

## 2008 Harvest Report

### Flavourful whites, lovely reds from cool, wet season

*As provided by Sawis, in collaboration with VinPro Consultation Service – compiled by ROMI BOOM.*

#### I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

- The 2008 vintage produced some outstanding wines with a lower alcohol content.
- The cooler weather conditions had a significant influence on the ripeness of the grapes. Harvesting took place about two weeks later and at a lower sugar content.
- Rainfall during the period preceding the harvest compromised the health of the grapes, but the appropriate viticultural actions minimised the danger of rot and downy mildew.
- Winemakers anticipate lovely red and white wines.

*For quotations by winemakers in various regions, see below.*

#### Crop size

The 2008 wine grape harvest is estimated at 1 357 597 tons (7 March 2008), which represents an increase of about 0.5% on the 2007 harvest. The wine harvest, including grape juice concentrate and grape juice, wine for brandy and distilling wine, will amount to 1 053,5 million litres at an average recovery of 776 litres per ton of grapes.

Weather conditions in the Orange River, Little Karoo, Robertson, Stellenbosch and Worcester areas resulted in high fungal disease pressure. Effective spraying programmes by producers reduced the harvest losses.

The Olifants River and Robertson had record crops, while Breedekloof, Malmesbury, Orange River, Paarl and Worcester show increases.

**Autumn 2007** Good rainfall during the post-harvest period of 2007 ensured that sufficient reserves were available for budding. Cold temperatures, especially at the end of May and beginning of June, ensured that sufficient cold units were available for optimal dormancy breaking.

**Winter 2007** It was a typical wet and cold Boland winter. In many instances heavy downpours caused damage to dams and disrupted the planting of vines, but in instances where vines were planted at the right time, the regular showers ensured good take.

In the Olifants River rainfall was average and even below average, but well distributed and producers could once again establish cover crops successfully. The Clanwilliam dam was full until late in winter with the result that sufficient irrigation water was available.

The winter in the Orange River was one of the coldest ever. Widespread cold damage occurred on young vines especially. In the Swartland the above-average wet and cold winter saturated the soil, caused good run-off and filled dams to capacity. Dryland vines in particular benefited.

**The 2007/2008 growing season** As a result of the good winter rains growth was vigorous and aided by follow-up rains during spring. Budding occurred about ten days later, which was the first indication

that the harvest might possibly be late. Budding of white and red cultivars was fairly even, except for Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. Spring was very cool, so too early summer, with much rain. The average maximum temperatures for November to January were cooler than the long term averages. Fertility was initially normal to above normal, but cool, rainy and windy conditions during flowering of certain cultivars caused weak set and looser bunches, especially in Merlot, Shiraz and to a lesser extent in Cabernet Sauvignon. Ample soil moisture and cool weather conditions caused vines to grow vigorously. Regular tipping/topping and breaking out of leaves were required to control and aerate canopies.

Rain fell throughout the growing season, with heavy showers at the end of November and beginning of December. As a result of the regular showers disease pressure was higher this season.

In the Orange River crop losses occurred due to cold damage during the winter as well as widespread hail damage in November and December.

**The harvest** Ripening was delayed and the harvest commenced at least two weeks later than usual. It was a difficult, long harvest season with slow, optimal ripening in mid- and late season cultivars especially. The increased intake later in the season placed cellar personnel and capacity under great pressure.

Rain during the harvest adversely affected Chenin blanc vineyards in some regions. The pressing season was cool to warm at the end of the period with rain in February. Disease pressure remained high throughout. Cooler weather conditions caused crop losses despite lots of additional input from producers.

**The wines** An average year for quality, with promising wines from grapes that ripened early. The large crop and regular showers during the harvest caused sugars to remain low for the biggest part of the harvest period. Most white cultivars were harvested at lower sugars than last year.

Initially grape analyses were very well balanced, with average flavour intensity. The generally cool climate during the first part of ripening favoured flavour retention in cultivars such as Sauvignon blanc. In mid- to late season cultivars abnormal acid (low) and pH (high) analyses occurred. Slower ripening than usual favoured excellent phenolic ripening, giving rise to great expectations as regards the quality of the 2008 red wine harvest.

