

SOUTH AFRICAN WINE HARVEST REPORT 2009

Information supplied by Vinpro and SAWIS

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SUPERLATIVE QUALITY VINTAGE, ONE OF THE BEST EVER

I GENERAL OVERVIEW

- The outstanding quality of the 2009 harvest will ensure that it goes down in history as one of South Africa's best.
- Lower yields and intensely concentrated flavours from extremely healthy grapes mean that producers throughout the winelands are delighted with the results.
- Wine lovers can look forward to superlative Sauvignon blanc wines. Other top performing cultivars are Chardonnay and Sémillon, thanks to unseasonably cool weather in late December and early January. Among the reds, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Pinotage and Merlot are exceptional.

Crop size The 2009 wine grape harvest is estimated at 1 337 021 tons (30 April 2009), which represents a decrease of 88 592 tons on the 2008 harvest. The wine harvest, including grape juice concentrate and grape juice, wine for brandy and distilling wine, will amount to 1 021,5 million litres at an average recovery of 764 litres per ton of grapes.

Paarl and Stellenbosch were affected by runaway veld fires, which fortunately caused only slight losses. In all regions except Breedekloof and the Klein Karoo year-on-year production trends were down.

2008 growing season After a very cold, wet winter, late September rains enabled accumulation of good moisture reserves in the soil. Late spring and early summer were essentially cool months, causing vigorous growth, which slowed down ripening and enhanced flavour accumulation.

The harvest The cooler ripening season caused the harvest to start two weeks later than usual. Late February and early March temperature spikes had cellars going into overdrive with tremendous pressure on resources and logistics, since the later cultivars ripened at the usual time and not two weeks later. The picking season was more than a month shorter than usual.

While parts of the Orange River, Klein Karoo, Robertson and Worcester received 50 mm rain in February and March, the other districts experienced one of the driest summers in many years. Water resources were under severe pressure when the heatwave struck at the end of February. Moisture stress affected dry land vines and ripening accelerated in late cultivars.

The wines Smaller berry size gave excellent fruit to skin ratio, thus enhancing colour intensity in the reds. The white wines boast luscious, full bodied characters, with remarkably low pHs and delightful acidity.

For quotations by winemakers in various regions, see below.

Breedekloof Ample water and almost ideal growing conditions. November and December were characterised by mild day temperatures and cool nights especially. Early ripening grapes had excellent analyses and made promising wines.

Klein Karoo Particularly cool spring and summer, with the lowest heat units in five years. Flood damage in the vicinity of Montagu in November. Lovely colour and flavours in the grapes.

Olifants River Optimal growing conditions throughout the growing season. Especially good yields from Colombar and Chenin blanc, despite floods. A fair amount of red grapes were again crushed at lower ripeness for rosé wines.

Orange River Crop losses due to spring frost and widespread hail damage in November and December. Cool night temperatures promoted the development of good acids in grapes. The lower yield per hectare resulted in excellent wines, especially from grapes received until mid February.

Paarl Production of Sauvignon blanc was down by more than 30% in some instances. A long, wet winter was followed by an extremely dry summer. Excellent grape analyses across all cultivars, some say the best in over a decade. High acids and low pHs were a general trend and the colour in red cultivars was very intense.

Robertson A very cool growing season. Floods in November caused damage to vineyards and infrastructure. Medium to small berries produced fantastic flavours. The quality of white as well as red wines is excellent.

Stellenbosch A particularly healthy year with no significant diseases or plagues. Exceptional must analyses indicate excellent quality, especially from the early to mid-season cultivars. The colour of the red cultivars is remarkably intense.

Swartland Winter was late but with sufficient cold and winter precipitation to supplement soil water supplies optimally. Growth was vigorous and it was an exceptionally healthy year. Excellent grape analyses with high acids and low pHs.

Worcester Cool ripening conditions with particularly cool nights. Very good analyses and flavours, in Sauvignon blanc especially. During the harvest the maximum day temperatures exceeded the long term average for almost three weeks. Many cultivars ripened simultaneously and cellar capacity was challenged to the utmost.

II MOST IMPORTANT WINE REGIONS

BREEDEKLOOF

Production trends

The 2009 crop is expected to be bigger than the 2008 crop. The harvest started about 10 days later than in 2008.

