Very low (Tokara).

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Outstanding whites (Tokara). As the harvest information was received, reds were still fermenting so too early to comment on them.

REGION: FRANSCHHOEK

CONTRIBUTORS: CABRIERE, CAPE CHAMONIX, GRAHAM BECK, LA MOTTE, MANOIR DE BREDEL, MONT ROCHELLE, RICKETY BRIDGE, TOPIARY

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 More than enough rain and cold, with a few snowfalls.

SPRING 2007 Late and still cold, but budding was even

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Graham Beck's viticulturist, Marco Ventrella, records that wind was a notable factor, "punishing those for whom canopy management is not a priority. Where the valley channels the wind rolls in gusts and repeatedly topped exposed vineyards without wind breaks; the prospects for these is not great."

HARVEST 2008 Mild daytime temperatures, cold nights. Disease pressure, increased by intermittent rain, was alleviated by the return of the south-easter.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Regular rain encouraged rot, especially in the whites but also in some reds. Containing growth, managing irrigation and determining when to harvest, as sugars rose slowly. Careful grape sorting in the cellar.

POSITIVES No heat waves during harvest, which allowed the grapes to ripen slowly and at lower sugars, resulting in lower alcohols. Good balance, concentrated varietal flavours and soft tannins. Perfect natural ferments, no sticking. Dustin Osborne of Mont Rochelle noted the challenging phenomenon of reds picking up unusual amounts of acid post-fermentation, possibly due to the cooler season; generally higher natural acid, with the benefit that no tartaric acid addition was necessary.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon Blanc** (Chamonix - aromatic and less herbaceous; Mont Rochelle - great balance and flavour intensity). **Chardonnay** (Chamonix - great balance, flavour intensity; Mont Rochelle - amazing fruit, lower alcohols). **Chenin blanc** (Rickety Bridge - loads of fruit). **Cabernet sauvignon** (La Motte - dark, tannic; well balanced, less green; Topiary - good balance; Rickety Bridge - full, deep, intense). **Merlot** (Rickety Bridge - deep, intense, not at all warm). **Malbec** (La Motte - good colour and spicy flavours). **Shiraz** (La Motte - lots of pepper and spice; Manoir de Bredel; Mont Rochelle - lots of pepper and spice, good acid despite higher alcohol).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Merlot** (Chamonix - ripened as the rain came which might dilute it; Mont Rochelle - a bit herbaceous; Manoir de Bredel - from sandy soils). **Chenin blanc** (Chamonix - "So much rot..." sighs Gottfried Mocke.)

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Chardonnay higher than 2007 (Cabrière); up by 5% generally at Chamonix but Pinot noir down 20%. Potentially huge but thinned for quality (Mont Rochelle); overall, slightly higher (Topiary).

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) La Motte's Edmund Terblanche is happy that "2008 proved organic farming can be successful; despite the challenges, the grapes stayed intact and healthy. Congratulations to the viticulturists." In his view, reds generally have good colour, elegant tannins but Cabernets have "huge tannins, dark colour - intimidating wines for sure". "A very European vintage; the wines will take longer than usual to show but they will have fantastic flavour," reports Gottfried Mocke, Chamonix. Whites either very good or very bad, depending on harvesting time; reds generally good, if not as good as 2007 (Topiary).

REGION: UPPER/HEMEL EN AARDE VALLEY

CONTRIBUTORS: BOUCHARD FINLAYSON, HAMILTON RUSSELL VINEYARDS, LA VIERGE, NEWTON JOHNSON, TOKARA

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Low temperatures, high rainfall; textbook conditions for ideal vine dormancy.

SPRING 2007 Very late and slow to start. Cold with rain and wind early on, which led to lower crop yields. Hail at Newton Johnson destroyed crop on some blocks.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Still cold; November rainfall highest for past 10 years, leading to vigorous growth.

Oppressive humidity during period October to January which, with the rain, caused mildew infection.

HARVEST 2008 January temperatures lowest average for 14 years. Things warmed up in February, easing disease pressure.

HARVEST 2008:

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Weekly rains through the growing season caused excessive vigour and increased disease pressure but grapes responded to timeous mildew control. Sorting rot-infected from healthy grapes in cellar. High malic acid levels.