Many rosé wines were made from several red cultivars. The occurrence of botrytis in some blocks impacted on wine quality.

**Breedekloof** An average year for quality, with promising wines from grapes that ripened early. The quality of the first part of the harvest was excellent with delightful flavours in Sauvignon blanc and Chenin blanc.

**Klein Karoo** Excellent wines are expected, with good colour and complex flavour. Grapes reached full maturity at a low sugar content. It was therefore possible to make lower alcohol wines with fully ripe grape flavours.

**Olifants River** A record crop. The quality of the wines looks promising. Red grapes were pressed at lower ripeness for rosé and rebate, which reduced peak intakes of Shiraz especially. Grapes intended for red wine could therefore be delivered at optimal ripeness.

**Orange River** Most Merbein and Sultana grapes were used for raisin production this year due to favourable prices. Wine quality is good and most white cultivars were picked at lower sugars than last year.

**Paarl** For the fourth consecutive year Paarl's wine grape production has increased. Ripening took its time, favouring very good phenolic ripeness, with high hopes for the 2008 red wine harvest.

**Robertson** A record crop. The red wines are looking very good with excellent colour, especially Pinotage and Merlot. As usual the quality of the Chardonnay is outstanding.

**Stellenbosch** Exceptional quality with excellent grape analyses. Good to high sugars, good pH analyses (except late cultivars), with many instances of high malic acid.

**Swartland** Quality across the spectrum thanks to healthy grapes. Chenin blanc looks excellent and in general Chardonnay too, except along the coastal region where downy mildew and oidium caused problems towards the end of December. Cabernet Sauvignon struggled to achieve colour and sugar.

**Worcester** The quality of the first part of the crush was excellent with lovely flavours, especially in Sauvignon blanc Chenin blanc. Fair volumes of red grapes such as Ruby Cabernet were crushed for rebate.

## **II. MOST IMPORTANT WINE REGIONS**

### **BREEDEKLOOF**

#### **Production trends**

For crop size, refer to the Worcester region.

The increase in crop size is due mainly to the good post-harvest period of 2007, the cold and wet winter period, beneficial climate for growth and fruit set during budding, the relatively low disease pressure during ripening and generally more and bigger bunches per vine. The regular occurrence of showers during the growing season possibly contributed to the larger berries.

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

Good rainfall during the post-harvest period of 2007 ensured that sufficient reserves were available for budding. The cold temperatures, especially at the end of May and beginning of June, ensured sufficient cold units for optimal dormancy breaking. In some areas crop losses occurred in Chenin blanc particularly due to botrytis and sour rot, while it did not cause any problems in other cultivars.

The first cold and wet conditions occurred at the end of April only. These conditions delayed leaf drop and ensured good accumulation of reserves in the permanent parts of the grapevine. The third week of May 2007 saw particularly high rainfall (especially in areas such as Slanghoek), which was most beneficial for soil water levels. These climatic conditions, combined with cold day as well as night temperatures, probably also aided dormancy breaking. Compared to 2006 the rainfall for the period from May to end July was higher throughout.

The typical wet and cold Boland winter ensured sufficient opportunity for dormancy breaking. In many instances the heavy rainfall caused damage to dams and disrupted the planting of vines, but in instances where vines had been planted at the correct time, the regular showers ensured good take.

Soils were mostly replenished before budding. Most irrigation dams reached the highest levels in many years. Ample water and almost ideal growth conditions as regards temperature caused strong even budding. Growth was vigorous everywhere. At the beginning of the growing season the vines were very healthy, although wet weather at the end of October caused a few headaches.

Good spraying programmes prevented damage. Fortunately the rain alternated with wind, which kept the canopies dry and healthy.

November and December were generally characterised by mild day temperatures and cool nights especially. Day temperatures only started heating up during the last two weeks of December. At the end of January there was a short hot period with warm day temperatures, but the nights remained cool. During this period water requirements shot up and good irrigation scheduling was essential.

The generally cool climate during the first part of ripening favoured flavour retention in cultivars such as Sauvignon blanc. With careful monitoring of soil water levels, no loss of flavour occurred.