The increase in crop size may be ascribed to the following factors: the good post-harvest period of 2008, when good precipitation ensured sufficient reserve levels for budding, the wet and cold winter period, the beneficial climate during budding for growth and fruit set, the relatively low disease pressure during ripening and generally more and bigger bunches per vine. Copious amounts of rain in November may also have contributed to the larger berries. The grapes generally had no botrytis infections, although crop losses did occur in some areas, in Chenin blanc especially.

Climate and viticultural trends

The post-harvest period was characterised by late leaf fall and short warm periods. From July onwards night and day temperatures were cold, bolstered by good snowfall. On the whole there was good accumulation of reserves and canes were properly ripened.

Severe cold, especially in July, was beneficial to dormancy and dormancy breaking aids were only used in exceptional circumstances. Soil water was supplemented by the snow.

The period from August to October 2008 was characterised by wet and cold weather conditions. Rainfall for August and September was respectively 107% and 317% higher than the long term figures.

Most soils were therefore properly supplemented before the onset of budding. The level of most irrigation dams was the highest in many years. With an abundance of water and almost ideal growing conditions in terms of temperature budding was strong and even. Growth was vigorous and the vines very healthy, although there were instances of rapid dieback. Snails remain problematic in this area at the beginning of the growing season.

Copious rain in November caused numerous outbreaks of oidium infection. Fortunately this period was followed by warm, dry and windy weather. Mealybug was the only other problem, with isolated instances of botrytis towards the end of the harvest.

November and December were characterised by mild day temperatures and cool nights. Day temperatures only started heating up during the first two weeks of December. Mid January saw a short warm period with warm day temperatures, but the nights remained cool. Ripening in the early cultivars was 10-14 days later this year.

Warm weather towards the middle and end of the season resulted in accelerated ripening and later cultivars ripened at the usual time. Water demand shot up during this period and necessitated good irrigation scheduling. Precipitation of 163.2 mm from 11 to 14 November shielded the soils against moisture stress thanks to improved water retention ability. Meticulous monitoring of soil water levels eliminated stress induced by the increased water demand.

Grape and wine quality

The overall cool climate during the first part of ripening favoured flavour retention in cultivars such as Sauvignon blanc. Quality was average to above-average and especially grapes that ripened early, showed excellent analyses and made promising wines. Despite a slightly higher yield, later cultivars such as Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon displayed good colour and made good average wines.

KLEIN KAROO

Production trends

The 2009 crop amounts to 43 480 tons which is 6.1% bigger than the 2008 crop. Good water supply from the winter onwards, supplemented by rain in November, and healthy grapes (no rot) were the most important contributing factors to the bigger crop. Flood damage and high disease pressure drastically increased the cost of grape production on some farms.

Climate and viticultural trends

The first part of winter was dry and warm, which raised concerns about weak and uneven budding. However, July saw good cold and rain and except for Chardonnay in warm localities, sufficient cold accumulated and budding was fine. Winter started late with less cold than usual and budding was expected to be poor in warmer parts. Spring temperatures were variable with numerous cold days, which delayed budding. Spring and summer were especially cool, with the lowest heat units in five years. Mid November cold and wet weather considerably reduced the yield of late flowering cultivars such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon blanc and Ruby Cabernet. Weather conditions were cool, even during the harvest, with above average maximum temperatures only at the beginning of March.

The mid November showers caused large scale flood damage to vineyards, orchards and infrastructure in the vicinity of Montagu. The other months had little or no rain, with the result that natural resources for irrigation were almost depleted during the last stages of ripening. Vines were healthy except for oidium on some farms.

Grape and wine quality

Cold weather delayed the harvest by two weeks. The cool weather conditions that prevailed and the cool nights up to and during the harvest resulted in lovely colour and flavours in the grapes and a very good vintage can be expected.

OLIFANTS RIVER

Production trends

The Olifants River probably harvested its second largest crop ever this year. The increase may be ascribed to particularly good yields from Colombar and to a certain extent also Chenin blanc, despite the floods that afflicted some blocks, and a decrease in red grapes.

The total crop will probably amount to approximately 212 000 tons, representing a decrease of only about 8 000 tons compared to last year's record crop. Red grapes were again crushed at lower ripeness for rosé wines, which alleviated the peaks of Shiraz intake. There was nevertheless huge pressure on cellars as the red cultivars all ripened more or less simultaneously.

Climate and viticultural trends

Unlike last season February temperatures this year again considerably exceeded those of January, with consistently high temperatures from 6 February to the end of March.