POSITIVES "Every vintage is a pack of cards! In 2007 we were dealt the perfect hand and 2008 has also presented some outstanding wines," enthuses Peter Finlayson, admitting it was a tough poker game in the process. Slow sugar development with lower alcohols at ripeness. "Load shedding wasn't as bad as anticipated," rejoices La Vierge's Marc van Halderen.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc** (Bouchard-Finlayson and Hamilton Russell Vineyards). **Chardonnay** (La Vierge - intense flavours, well balanced and age-worthy; Tokara - less rot, good flavour development; Newton Johnson - healthy grapes with power and good acid). **Pinot noir** (HRV - on par; La Vierge - fine tannins and good fruit; Newton Johnson - great aromatics, acid and supple; first crop from home vineyards).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc** (La Vierge - some blocks due to rot; Newton Johnson - intermittently expressive, average). **Sangiovese** (La Vierge - uneven with signs of bird damage). **Grenache** (Tokara - uneven with poor colour, lots of rot).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Chardonnay from Bouchard-Finlayson home vineyards up, also Pinot noir, partly due to new vines coming into production. Sauvignon blanc around 70% down on La Vierge but up on Barbera and Shiraz. Pinot noir and Chardonnay down, Sauvignon average, Syrah up at Newton Johnson.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Rewarding with lower alcohols a general characteristic (Bouchard Finlayson). Gordon Newton Johnson is "happiest about alcohols (lower) and acidity (good)", otherwise "happy but cautious, with a mix of very good and average wines".

REGION: KLEIN KAROO/CALITZDORP

CONTRIBUTORS: DE KRANS, KLEIN KAROO PRODUCERS

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Dry but cold.

SPRING 2007 Dry, cooler than usual with a late frost in mid-October.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Between November and February, more than 300mm of rain fell. December and January cooler than usual.

HARVEST 2008 Cooler conditions led to a late start, between 10 days and two weeks.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Selecting only healthy grapes, as the rain had caused high disease pressure. A large number of fruit flies also caused damage to the grapes. After the delayed start, the later varieties ripened early or at the usual time, putting the cellar under pressure.

POSITIVES The cool growing season produced outstanding flavour in whites and early ripening reds, also full

ripeness at lower sugars.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Chardonnay, Pinotage, (De Krans, producers group). Touriga nacional (De Krans). Sauvignon blanc, Viognier, Colombar, Merlot (producers group).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Chenin blanc, Shiraz (producers group) Tinta barocca, Souzão, Muscat (De Krans - Muscat varieties due to rot and, in some instances, ripening difficulties).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS De Krans' crop was overall down 10% on a normal year with Muscat varieties down 50% on 2007.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Good quality whites and reds but, in a difficult year, grape selection was important, as well as being patient not to harvest too early.

REGION: OLIFANTS RIVER

CONTRIBUTORS: FRYER'S COVE, KLAWER, NAMAQUA, SIR LAMBERT

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Abundant rainfall and cold: Namaqua reports the Olifants overflowed its banks twice and the Clanwilliam dam overflowed until the end of November.

SPRING 2007 Normal, cool with good budburst all round. Occasional thunderstorms supplied additional nitrogen, resulting in excellent shoot growth and sufficient leaves to ripen a bumper crop.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Cool with occasional hot spells in December but grapes ripened under ideal conditions. Good onshore wind dried Fryer's Cove vineyards after morning fog.

HARVEST 2008 Later ripening, around 10 days to two weeks, because of cool weather. Unusually, January was warmer than February with a three-week heat wave which saw premature ripening in many vineyards. 'A season that will definitely separate the men from the boys,' say the Namaqua team.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) The challenge for Fryer's Cove is to harvest the grapes as cool as possible and protect them against oxidation, before they are vinified in Stellenbosch; also to harvest before the thousands of sparrows take their share. Power failures and a cooling plant which broke down were taxing cellar conditions. Klawer experienced a huge peak of intake due to the prolonged heat wave; this and power cuts caused capacity problems. The trick to alleviating problems associated with receiving over 100 000 tons of grapes, as Namaqua does, is to pick each variety as near as possible to optimum ripeness and to correctly allocate blocks between rebate (brandy), the hugely popular rosé and other wines. High pH levels were a problem later in the harvest for both Klawer and Namaqua. Excellent vineyard management helped avoid rot in Sir Lambert's vines.