February, March and April day temperatures were generally lower than in 2007. The maximum temperature never once exceeded 40 degrees Celsius.

Due to the warm, dry and windy conditions there were hardly any diseases at the beginning of the harvest. A few new outbreaks of downy mildew and oidium were observed between November and January.

Botrytis infections after mid-crush to late in the harvest period caused a few problems. Mealybug was the only other problem. However, the occurrence of aster yellows in the Breede River should be seen in a very serious light.

### **Grape and wine quality**

An average year for quality, with promising wines from grapes that ripened early. In instances where the crop was too heavy for the vines, combined with a late vintage, some vines (Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon in particular) did not ripen optimally. The occurrence of botrytis in some blocks also influenced wine quality.

## **KLEIN KAROO**

### **Production trends**

The 2008 crop amounts to 40 435 ton, which is 14,6% less than 2007. The decrease is due mainly to the cooler conditions as well as regular showers which caused losses.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Winter rainfall and temperatures were close to the long term average for the Klein Karoo. There was sufficient winter chill for complete dormancy breaking and budding was normal and even.

Spring and early summer deviated from the usual weather conditions. Temperatures were below average. Cold conditions and snow on mountain ranges even caused severe frost early in October. Much more rain occurred than in a normal season, with limited flood damage. All sources of irrigation water were thoroughly supplemented. With ample soil moisture and cool weather conditions growth was vigorous. Regular tipping/topping and breaking out of leaves were required to control and aerate canopies.

Weather conditions favoured fungal diseases such as oidium, downy mildew and botrytis. Producers in the Klein Karoo, which normally has a healthy climate, had to adjust their spraying programmes considerably to prevent losses in this wet season. Despite good disease control showers early in February caused rapid swelling in berries, which then burst. Chenin blanc suffered most, consequently much less Chenin blanc was pressed and used for wine this year. Fortunately the rainy weather cleared and other cultivars remained healthy.

Normally fruit fly does not choose the grapevine as a host. Numbers were out of control, however, and caused big losses in some vineyard blocks.

While weather conditions during the harvest were just about normal, disease pressure remained high throughout.

Despite considerable additional input from producers, the cooler weather conditions nevertheless caused crop losses. Ripening was delayed and the harvest started at least two weeks later than usual.

The long season and fungal diseases exhausted the vines and few leaves were retained in the post-harvest period.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Despite cool weather conditions and rain which challenged grape producers and winemakers, excellent wines may be expected from the Klein Karoo. Lovely colour and flavours were deposited in the grapes by the cooler weather. Grapes achieved optimal ripening at a lower sugar content. The ideal of lower alcohol wines with fully ripened grape flavours could therefore be achieved this year.

## **OLIFANTS RIVER**

### **Production trends**

The Olifants River harvested the biggest crop in its history. The increase may be largely ascribed to exceptionally good Chenin blanc yields and to a certain extent also Colombar, while there is also a constant increase in red grapes with new plantings coming into maturity and full bearing. The total crop will probably amount to close on 224 000 tons, representing an increase of more than 14 000 tons on last year's record harvest.

This year also saw pressing of red grapes at lower ripeness to make rosé and rebate, which reduced the intake peaks of Shiraz in particular. Grapes intended for red wine could therefore be delivered at optimal ripeness.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Although the rainfall during the preceding winter was average and even below average in places, it was evenly distributed and producers were once again able to establish cover crops successfully. The Clanwilliam dam was once again full until late winter with the result that sufficient irrigation water was and remains available to irrigate vines optimally, which most likely also contributed to a record crop. Optimal growing conditions prevailed throughout the season with moderate temperatures and customary westerly winds in the afternoons, but no abnormally strong winds.

These favourable conditions caused extremely vigorous growth, probably also due to isolated thunderstorms in summer, which provided additional nitrogen. Aster yellows distributed more quickly this year, probably because awareness of the disease and symptoms is increasing.

Similar to last season the February temperatures were once again below that of January, a trend that is now occurring more regularly, with few exceptions.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Quality of the white wines will probably not equal that of previous years, but increased yields should compensate producers' income per hectare.