Despite average and even below average rainfall the previous winter, it was evenly distributed and producers were once again able to establish cover crops. The Clanwilliam dam was at capacity until late winter and sufficient water was available for optimal irrigation. Growing conditions throughout the season were optimal with moderate temperatures and normal westerly winds in the afternoons, but no abnormally strong winds. Given these favourable conditions growth was vigorous.

Oidium, especially in white cultivars, caused rot later in the season. Snails also caused damage, the dune snail in particular, and in some instances snout beetles occurred, as well as mealybug and scales.

Grape and wine quality

Ripening was 10-14 days later in certain cultivars. Grape analyses were generally very good and grapes from cooler areas, as well as those crushed early in the season, were outstanding. White blocks crushed late in March may not equal the quality of previous vintages.

ORANGE RIVER

Production trends

The 2009 crop was approximately 30% smaller than the 2008 crop, 115 000 tons as opposed to 171 664 tons. All wine grape cultivars as well as Sultana and Merbein had smaller yields. The yields of Chenin blanc and Colombar decreased by 15% and 10% respectively from 2008 to 2009.

Sultana and Merbein, the joint production of which decreased by about 52%, were mainly used for raisin production this year due to favourable prices. Losses occurred due to frost in late spring as well as widespread hail damage in November and December. Above average rainfall prevailed throughout the last three weeks of the harvest. Rot at the end of February and beginning of March resulted in losses.

Climate and viticultural trends

The first frost occurred in June 2008 and leaf fall was therefore much later. Good accumulation of reserves took place. Widespread precipitation covered the entire area during the second half of June, with accompanying low temperatures (night temperatures below 0°C) for a period of approximately two weeks. July temperatures were moderate with average day temperatures of 20-25°C and night temperatures of 1-5°C. The last week of July saw warm night and day temperatures. Winter was generally much warmer than previous seasons when young vines suffered considerable cold damage.

Warmer weather than usual in June, July and August induced budding slightly earlier than in 2007. Night temperatures in September were constantly low, resulting in some frost damage at night, especially in the early wine grape and dual purpose cultivars such as Sultana, as well as in vineyards on marginal soils outside the irrigation scheme, where early budding occurred. Large fluctuations between day and night temperatures resulted in uneven budding, which encouraged restricted spring growth in the second half of October.

Night temperatures in November and December were below average with moderate day temperatures. There was no precipitation during this period. The first significant summer showers fell on 28 January. At this stage most vines were relatively healthy, although oidium occurred in places. Day temperatures of 5-20 January were constantly high, causing grape sugars to shoot up. With a low yield per hectare, Sultana grape sugars increased by 1°B per day during this period. The first wine grape cultivars were delivered to Oranjerivier Wine Cellars on 6 January. All the Chardonnay, Pinotage, Merlot and most of the Sultana had been picked by the end of January. Above average rainfall from mid February onwards caused downy mildew and rot started to occur late in the season.

Grape and wine quality

Cool night temperatures in November and December 2008 resulted in the development of good grape acids. Combined with the lower yield per hectare, this favoured vinification of excellent wines from grapes received until mid February.

PAARL

Production trends

Following three record seasons, a decrease of approximately 5% compared to the 2008 crop is expected, therefore a total of 147 600 tons.

The biggest decrease was in Sauvignon blanc, more than 30% in some instances. The other white cultivars were slightly down and compare well to the previous season's productions. Younger vines managed good yields.

The early red cultivars i.e. Pinotage and Merlot generally showed a small decrease. Cabernet Sauvignon and some other late cultivars (Mourvèdre, Petit Verdot etc.) ripened unevenly and in some instances Cabernet Sauvignon was harvested before the early cultivars because of lower yields.

Climate and viticultural trends

Abnormally cold and wet winter conditions lasted until September 2008. This delayed budding, resulting in unevenness and smaller bunches, especially in early cultivars such as Sauvignon blanc. Rain during the flowering period caused poor set and lighter bunches, which was common in the late flowering cultivars, e.g. Cabernet Sauvignon.

From October 2008 to the end of March 2009 hardly any rain occurred in the region, which had the biggest impact on the decrease in the crop. The average daily minimum and maximum temperatures from November to mid February were lower than the long term average temperature. As a result of cooler day temperatures many producers irrigated less than previous summers, which contributed to the higher percentage of berry shrivelling in late ripening varieties. The fair amount of wind between veraison and harvest also resulted in high moisture consumption and required even more meticulous irrigation scheduling.