POSITIVES Healthy grapes with typical varietal flavours. Rain after the heat wave eased the severe stress. After a maiden harvest of 700kg, Sir Lambert received four tons of grapes this year, a definite positive in view of demand and economics.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Sauvignon blanc (Fryer's Cove, Klawer - some very good tanks). Chardonnay (Klawer, Namaqua - some very good tanks). Pinot noir, Merlot (Fryer's Cove, Klawer - good colour and flavour); Cabernet sauvignon (Namaqua).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Pinotage (Klawer - good average). Chenin blanc (Namaqua - rot). Merlot (Namaqua - higher pH levels).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Klawer is around

8% up, with whites up nearly 12% (Chenin up 20%), reds down nearly 9%.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Both reds and whites exciting (Fryer's Cove). Whites slightly less good because of rain; reds better in first half of season, high pH levels in second half (Namaqua). Much better than 2007 (Sir Lambert).

REGION: ORANGE RIVER

CONTRIBUTORS: THE REGION'S CELLARS

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Cold with low temperatures. Some frost.

SPRING 2007 Low temperatures and periodic abnormal high rainfall in the flowering season.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Two episodes of hail in the Upington region which damaged almost 3 000 to 4 000 tons of grapes. More low temperatures with some abnormal high rainfall.

HARVEST 2008 Abnormal rainfall with humidity providing ideal conditions for fungus development.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Sugars were very low; a lot of disease pressure. In the cellar, strict selection of healthy grapes was necessary.

POSITIVES The quality improvement programme has ensured better quality grapes for good wine. Grape quality was good until the last two weeks of the harvest. Low sugars ensured low pHs and high acid.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Chenin blanc** and **Colombar** have good primary aromas, intense flavour and ideal balance. **Shiraz**, **Merlot** and **Ruby cabernet** are notable, with deep colour, good analysis and lower alcohols.

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Thanks to active attention to the vineyard programme and fruit selection, it's been a satisfying harvest for all wine grape varieties.

REGION: PAARL INCLUDING WELLINGTON

CONTRIBUTORS: AVONDALE, BOSCHENDAL, FAIRVIEW, GLEN CARLOU, LANDSKROON, NABYGELEGEN, PERDEBERG RUPERT & ROTHSCHILD, SEIDELBERG, VREDE EN LUST

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Typical Cape winter of decades gone by - lots of cold and wet.

SPRING 2007 Relatively wet but enough wind to keep disease at bay. Cool October, temperatures rising late November.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Mild with lots of wind. Welcome rain early January, a heat wave at the end of the month. Boschendal recorded December was 2 degrees warmer than December 2006. Nights too warm for sauvignon blanc.

HARVEST 2008 Boschendal's temperatures were similar to previous two years. Rain in February. March temperatures normal with the occasional day over 35°C but nothing like the 2007 heat wave.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Harvesting at the correct time; late season the vineyards took a beating in the heat; relying on taste rather than analysis (Avondale). Vigorous growth which needed much more work in the vineyard; no big problem with disease, except for rot in Chenin after February rain (Boschendal). Long, drawn-out harvest after a late start (Fairview). Getting hold of Pinot noir; with the demand from sparkling wine producers, Pinot costs up to R8 000/ton (Glen Carlou). Uneven ripening and a bottleneck in the cellar with a lot of reds ripening together (Perdeberg). More vegetative growth than usual; with a bigger canopy, there's more transpiration - when to water and how much (Rupert & Rothschild). Juggling late white varieties from Elgin simultaneously with reds from the farm (Vrede en Lust).

POSITIVES Fewer green flavours in sauvignon, very cool end Feb/early March good for slow ripening of reds, which reached full maturity at lower sugars (Boschendal, Seidelberg). Electricity - thanks to the generator; steadily climbing sugars; heat waves not as long or hot as previous years (Glen Carlou). Longer hang time resulted in clean fruit flavours, soft tannins without high alcohols (Rupert & Rothschild).