## **ORANGE RIVER**

### **Production trends**

The total crop for the Orange River was 171 000 tons in 2008 compared to 161 555 tons in 2007. The 2008 crop was 5,9% bigger than the 2007 crop. The increase may be ascribed to higher yields of all wine grape cultivars as well as Sultana and Merbein. However, both Merbein and Sultana were used mostly for raisins this year due to favourable prices.

Crop losses occurred due to cold damage in winter as well as widespread hail damage in November and December. Widespread above average rainfall occurred during the harvest in the Orange River area. Later in the harvest period downy mildew resulted in leaf drop; consequently the later cultivars struggled with their sugar levels. Rot at the end of March and beginning of April resulted in losses.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The first frost of the season occurred on 29 April as a result of a cold front moving over the entire country. Thereafter day temperatures once again increased to between 28°C and 34°C. From the middle of May both night and day temperatures decreased rapidly, with night temperatures regularly below 5°C. At the beginning of June most vines had lost all their leaves due to frost and leaf drop had occurred to a large extent. Producers started clean pruning actions from the first week in June onwards.

The past winter was one of the coldest to date. One producer who has been monitoring temperatures on his production unit for the past 35 years, indicated that the lowest average temperature to date on his production unit occurred this year. Large scale cold damage was prevalent on young vines especially along the Orange River. The extent of the cold damage was apparent only once producers started pruning actions on their young vines. The cold weather damaged vascular tissue causing the vines to dry out, with the accompanying trunk splitting from the graft joint upwards. In some blocks there was up to 90% cold damage with the concomitant split trunks. Cold damage occurred even in the more westerly parts around Augrabies, which are traditionally not susceptible to such hazards. The low temperatures at the end of May and beginning of June ensured that the cold demand of the vines was satisfied. Hardly any rain occurred in the area in May, June and July. Apart from the cold damage in certain young blocks, conditions during winter were conducive to even budding and a good bud percentage.

Rainfall in November, December and January were above average. At the end of November and beginning of December large scale hail damage occurred in the area in and around Upington. Hail damage ranged from 5% to 90%, depending on area, cultivar, trellis system, row direction, etc. Numerous heavy showers in December were followed by regular precipitation in January. During the entire harvest period humidity was above average due to regular showers, causing high pressure from downy mildew in the vineyards. This necessitated the use of expensive systemic control substances.

The first wine grapes for rebate purposes were delivered on 7 January 2008. All cultivars ripened 2-4 weeks later than last year. This caused peak intakes at the cellars to occur much later. The last grapes were received by the cellars on 10 April. The pressing season was drawn out and the increased intake later in the season put enormous pressure on cellar personnel and capacity.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The good yield and regular showers during the harvest caused sugars to remain low for the biggest part of the harvest. Most of the white cultivars were delivered with lower sugars than last year.

Humidity was consistently high from the beginning of January onwards and dew occurred nightly, both of which contributed to the spread of downy mildew. The loss of leaves due to downy mildew and regular showers resulted in lower acids and higher pHs than last year.

Wine quality was nevertheless good.

## **PAARL**

### **Production trends**

The wine grape crop in Paarl has shown an increase for the fourth consecutive year. The last estimate in April indicated a 10% increase on the 2007 crop, i.e. 168 293 tons.

Possible reasons are the good winter rainfall (50mm less than the winter of 2006), more summer rainfall than the previous season (50mm more in Oct. – Feb.) and pruning practices for bigger yields to achieve more profitable crops.

Right from the start Chardonnay and Pinotage has a smaller crop, while almost all the other cultivars displayed a bigger crop. In high price point blocks especially big volumes of grapes were dropped so as to end up with a yield of 7-8 tons/ha.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

The levels of dams in the region were very good at the start of the season. Budding in white cultivars throughout the region was fairly even, but uneven budding was apparent everywhere in Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. Budding was generally very even in Merlot, Pinotage (despite sufficient cold in winter), and other new red cultivars.