With the high temperatures early in December, losses occurred on dryland as well as irrigated vines due to sunburn. Oidium was once again problematic towards the end of the season.

On the positive side, no heatwave of more than one day above 40°C occurred during the season. Together with approximately 30 mm of rain that was measured early in February, these two factors proved a saving grace and promoted slow, optimal ripening, especially in mid and late season cultivars.

Grape and wine quality

Cooler temperatures until the second half of February (except for 1-10 Dec 2008) delayed ripening and harvest dates were 10 days later than usual. Across all cultivars grape analyses were excellent - some say the best in over a decade. High acids and low pHs were a general trend and the colour in the red cultivars was very intense.

The ripeness of polyphenols and anthocyanins was most satisfactory, consequently the 2009 vintage should produce wines of a high standard.

ROBERTSON

Production trends

The Robertson wine valley crushed 199 708 tons of grapes, 2.4% less than the record crop of 2008. While Chardonnay and Chenin blanc had high productions, yields were down on Pinotage, Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon blanc and Ruby Cabernet.

The decrease is mostly ascribed to the cool season which produced smaller berries, as well as crop losses due to oidium. Cool weather conditions during the previous year's bunch initiation period (Oct/Nov 2007) also played a role.

Climate and viticultural trends

The number of cold units for May-June was much lower than the previous seven years' average. Cold weather started in July only. After the late winter, budding was on time and even. Initial growth was very slow and uneven, as a result of persistent cold and wet conditions in September. Robertson also had a very cool growing season. Average temperatures were approximately 2.4 °C cooler than the LT in September, 1.1 °C cooler in October, 1.8 °C cooler in November, 1.5 °C cooler in December, 2.3 °C cooler in January and 1.2 °C cooler in February (Robertson experiment farm weather station).

Precipitation over four days in mid-November measured between 120 mm and 300 mm, causing floods and damage to vines, orchards and infrastructure. Growth was vigorous after the heavy showers and to manage the canopies, labour input had to be increased. Much tipping/topping with additional suckering and breaking out of leaves took place to open up the canopies. Weeds were problematic as a result of the copious rain and contributed to high production cost, so too oidium.

Grape and wine quality

Grapes were very healthy otherwise with little to no rot and very little downy mildew. Berry size was medium to small, despite the showers and vigorous growth. Grapes crushed earlier in the season had very good analyses as a result of the cooler weather conditions. Wine quality at the moment is excellent, in particular Sauvignon blanc and Chenin blanc.

The quality of Chardonnay and Shiraz is good as usual. The colour of all red wines is exceptional due to the cool night temperatures as well as smaller berries.

STELLENBOSCH

Production trends

The 2009 crop is estimated to be 7-8% smaller than the previous year, mainly as a result of smaller bunches without shoulders. It was nevertheless an exceptional year for quality.

Sauvignon blanc, Merlot, Chenin blanc and Shiraz had above average crops, unlike Pinotage and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Climate and viticultural trends

The post-harvest (2008) period was unusually hot and dry with the first notable showers falling in May only. May temperatures were hotter than usual which could have impacted on budding. From June to September temperatures were lower, with above average rainfall. October and November temperatures were normal with little precipitation.

December was warmer than usual with good showers towards the end of the month. Conditions early in January were cooler, followed by hot to very hot conditions in the second half of the month, with no rainfall to speak of. February and March were dry and hot to very hot with heatwave conditions, early in March especially.

Budding was good and even in most cultivars. The cooler and very wet conditions of the early spring reduced soil temperatures and shoot growth was uneven. Uneven flowering and ripening ensued. Flowering was good in most cultivars, poor set occurring in isolated instances only. The wet spring induced vigorous growth, also of weeds. Warmer conditions late in the growing season and ripening period required intensive irrigation to ripen the grapes.

The season was particularly healthy with hardly any diseases or pests. Oidium on leaves caused problems late in the season and in the post-harvest period. Long horn grasshoppers and mealybug affected a few vines late in the season.

Grape and wine quality

Early cultivars achieved full ripeness approximately two weeks later than previous years. The late cultivars, in particular Shiraz with a large crop, struggled to achieve the desired sugars due to the heat and dry conditions in March. In most instances picking took place on taste rather than degrees Balling.