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Chenin blanc** (Avondale, Nabygelegen, Perdeberg - healthy grapes, lots of fruit; Seidelberg - intense yet elegant). **Petit verdot** (Glen Carlou - soft tannins, bursting with fruit; Nabygelegen). **Chardonnay** (Boschendal - good structure and length; Fairview - rich, good varietal character; Glen Carlou - lower alcohols, great analyses; Seidelberg - intense yet elegant; Vrede en Lust). **Shiraz** (Avondale; Boschendal - elegant with delicate pepper; Fairview - good colour, bright fruit, ripe tannins; Glen Carlou - white pepper, violets in Rhône style; Perdeberg - well balanced, good character; Vrede en Lust). **Viognier** (Fairview - good varietal character; Vrede en Lust). **Pinotage** (Fairview - good colour, bright fruit, ripe tannins). **Cabernet sauvignon** (Avondale; Seidelberg - great concentration, structure, age-worthy)

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc** (Fairview - too warm; Seidelberg). **Cabernet franc** (Glen Carlou - better than previous but still a little thin, average colour). **Semillon** (Perdeberg - overripe). **Cinsaut** (Perdeberg - sunburn and sugar too high). **Shiraz** (Seidelberg - some rot resulted in harvesting before optimal ripeness).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS About 10% down (Landskroon, Nabygelegen). Average (Boschendal). Reduced crop on Zinfandel due to rot (Glen Carlou). About 12% more than average and a record crop (Perdeberg). Lower on average, except for Malbec (Seidelberg).

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Very good whites, promising reds (Avondale). Good, reds just better than whites (Glen Carlou). Good both whites and reds (Landskroon). Above average to very good (Perdeberg). Good but not great (Seidelberg). Superb whites and rosé, jury out on reds (Vrede en Lust).

REGION: ROBERTSON

CONTRIBUTORS: ARABELLA, GOEDWERWACHT, GRAHAM BECK, ROBERTSON WINERY, VAN LOVEREN, WELTEVREDE

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Wet and cold from July onwards; Brandvlei dam, which supplies irrigation, completely full. Average maximum temperatures similar to long-term but average minimum down by 1-2 degrees.

SPRING 2007 Cooler than average with intermittent rain, especially November, and wind during flowering; bud break 14 days late, later varieties uneven.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Cooler, more rain than usual, long periods when no irrigation necessary - a first. "Vigorous growth, big canopies and high disease pressure; we spent a lot of time taming the beast," jokes Graham Beck's Irene Waller.

HARVEST 2008 Mostly good weather with some untimely rain. Generally cooler with usual heat waves less damaging but more of them.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Controlling disease pressure; knowing precisely when to pick, especially Sauvignon blanc because of end-January rain. "No recipes in 2008, we had to constantly re-evaluate decision-making paradigms," remembers Irene Waller. "Snails that hatched later than usual," was yet another challenge met by the Van Loveren team. Philip Jonker's harvest at Weltevrede reflects the difficulties experienced by many: "Bottleneck of grapes ready halfway through the season. We worked very long hours. Most mornings I got up at 03h30, some at 01h30, we started harvesting at midnight on two occasions continuing until the following night and we even started harvesting at 02h00 one Saturday morning. There was one 38-hour stretch without sleep including a physical workout of barrel stacking."

POSITIVES Cooler conditions led to excellent quality, Sauvignon especially. Even, slower ripening allowed for better phenolic ripeness. Cool evenings recovered and retained acids and flavours.

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Colombard** (Goedverwacht - loads of guava and herbaceous flavours). **Merlot** (Goedverwacht - excellent colour, fruit and structure). **Chardonnay** (Graham Beck - elegant, complex flavour development at lower sugars; Robertson Winery; Weltevrede - beautiful, intense yellow fruit favours in the grapes harvested at full ripeness). **Shiraz** (Graham Beck - longer hang time developed great concentration while retaining freshness; Weltevrede). **Chenin blanc** (Van Loveren). **Sauvignon blanc** (Van Loveren). **Gewürztraminer** (Weltevrede).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Chenin blanc** (Graham Beck - a lot of sour rot; Robertson Winery - rot). **Cinsaut** (Graham Beck - large berries without concentration or full phenolic ripeness). **Sauvignon blanc** (Robertson Winery - some blocks due to rot). **Red muscadel** (Van Loveren - rain drastically reduced yield; Goedverwacht); **Riesling** (Weltevrede - rot).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Average (Arabella). Up overall with Chardonnay significantly higher, Cabernet sauvignon lower (Graham Beck). Same as 2007, except Chenin and Sauvignon down due to rot (Robertson Winery). Overall 5% increase with Chardonnay, Ruby cabernet above average (Van Loveren). Same as 2007 (Weltevrede). /