The climate fluctuated considerably. Weather station data indicate that the past season's average minimum as well as maximum temperatures were warmer than the previous season, as well as the long term (LT) figures. During the flowering period less wind and more showers prevailed. Berry set was not affected by the rain and on the whole all cultivars had even, full bunches. From véraison to harvest more wind as well as rain occurred, resulting in high disease pressure which persisted up to and during the harvest. Early in the season snails caused widespread damage, especially to young buds, leaves and shoots. Isolated outbreaks of mealybug occurred at an early stage.

Although there weren't any consecutive days above 40°C, there were warm periods with the one from 6 to 9 March having a big impact on grape analyses especially. Approximately 30mm rain were measured early in February. Jointly these two factors may be seen as the biggest reason for the vines' soundness and slow, optimal ripening in mid- and late season cultivars especially.

The harvest started approximately 10 days later than in 2007 and this trend persisted throughout the season.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Initially grape analyses were very nicely balanced, with average flavour intensity in Sauvignon blanc. In mid- to late season cultivars abnormal acid (low) and pH (high) analyses occurred. Acid adjustments were necessary in many instances. However, slower ripening resulted in very good phenolic ripening, thereby giving rise to high expectations of the 2008 red wine crop.

The quality of Chenin blanc and Chardonnay is excellent. Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and also Pinotage promise once again to produce exceptional wines, while good quality Merlot may be expected from the Paarl region this year. Once again numerous rosé wines were made from several red cultivars.

## **ROBERTSON**

### **Production trends**

The 2008 vintage will be remembered for posing exceptional challenges to producers, viticulturists and winemakers. The Robertson Wine Valley 203 000 crushed tons of grapes, the most ever. The crop was 3,2% bigger than the record crop of 2007.

Early cultivars such as Chenin blanc, Sauvignon blanc and Pinotage had smaller crops as a result of rot. The later ripening cultivars had bigger crops than the previous year. One of the main reasons for the increased crop is the copious amounts of rain that occurred in spring and early in summer. Plantings in recent years also exceeded uprootings and young vines starting bearing. In 2004, 2005 and 2006 respectively 299 ha, 210 ha and 135 more hectares were planted than uprooted.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

After the good winter budding occurred approximately ten days later. Budding was even except for a few Shiraz blocks. Robertson had a very cool spring and early summer with abundant rainfall. From October to December the rainfall exceeded the long term average by 114 mm. Mountain farmers' dams were relatively empty before November, but overflowed after December. The average maximum temperatures for November to January were between 1°C and 2°C cooler than the long term average. The temperatures and rainfall during the harvest were average. (The above data apply to the weather station on Robertson Experiment Farm.)

Ripening was very slow as a result of the cooler weather and the harvest started approximately two weeks later. Sour rot especially and to a lesser extent botrytis were initially bothersome in some Chenin blanc and Sauvignon blanc blocks. From January onwards there was much less rainfall, which restricted the extent of the rot. Fruit fly was a dilemma this year. As a result of the vigorous growth considerably more labour input was required to manage the canopies. Multiple tipping/topping actions with additional suckering and breaking out of leaves took place to open up the canopies.

### **Grape and wine quality**

At this stage the red wines are looking excellent with very good colour. Promising cultivars are Pinotage and Merlot. As usual the quality of the Chardonnay is outstanding.

## **STELLENBOSCH**

### **Production trends**

Early in the season the crop was estimated to be bigger than the 2007 crop. As a result of unfavourable climatic conditions these early estimates did not materialise. Current estimations show the crop to be the same as or 1.5% bigger than the 2007 crop.

Despite the large number of flower clusters crop size was influenced by cool, rainy and windy conditions as well as botrytis on Chardonnay and especially Shiraz. Lighter crops occurred in Sauvignon blanc especially as a result of smaller bunches. The same trend was observed in some Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards, where bunches were smaller and the second bunch on a shoot very small indeed. Even so good average crops were obtained from Pinotage, Chenin blanc and Merlot. Detrimental factors had a bigger influence on crop size in the cooler coastal areas.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Good rain and sufficient cold occurred in winter. The early spring was cool, with much wind and rain. This was followed by moderate (November) to normal (December) temperatures and alternating rain in early summer. The January temperatures were warm with average rainfall, while February was much cooler, with higher rainfall than usual. Relatively few southeasterly and considerable southwesterly winds prevailed during this period. March and April had above average temperatures with isolated showers in March. There were only a few very hot days in March.