Merlot was the exception in that the desired sugars were achieved at a low pH while the grapes still tasted green. In many Merlots ripeness therefore occurred at above average sugar content.

The must analyses were exceptional and indicate excellent quality, especially in the early and mid-season cultivars. The colour in red cultivars is particularly intense.

SWARTLAND / MALMESBURY

Production trends

The 2009 crop turned out to be bigger than initially anticipated, but it is still 6.6% smaller than the 2008 crop. Differences in production areas were significant; Darling Cellar being considerably down, while Swartland and Riebeek Cellars had more or less the same crop size as in 2008.

The biggest decreases were in Pinotage and Cinsaut, while Sauvignon blanc and Chenin blanc yielded good crops, mainly as a result of young vines coming into full production.

Climate and viticultural trends

A good autumn led to late leaf fall with good accumulation of reserves and good cover crops. Winter was late but with sufficient cold and winter rainfall to supplement soil water optimally. Late winter showers and cold in September delayed the season by approximately 10-14 days.

During the entire growing season the climate was favourable with cooler nights especially. Growth was vigorous and following supplementary showers in November the vines were looking good until late in the season. The warm weather from mid-February and heatwaves at the beginning of March caused the vines to suffer. With regard to diseases and pests, it was an especially healthy year. Oidium occurred late in the season, but did not impact on the crop. Some blocks suffered sunburn.

Grape and wine quality

On the whole the grape analyses were excellent with high acids and low pHs. The colour of the red grapes was intense. The quality of Chenin, Sauvignon blanc and Shiraz is outstanding. In places Cabernet Sauvignon, which had been fairly uneven from the flowering stage, struggled to achieve good colour and optimal ripeness.

WORCESTER

Production trends

The region will probably get close to the record crop of 2008. Cellars with a large percentage of red grapes seem to have crushed slightly less than the previous year. Yields of most red blocks, Pinotage and Ruby Cabernet especially, are down.

Climate and viticultural trends

The post-harvest period was relatively good with leaf fall being fairly late. Good accumulation of reserves took place and canes were properly ripened throughout. In May precipitation measured 30 mm, in June 11 mm and in July 80 mm (Nuy weather station). In July the area had very good snowfall with a significant effect on farm dams.

There were concerns that high temperatures of May and June 2008 may cause uneven budding patterns. The use of dormancy breaking aids was therefore recommended on cultivars such as Chardonnay, young vines and most of the red varieties.

Low temperatures in August and September restricted budding and growth. In October the vines suddenly spurred. As expected, budding was uneven in later cultivars such as Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon blanc.

November was a very wet month with rainfall of between 160 and 230 mm over four days, damaging vines, soil and bridges. Drenched soils made it impossible to spray vines, which were under pressure from oidium, for a period of two to three weeks. Fortunately good weather followed and growers managed to keep the oidium pressure under control. December and January were characterised by relatively cool ripening conditions, the nights especially being cold.

In February the region had good precipitation of 25 to 40 mm, which increased oidium and downy mildew pressure. The first heatwave started on 5 February and it was very hot with regular intervals, in March especially. Maximum day temperatures were above the long term average for almost three weeks.

During flowering it was already evident that many cultivars would ripen simultaneously. Cellar capacity was challenged to the utmost. It was a bonus that most cellars were relatively empty at the start of the season.

Grape and wine quality

Initial pressing started 10 to 14 days later than the previous season. The grapes were especially healthy with very good analyses and flavours, in Sauvignon blanc especially. The colour of the red grapes was especially good and problems with sugars were few and far between, except during the March period.

III ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

Australia

The estimate for the 2009 Australian wine grape harvest is 1.63 million tons, 11% down on the 2008 harvest. This would make the 2009 harvest much smaller than the record 2005 harvest of 1.93 million tons, but much bigger than the drought and frost affected 2007 harvest of 1.34 million tons.

The season was characterised by unusual weather conditions. Winter rainfall was below average and temperatures above average. Spring was relatively warm and dry in the early stages and ended with a relatively cool and wet November. These conditions continued into December in many growing regions, and in the cooler climate districts soil moisture profiles were filled. For the Victorian and South Australian warm climate districts, this rainfall allowed small increases in sparse water allocations in January.

January was very dry with average temperatures until a heatwave struck much of South Eastern Australia in the last week of January and first week of February. Temperatures rose above 38°C for almost two weeks including a number of days with heat spikes of around 45°C. Following the heat event, the rest of February was dry.