Robertson / continues

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Good acidities in the whites, good colour and extract on the reds (Goedverwacht). Much more promising than anticipated; reds outstanding (Robertson Winery). "Quality outstanding on both reds and whites. It all depended on the level of attention to detail and ability to be flexible this year. Fixed thinking and generalisations gave poor results." Irene Waller, Graham Beck. "The results look good but 2008 would not have forgiven convenience winemaking. It was a year that tested commitment and dedication. You had to be spot on with the time of harvest and selection of the best grapes." Philip Jonker, Weltevrede.

REGION: STELLENBOSCH

CONTRIBUTORS: BLAAUWKLIPPEN, DELHEIM, ERNIE ELS, GRAHAM BECK, HARTENBERG, HIDDEN VALLEY, JORDAN, KAAPZICHT, KANONKOP, KANU, LAIBACH, L'AVENIR, MEERLUST, MORGENHOF, MULDERBOSCH, QUOIN ROCK, REYNEKE, RUSTENBERG, SAXENBURG, SPIER, STERHUIS, THE FOUNDRY, TOKARA, VILLIERA, WATERFORD,

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Cold, wet and long. Rain between April/August highest for 20 years in some parts of the region; filled dams and water table. Good cold spells ensured full dormancy, also killed most bugs.

SPRING 2007 Cool; bi-weekly rain continued during growing season, "...which produced vigour and happy vines," reports Kevin Arnold; also disease pressure. Budding in some parts between 10-14 days late. Strong south-easter resulted in natural crop thinning on higher vineyards. Rain and wind had negative effect on pollination, especially

Merlot, Malbec (Spier) and also made canopy management difficult to control. Higher humidity led to increased chewing pest risk but mildew was offset by windier than normal conditions (Quoin Rock).

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Cool, with intermittent rain till mid-January, then a week of heat wave. Overall pleasant, because harvest was later, ample time to maintain vine canopies, which made harvest easier (Blaauwklippen). New weather station enabled us to spray in right conditions, no problems with mildew. More wind south-west (Jordan). Extreme winds in December, resulting in shoot and leaf loss on S/SE facing slopes but also beneficially prevented mildew. Only three anti-fungal sprays during spring/early summer, most as a result of better airflow through canopies, less vigorous vines (Quoin Rock). Rain led to excessive growth, demanding more canopy management (Sterhuis). Excessive January winds dried out topsoil/stressed vines (Waterford).

HARVEST 2008 Mid-February's thunderstorm, high humidity, no wind and subsequent heavy rain. "Drying ripe Sauvignon and Gewürztraminer was an urgent challenge, which we met by running the spray pumps through the vineyards with only the fans blowing," remembers Delheim's Victor Sperling. Such ingenuity saved the day and the grapes. Great number of days above 30°C than the previous four years (Rustenberg). Overall temp not too bad, just two little heat waves; nighttime temps above average (Spier). Early March rain saw rot in thin-skinned reds: Merlot, Cabernet franc and especially Shiraz. Beautiful warm days to finish harvest for Cabs, Petit verdot.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Difficult weather conditions throughout season required 25% more labour hours in vineyard, often at weekend (Waterford). High disease pressure/vigour coping with higher daily volumes in cellar, sorting grapes. "Mentally, physically, emotionally the most challenging vintage to date," sighs Johan Kruger of Sterhuis. All varieties ripening at once stretched manpower in vineyards/capacity in cellar (Rustenberg). Needing to pick more stressed/exposed sections before majority of block (Quoin Rock). Long harvest with 35% more volume; high pHs because of longer hang time (Laibach). Periods of quick ripening, then three weeks when sugars stayed the same. Some Cabernets struggled with fermentation, nutrient deficiency (Kanonkop)? Shortage of CO₂ and dry ice for a month (Kaapzicht). Patience in the cellar as harvest started late but finished on time, managing tank space efficiently (Ernie Els). Slower ripening resulted in late picking and consequent high sugars/high 15.5% alcohols (Blaauwklippen). Later reds suffered more as warmer March meant they had to be harvested fast and furiously, which led to elevated Ballings towards end (Kanu).