The cool and rainy pre-summer was followed by a normal to cool mid-summer with isolated showers. The harvest season was cool to warm towards the end of the period with rain in February.

Budding was good and even. Initially large numbers of flower clusters were observed on all cultivars and fertility was average to above average. During flowering of certain cultivars conditions were cool, rainy and windy. This caused weak set and looser bunches, especially in Merlot, Shiraz and to a lesser extent Cabernet Sauvignon. Shoot growth was good to vigorous as a result of the moderate temperatures and regular showers. Bunch development, with regard to size, was not up to scratch. Smaller bunches occurred especially in Sauvignon blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and to a lesser extent Chenin blanc and Shiraz. The phenomenon could possibly be ascribed to the cool/cold conditions that prevailed during the differentiation period of the bunches the previous season (November - December 2006).

Disease pressure especially from oidium and snout beetles was high throughout the growing season. Dew nights occurring as early as January caused downy mildew problems, especially on younger leaves. Rain and high humidity throughout the growing season were responsible for botrytis in Chardonnay, Sauvignon blanc, and later in the season also in several Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon vineyards. The same trend occurred the previous vintage, but the extent this year was greater. As a result of downy mildew infection loss of leaves, especially on the shoot tips, occurred towards the end of the harvest. A few very hot days early in March caused leaves to turn yellow overnight, in Shiraz especially – the trend was also observed in a few other later cultivars.

Grapes ripened approximately 7 to 10 days later than usual, mostly due to the cooler climate.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Quality was exceptionally good with very good grape analyses. Good to high sugars were obtained, good pH (except in late cultivars), with high malic acid a regular occurrence. Generally speaking 2008 will be a good and interesting vintage as far as quality is concerned.

## **SWARTLAND / MALMESBURY**

### **Production trends**

Initially the crop seemed slightly bigger than last year, but current statistics show it to be 6% bigger. Considerably more white and slightly more red grapes were delivered to the cellars. Chenin blanc fared exceptionally well, especially on marginal soils; Darling Cellar reported a 41% increase in its Chenin crop.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

Thanks to above average wet and cold conditions in winter, the soil was at field capacity, run-off was good and dams were full. Dryland vines in particular benefited. As a result of the good winter rainfall, growth was vigorous and bolstered even more by follow up rains in spring.

Budding was even in Chenin blanc and Chardonnay blocks, as well as Shiraz to a lesser extent, while budding in Cabernet Sauvignon was uneven.

Canopy management required additional input to prevent compaction. Disease pressure was under control and only became high much later in the season. Very good cover crop production was obtained this year and more producers allowed cover crops to seed. Weeds proved highly bothersome and eventually many producers no longer attempted to control them.

Characteristic of the previous season were heatwaves in January. Although high day temperatures were indeed achieved during the same period this year, there were no heatwaves. Temperatures in February were hot to extremely hot and combined with the absence of rain the vines' water demand skyrocketed.

Due to the season's being late, the delivery of grapes to the cellars was initially two to three weeks late, with considerable accumulation of cultivars in a short while.

### **Grape and wine quality**

Quality across the spectrum looks very promising and all the grapes were obviously healthy. Chenin blanc is looking excellent and generally Chardonnay too, except along the coastal region where downy mildew as well as late oidium caused problems at the end of December. Closer to the harvest Cabernet Sauvignon struggled to obtain colour and sugars, mainly because young leaves had been destroyed by downy mildew.

## **WORCESTER**

### **Production trends**

The Worcester crop estimate currently still comprises both Worcester and Bredekloof. According to the last estimate in April 372 400 tons were expected compared to 352 300 tons the previous season. The difference is ascribed mainly to this season's rain which resulted in larger berries.