Relatively cooler conditions in November hampered flowering and fruit set and in December slowed berry growth, resulting in lower bunch weights. The heat event in late January/early February resulted in lower yields in heat-affected regions with some sunburn and shrivelling of grapes. White yields per hectare are expected to be more affected than reds. The heat occurred at the commencement of the white harvest and also accelerated it. Red grapes had an opportunity to recover somewhat before harvesting.

New Zealand

This year's wine harvest is likely to fall short of last year's record season, despite an additional 3 000 ha of grapes entering production for the first time. New Zealand Winegrowers' annual pre-vintage survey projected a tonnage of around 275 000, down 4% from last year's record 285 000 tons. With quality being the catchphrase of the 2009 vintage, companies worked with growers to ensure controlled yields. Some growers chose to drop canes to limit the vine's fruit, while others opted for shoot thinning.

The weather leading into the vintage was very positive, with most regions reporting excellent grape quality. Cool conditions during late December in Marlborough created variable flowering of Sauvignon blanc, the region's flagship variety. The later ripening areas of the province were most affected when cool southerlies hit just prior to Christmas, causing lower than expected fruit set for some. The earlier ripening areas of Marlborough had excellent fruit set. Irrigation started at the end of January only, which is late for Marlborough. Canopy management resulted in earlier ripening.

Argentina

Due to climatic conditions, this year's wine harvest in Argentina will be down 25% compared to last year. According to Argentina's National Wine Institute, hail in some provinces, and overall higher temperatures in February and March, are factors in the lower production output this year. The lower production this year has occurred despite Argentina having a 12% increase in land under cultivation for wine grapes.

Chile

In Chile, wine growing areas that are not irrigated are predicting a similarly low harvest, with an estimated drop in production from 30 to 40% because of higher temperatures and low rainfall.

Most wineries in Chile, however, are reporting a good harvest. The lack of rain was beneficial to this year's harvest. Wineries in the far south may experience changes to quality because of the higher temperatures.

IV VINTAGE GUIDE

The number of wine regions, their geographic distance and climatological diversity defy generalisation, but the overall characteristics of recent vintages may be summarised as follows:

2008: Elegant wines with a lower alcohol content due to cooler weather conditions. Slower ripening favoured phenolic ripeness, with excellent quality implications for red wines. Lovely colour and flavours from early ripening vines.

2007: As good as, or better than 2006. Quality all round, with elegant Sauvignon blanc and well-structured Chardonnay the stars amongst the white wines. Climatic conditions and cooler February temperatures favoured physiological ripeness. Black grapes had smaller berries with superb skin to fruit ratios. Magnificent colour, flavour concentration and overall structure.

2006: Quality across the spectrum. Intense character and exceptional flavour concentration. Top quality Chardonnay, Sauvignon blanc and Chenin. Full-bodied Shiraz with excellent maturation potential. Pinotage and Cabernet Sauvignon boast lovely colours and flavours.

2005: A difficult vintage with a very dry winter, excessive rainfall during the crush and a scorching heatwave towards the middle of February. Smaller crops meant concentrated flavours and lovely colours. Magnificent red wines, but careful selection is mandatory.

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.

V QUOTES FROM WINEMAKERS IN THE VARIOUS REGIONS

Breedekloof

Johan Linde, Botha Wynkelder - production manager

"The pressing season was shorter than usual, which means winemakers had to focus, plan and make optimal use of cellar capacity to take in all the grapes at optimal ripeness. The feeling is nevertheless that the 2009 vintage will produce exceptional quality wines. Cultivars showing great potential are Sauvignon blanc, Chardonnay, Sémillon, Pinotage and Cabernet Sauvignon. Full ripe grapes with high acids ensured that wines have intense colour, complex flavour and good maturation potential."

Constantia

Duncan Savage, Cape Point Vineyards

"The 2009 harvest, my seventh vintage at Cape Point Vineyards, has been exciting and one of the best. We had a good, wet winter with late rains and cold, resulting in delayed budding. Growth in the early part of the season was very slow due to cold and wet conditions. Things only really got going with our main growth spurt in December and January. Late rains meant a fair amount of vegetative growth and thus extensive canopy management was required. We opened most blocks fairly aggressively to ensure ripeness with the bulk of the actions being applied in November and December. Follow-ups were required in January to counter late growth spurts.