POSITIVES Moderate water stress arrived later, was more easily managed; spontaneous ferment started as normal/finished in 20 days, as did malolactic (Blaauwklippen). Lower alcohols (Delheim; Jordan; Kanonkop, Kanu; Laibach; L'Avenir; Meerlust/Foundry; Quoin Rock; Reyenke; Rustenberg; Spier; Waterford)). Cooler growing season, loads of flavour in whites, good colour in reds (Hidden Valley). Slow ripening, less stress for the winemaker (Kaapzicht). Supple elegant tannins (Laibach). Great varietal expression on Pinot, Merlot, Syrah (Meerlust/Foundry). Lovely fruit purity, tight/mineral wines that will develop with age; good colour, aromas, flavour, tannin across the board (Tokara). Improved phenolic ripeness, better acidity, good balance (Villiera). Good quality fruit, refined tannins (Waterford).

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc** (Hidden Valley, Kanu - intense flavours; L'Avenir - fantastic flavours with good natural acid; Mulderbosch - complex; Villiera - ripened between heat/rain with no botrytis, plenty of flavour; Waterford - great fruit/minerality, lower alcohols). **Chardonnay** (Hartenberg - elegant, fresh, lifted fruit; small concentrated berries; Laibach - great analysis, lovely ripe flavours, minerality, lower alcohol, and with "...a good crop to keep the bank manager happy," smiles Francois van Zyl; L'Avenir - fantastic flavours with good natural acids; Mulderbosch - structure, fullness, fruit a real stunner; Rustenberg - ripeness at lower sugar, good acid; Waterford - great fruit, minerality, lower alcohols). **Chenin blanc** (Kaapzicht; Kanu - intense flavours; L'Avenir - fantastic flavours with good natural acids; Sterhuis). **Cabernet sauvignon**

(Blaauwklippen - complex, finesse; Graham Beck; Jordan - great structure; L'Avenir - clean fruit, soft tannins; Mulderbosch rich fruit, big, soft tannins; Rustenberg - healthy gapes, lower sugar, great acid; Villiera - phenolic ripeness; Waterford - good mid palate, lower alcohol levels). **Shiraz** (Ernie Els - good structure, lower alcohol; Graham Beck; Hartenberg - broad flavours, soft, ripe tannins; Foundry - great varietal definition, minerality, perfume, acid; Mulderbosch - peppery; Quoin Rock - balance, fruit purity; Reyneke; Spier - good fruit, structure; Waterford - good mid palate, lower alcohol levels). **Tannat** (Hidden Valley - sweet fruit, soft tannins; Reyneke - cool season). **Merlot** (Jordan; Kanu - bright cherry flavours, lovely tannins; Laibach - great fruit, colour, silky tannins; Meerlust - opulence, depth). **Pinotage** (Kanonkop; Laibach - low alcohol, pitch black, juicy; L'Avenir - clean fruit, soft tannins; Spier - good fruit, structure). **Cabernet franc** (Kanu - lower alcohol, best ever; Reyneke).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES **Sauvignon blanc** (Kaapzicht - due to shortage of dry ice/CO₂; Kanu - neutral; Laibach - heat/rain neutral). **Chardonnay** (Meerlust - some botrytis/lower crop). **Chenin blanc** (Jordan - sour rot meant significant crop losses with this variety; Kanu - unripe with rot; Spier - rot, little flavour; Villiera - rot). **Semillon** (Rustenberg - unbalanced, lacks concentration). **Cabernet sauvignon** (Mulderbosch - heat over Easter caused the sugar levels to go crazy; higher blocks (approximately one third of Cabernet) have 15%+ alcohol. Laibach - January rain caused bigger berries, lack of colour; ferments also difficult; Spier - early blocks). **Zinfandel** (Blaauwklippen - sour rot, crop loss of 35%). **Malbec** (Blaauwklippen - bigger berries, less concentration; Waterford - heavier bunches, too much vigour). **Cabernet Franc** (Ernie Els - poor colour). **Merlot** (Kanonkop - uneven ripening; Morgenhof - bigger berries/less concentration; Mulderbosch - unripe tannins; Quoin Rock; Reyneke - bird damage; Rustenberg; Spier - early blocks). Pinotage (Reyneke - mildew). **Shiraz** (Villiera - botrytis "for the first time ever", says an amazed Jeff Grier).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Above average (Blaauwklippen - 15% up overall, specifically Malbec, Cabernet franc; Ernie Els. L'Avenir - reds 30% higher due to vineyards reaching full production and clean fruit; overall 20% higher than 2007; Waterford). Normal (Hartenberg, Hidden Valley, Kaapzicht, Kanonkop, except for large Pinotage crop, Laibach, Rustenberg, Villiera). Down (Jordan - because of rot in Chenin; Meerlust - 5% a function of practices; Mulderbosch - 5% overall, 15% on Sauvignon blanc, Cabernet sauvignon; Spier - 5%). Low (Tokara - especially reds). And from biodynamically farmed Reyneke, Johan Reyneke reports "good six tons-plus/hectare yields from biodynamic vineyards but four tons/ha for newly purchased conventionally farmed."