### **Climate and viticultural trends**

After a cold and wet winter budding was late in most cultivars, which was the first indication that the harvest might be late. Regular showers occurred throughout the growing season, with heavy showers at the end of November and beginning of December. These showers combined with thunder which released nitrogen in the atmosphere caused especially vigorous growth.

Set was generally good. Further showers during the cell expansion and véraison period caused enlargement of berries, which contributed to a large crop.

Disease pressure was higher throughout the season due to regular showers. Problems came about where producers did not adapt their spraying programmes to the later and longer season. Contact spraying had to be alternated with systemic control. Several producers neglected to give the late cultivars an additional spray, resulting in oidium and downy mildew on these late cultivars.

The harvest was difficult. Rain during the harvest had an adverse effect on Chenin blanc vines especially. Berries were pressed from the bunches and in some instances botrytis and sour rot caused extensive damage. Cellars had to adapt quickly to restrict the botrytis damage to the minimum.

The heatwave in February caused vines to ripen suddenly and cellars struggled to process the backlog. Many vines, especially towards the end, did not achieve the desired sugar levels.

### **Grape and wine quality**

The quality of the first part of the harvest was excellent, with lovely flavours, especially in Sauvignon blanc and Chenin blanc. Botrytis put a slight damper on this. Properly suckered vines

nevertheless produced good wines, in many instances as a result of leaf drop caused by late downy mildew.

Overall quality is fair. Red grapes such as Ruby Cabernet were once again pressed for rebate.

### **III. ELSEWHERE IN THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE**

#### **Australia**

While the 2008 Australian grape harvest is set to produce higher yields than first thought (1,6 million tons), volumes are still way below the average of two million tonnes. The shortfall is due to what many are calling the worst drought to hit the continent in a century.

The lack of rainfall in 2007, particularly in the Murray-Darling river basin, which is home to much of the country's agricultural and wine production (New South Wales, Victoria and southern Queensland), means irrigation water was at a perpetual premium. Grapevines grown in cooler areas in Australia are less affected by drought or problems of access to irrigation water.

Some vineyard owners have been forced to uproot vines that were otherwise destined to die of thirst.

#### **New Zealand**

New Zealand expects a record grape harvest in 2008, boosting the outlook for wine sales, according to the industry's national organisation. This year's harvest is forecast to rise as much as 20 percent to 245 000 tons.

However, 2008 was a difficult vintage because of the higher than expected yields and ill-timed rainfall. Thanks to the high-volume outcome of the long, hot summer, there were high quality grapes across all varieties.

### **IV. VINTAGE GUIDE**

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

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. QUOTATIONS FROM THE REGIONS**

### **Breedekloof**

Pieter le Roux Carstens, Slanghoek

“The harvest lasted from week 5 to 16 and delivered a good crop of above-average quality. The biggest challenge this year was to harvest blocks at an acceptable degree of ripeness without the wine’s quality being compromised by any rot in the vineyard.

“It was an excellent growing season without any heatwaves during the harvest. Grapes achieved a high measure of optimal ripeness thanks to the mild climate, as well as the cold nights.

“Chardonnay is exceptionally full-bodied and complex with concentrated flavours, while Colombard is noticeably fruitier than in 2007 with prominent guava, apple and tropical flavours and a balanced mouthfeel.

“All red cultivars show good potential with intense colour and promising flavour profiles. Everything points towards a promising season for red wines.”

### **Constantia**

Boela Gerber, Groot Constantia

“Persistent rain early in the season created some rot problems. We had a big picking team this year, using a lot of extra contract pickers, and did thorough sorting/cutting out of any rot in the vineyard. Even so, we still had a second sorting in the cellar to ensure that we use only the best grapes.

“The relatively cool ripening conditions resulted in awesome fruit expression on white as well as red wines. We made exceptional whites and good reds this year. Although I am very happy with all the whites, the best-performing variety must be Sauvignon blanc, which has a ripe, tropical fruit character and firm acids. The best red has to be Shiraz, which is very spicy and peppery with good colour. Pinotage has nice fruit and good colour, but not the concentration and complexity we got in ’05 and ’06.

“Our crop was about 20% down, mostly on the reds, with Pinotage and Cabernet Sauvignon being the lowest bearers this year.”