"The first summer warmth was in February, our hottest days being in early March (33 and 36 degrees). The vineyards were healthy up until picking, with almost no rot whatsoever. 2009 yielded the ripest canopies that I have seen in my time at CPV and thus phenolic ripeness throughout the farm was not a problem.

Picking commenced late in February, with the bulk of the fruit coming in the first weeks of March. Although we started fairly late, we finished at the normal time in March.

"We bought in a fair amount of fruit this year from prime vineyard locations around SA and quality has been fantastic across the board, some of the best Sauvignon and Sémillon fruit I have seen. The wines will be among the best of the decade."

Klein Karoo

Danie Schoeman, Excelsior Vlakteplaas

"Here at Excelsior Vlakteplaas, and also at neighbouring cellars in the Oudtshoorn area, the weather and crushing conditions were much better than last year. The quality of the grapes was excellent and as far as volume was concerned, it was a good, average year.

"Vines benefited from the showers during the first week of February and gave us an opportunity to harvest at optimal ripeness. The Muscadel especially had lovely sugars with good colour and flavours. Conditions having been fairly dry in 2008, the yield per hectare was sufficient. The favourable sugar/acid ratio resulted in wines with lovely flavours."

Olifants River

Roelof van Schalkwyk, Klawer Koöp

"Our harvest was very good and the crop is only one per cent smaller. Our white wines are above-average and it is an outstanding year for Chardonnay. Another excellent wine is the Colombar. We experienced a heatwave towards the end of February, but fortunately our best grapes were already in the cellar by then."

Paarl

WS Visagie, Simonsvlei International

"2009 was a very, very good year for Simonsvlei. The quality of the grapes was excellent and thanks to the cooler ripening period all the analyses were just ideal.

"The wines are very stable with regard to functionality of sulphur, microbiological and colour stability. The colour of the wines is deep and lovely as a result of the ideal pH in the wines. No tartaric acid was added in 2009, which of course also contributes to the stability of the wines.

"The crop was not very big. Pinotage especially had fairly low yields. Wines completed MLF very quickly.

"I think 2009 was as close to ideal as anyone could wish for. We'll never be without the February heatwaves, but we've learnt to make peace with them!"

Robertson

Jacques Bruwer, Bon Courage

"In general the quality of the grapes was much better than last year and ripening was even. The berries were really healthy and good sugar levels were achieved as a result of the February heatwave. For the first time in many years there were no showers in February!"

Stellenbosch

PG Slabbert, Stellenbosch Hills

"Initially we expected the crop to be smaller than in 2008, but eventually it turned out to be 14% bigger. Bigger crops were obtained from Merlot and Shiraz, Pinotage being the only cultivar with an 18% decrease.

"The initial weather conditions were very promising and some great wines were made. The 2009 vintage is an exceptional year for red wine, with good to above-average Sauvignon blanc and Chardonnay. The wines from the early cultivars such as Sauvignon blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinotage and early Cabernet Sauvignon are indeed excellent, with very intense colour and fruit, as well as good acid balance and tannins. The same cannot be said, however, for the wines made after the extremely hot weather conditions in March.

"In general the harvest went off without a hitch and no major disruptions."

Swartland/Malmesbury

Lukas Wentzel, Groote Post

"The harvest was an excellent one as a result of the previous winter's ample precipitation. Our crop was the same size, it is mostly fairly consistent, because we are able to give supplementary irrigation during ripening and in the post-harvest period. We had a cool November and December. During the final growth period it was nice and dry.

"We were able to make lovely, full-ripe Sauvignon blancs and the Chardonnay is also excellent, because we had hardly any botrytis to speak of. The Pinot noir is average, the Cabernet good, and the Merlot in particular is fabulous. The colour in all the red wines is very good, and in the Shiraz too it is exceptional."

Worcester

Jean le Roux, Brandvlei Cellar

"The 2009 harvest was one of the best ever at Brandvlei Cellar, and what's more, production is approximately 7,5% bigger. White wines are particularly fruity, even though the acids were a bit high early in the season. In 14 years at Brandvlei Cellar I have never seen such high acids. Sauvignon blanc, Chenin blanc and Colombar wines are all looking very good.

"The quality and colour of the red wines are exceptional, especially Cabernet and Merlot. These two cultivars had lower productions, while all the rest, including the whites, yielded a record crop. Best of all, however, is the increased demand for quality wine. Transfer stock in the cellar is the lowest in years."