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Very good (Hartenberg). Excellent (Jordan, worth the gamble of waiting, except Chenin). Chenin good, other whites useable, reds looking good (Kaapzicht). Good to very good reds (Laibach). Very good (L'Avenir). Earlier drinking reds with good weight great balance (Waterford). Whites, reds above average; later ripening reds good, bubbly base very good (Villiera). Average with the good stuff looking outstanding (Tokara). Cool climate vintage, lower alcohol, pHs; "The wines have the Burgundy effect - power with finesse," enthuses Johan Kruger (Sterhuis). Very high, warmer climate varieties show immense promise (Spier). Very excited (Rustenberg). Really good, long cool season made a positive difference (Reyneke). Fantastic, great tasting wines from great tasting fruit (Quoin Rock). "I think people are going to love drinking 2008 wines," reckons Morgenhof's Jacques Cilliers. Fresh vibrant, supple wines with poise and longevity, lower alcohols (Meerlust/Foundry).

REGION: TULBAGH

CONTRIBUTORS: RIJKS, TULBAGH MOUNTAIN VINEYARDS

WEATHER CONDITIONS

WINTER 2007 Double annual rainfall; cold but little snow, which came late in the season.

SPRING 2007 Cool with occasional rain, which gave the vines a knock during flowering; slow growth and cell development in the bunches.

EARLY SUMMER 2008 Cooler than usual but none of the rain which fell closer to the coast, apart from a December shower or two, which relieved the need for irrigation.

HARVEST 2008 Rain end February, then heat and south-easterly wind. With the later harvest, came moderate days and cool nights.

HARVEST 2008

CHALLENGES (IN VINEYARD AND CELLAR) Keeping an eagle eye on ripening. Harvest started 10 days later than 2007, Rijks' Pierre Wahl remembers: "The early varieties ripened later, and Semillon, a late ripener, was ready with the early varieties." Things went back to normal until rain towards the end of February with heat, which caused the Shiraz and Cabernet sauvignon to ripen at the same time (Rijks). 'The Vintage of the 10 Plagues of Tulbagh' is how TMV's Callie Louw describes 2008: "Baboons (ever present), oidium (mid-spring to early summer), botrytis (just before harvest), rain, heat, and birds (just before harvest). That is only seven but the baboons count for three!" In the cellar, the labour-intensive, slow task of sorting grapes - half-a-ton per hour.

POSITIVES Cooler conditions led to phenolic ripeness at lower sugars, meaning lower alcohol wines (Rijks). Awesome weather towards the end of ripening, giving real concentration with good analyses (TMV).

BEST-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Sauvignon blanc, Chenin blanc, Pinotage and Cabernet sauvignon (Rijks). Syrah, Mourvèdre (TMV - can handle heat and had the least disease pressure). Chenin blanc, Viognier, Chardonnay, Grenache blanc (TMV - all from the Swartland with amazing flavours, acidity).

LESS WELL-PERFORMING WHITE AND RED VARIETIES Cabernet sauvignon (TMV - problems with oidium).

CROP SIZE - OVERALL AND VARIETIES WITH SIGNIFICANT LOWER OR HIGHER YIELDS Average (Rijks). Very small, due to weather conditions (TMV).

OVERALL QUALITY (WHITES AND REDS) Looks very good; concentrated wines with elegance and freshness (TMV). Bit early to say but some whites and reds look superb (Rijks).