### **Klein Karoo**

Stroebe Nel, De Krans

“With regard to the growing season, we had lots of rain (too much) in November and December. It also rained in February, causing rot in almost all cultivars, including those that were harvested later.”

### **Olifants River**

Len Knoetze, Namaqua Wines

“The crop at Spruitdrift is lighter this year as far as red wine is concerned and slightly heavier on the whites. Since it was a tricky pH vintage, winemakers had to know exactly what they were doing in the cellar. The quality of our red wines is very good, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon especially, and also Pinotage. At the end of the season there was a little rot in the white grapes, but on the whole it was quite a good season for us with regard to diseases.”

### **Paarl**

Rudiger Gretschel, Boekenhoutskloof, Franschoek

“The growing season started with even bud break after a good cold and wet winter. We struggled with difficult conditions during flowering and set in particular, with cold, wet and windy patches during these crucial developments on the vine, hence we experienced less fertilisation as well as looser bunches with bad setting.

“The harvest started off well on the white cultivars, although we experienced nearly weekly showers in February and March. We got all the whites off including our valued Sémillon before any damage like rot hit the grapes. The Syrah crop in particular turned out to be stunning. We did struggle though with some dilution problems with our Cabernet franc and Cabernet Sauvignon, because of the persisting rain. These conditions tested the winemaker in the cellar with saignée done on the musts to ensure proper concentration and extraction in the resulting wine.

“We believe it was a fair vintage but not necessarily one to be remembered for a long time to come.”

### **Robertson**

Johan Stemmet, Excelsior Estate, Ashton

“Our crop was large, about 10% bigger than usual. There was some rot in the white grapes. The quality of the previous two vintages was better than this year.”

### **Stellenbosch**

Guy Webber, Stellenzicht

“Official weather data for January and February shows that 2008 was substantially warmer here with 132 hours measured above 30°C as against a mere 39 hours during the same period in 2007. This despite the fact that the average maximum temperatures for both years were not substantially different – 2008 thus retained the maximum temperatures for longer periods during the day.

“Notwithstanding the above, 2008 had a much better growing season than 2007 in that we had quite a bit more rain at regular intervals during spring and early summer. This resulted in quite vigorous growth in all the vineyards and the average yields were up by about 12% on 2007.

“Wines from the 2008 vintage seem to have slightly lower alcohol contents, due to the increased vigour and the vines’ abilities to ripen the grapes more effectively. The Pinotages seem to be similar in style to those of 2001 when they showed more of their Pinot noir side, while the Shiraz wines have similar intensity to those of 2005. The Bordeaux varieties are very elegant with Sémillon, on the white side, particularly herbaceous.”

## **Tulbagh**

Dewaldt Heyns, Saronsberg

“The past season was closer to normal than the previous five seasons. We had good winter rainfall with sufficient cold units. Spring and summer were slightly cooler than usual due to regular cold fronts that hit the Wesern Cape. However, these fronts were quite weak and Tulbagh had less rain than certain other regions, consequently we did not suffer the accompanying crop losses due to rot. It was a healthy year for us despite the wetter conditions. This may be due to the previous years that were all very dry, which reduced the spore levels of most fungi.

“Ripening was delayed by the cooler weather, making it a long, drawn-out season. The extended season had a positive impact on tannin ripeness and lower alcohol, at the expense of fruit complexity.

“Wine quality appears to be average to slightly above average, with outstanding Sauvignon blanc, Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. I don’t think it will be an excellent year, due to fruit concentration levels that are not as prominent at this stage as in other years. Grapes harvested late in March and April do not meet expectations.”

## **Worcester**

Anneke van Niekerk, Nuy Wine Cellar

“The 2008 crop looked very promising after a good winter. Rain in early and mid-February impacted on the early cultivars and Chenin blanc, Sauvignon blanc and SA Riesling especially were affected by rot. The harvest started ten days later than usual and also finished ten days later than usual. The record crop put the cellar under pressure and the daily intake was bigger than usual.

“On the whole the quality is good and the red wine in particular has lovely dark colours and good structure. The white wines are lovely and fruity.”