

SOUTH AFRICAN WINE HARVEST REPORT 2004

Information supplied by VinPro and SAWIS

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I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

Autumn 2003: Good rainfall after the pressing season, followed by warm and dry weather conditions, resulted in late leaf drop. This was conducive to very good accumulation of reserves.

Winter 2003: Cool but markedly drier than usual. Low rainfall occurred in all the regions, with the result that winter catchment dams as well as soil moisture in dryland vineyards did not receive their full complement of water.

The 2003 growing season: Winter was followed by a cool spring and the vineyards started budding 10 to 14 days later than usual. The season's growth started with good vigour thanks to the favourable weather conditions and good accumulation of reserves.

Cooler conditions in October and November resulted in a long flowering period, which in turn caused uneven berry set and bunches that did not develop uniformly. One of the biggest challenges in the vineyard this year was uneven berry set and vineyard teams did a great deal of green bunch removal to promote even ripening. Véraison occurred 10 to 14 days later than usual.

The 2003/4 season will also be remembered as one of the healthiest ever, which was mainly due to the absence of rain. It was only in the lower section of the Breede River valley that problems with Botrytis were caused at the beginning of the season by sporadic southeasterly rain and high humidity.

The harvest: Long and testing is how many producers will remember the 2004 harvest. Cool climatic conditions caused the growing and ripening conditions to be very good, but delayed everything. By early March, much of the harvest was still hanging on the vines when it is usually nearly all in the cellar. Ripening occurred 7 to 14 days later than in 2003, with a heatwave in February and rain at the beginning of March delaying the harvest even further. During the long hang time the grapes ripened slowly and accumulated complexity, but it felt like the harvest would last forever and nerves of steel were required to wait patiently for the grapes to achieve optimum ripeness. Sugars were good and while acids and pH were not always equally satisfactory, these could be adjusted in the fermentation tanks by the winemakers. The colour of red wine cultivars was exceptionally good and intense this year, thanks to the cool night temperatures.

The wines: Thanks to the excellent quality of the grapes that were crushed, the wines look promising. At the time of going to press it was too early to say how the wines would develop, but experience has taught that cool season wines develop more slowly than warm season wines.

Crop size: The 2004 crop was underestimated by everybody. According to initial estimates and indications it was going to be a very average crop. Eventually it turned out to be the biggest crop ever in the South African wine industry! The estimated total wine harvest of 1 018,50 million litres (1 314 364 tons) represents an increase of 6,54% compared to the 2003 harvest. The figures mentioned above include juice and concentrate for non-alcoholic purposes, rebate and distilling wine, at an average recovery rate of 775 litres per ton of grapes. The biggest increases occurred in the Orange River and Worcester regions. The summer rain in the Orange River region caused a considerable amount of grapes that were destined for the table and drying market to end up in wine cellars. In Worcester expansion and a particularly good year were responsible for a record crop.

Stellenbosch: Good average harvest with wine quality ranging from very good to average red and white wines.

Paarl: Despite an extremely dry winter a large crop was harvested. Winemakers are looking forward to very good wines. Delightful fruity Chenin blanc and Chardonnay wines. Good Cabernet Sauvignon and outstanding Shiraz.

Swartland: One of the driest seasons in years. Delightful fruity Chenin blanc and Chardonnay wines. Good Cabernet Sauvignon and outstanding Shiraz.

Robertson: Warm, humid conditions and sporadic rainfall. Chardonnay as usual very good. Fruity Colombar. Both the colour and the quality of the red wines are looking good, Merlot especially. Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon are very promising.

Worcester: The biggest crop in the history of Worcester/Rawsonville. More complex wines; white wines with slightly less fruit. Chardonnay excellent.

Klein Karoo: A warm, dry summer with little rain. The quality of the wines is very promising.

Olifants River: Much smaller crop due to serious drought. The quality of the red and early white cultivars is very promising. The region's potential for the cultivation of quality

red grapes is once again confirmed by the fact that a considerable percentage of the crop was delivered to cellars in the Boland.

Orange River: A record crop – 16% more wine grapes was crushed than the previous biggest crop (2002). Both the sugar content and the quality of the grapes delivered to the cellars were good despite the rain.

II. MAJOR WINE REGIONS

STELLENBOSCH

Production trends

The crop is approximately 7% bigger than in 2003. Shiraz, Merlot and Pinotage produced a larger crop (big bunches). In general Cabernet Sauvignon produced a smaller crop than last season. The white cultivars' crops were average to variable.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

The 2003 climatic conditions were characterised by a warm and dry autumn and early winter. Good rainfall occurred in August and September 2003. Spring and early summer were cool with good rainfall in December 2003. In January and the first half of February temperatures were above average and rainfall was good. This was followed by cooler temperatures with good rainfall at the beginning of March. The season experienced hardly any strong southeasterly winds, although regular south-southwesterly winds occurred, causing mild temperatures in the growing season.

Although good budding occurred, initial shoot growth was uneven, mainly because of the effect of the dry warm autumn (early leaf drop) and early winter on the vines' reserves. The uneven shoot growth caused the flowering period to be uneven and long. These factors resulted in uneven colour formation and ripening and crop control was important to promote more even ripening. Good distribution of rainfall throughout the growing season resulted in good canopies.

There was next to zero fungal disease incidence, except for late post-harvest occurrence of oidium on leaves.

Grape and wine quality

In general 2004 may be considered a good year. The quality of early and midseason red cultivars, Shiraz in particular, is very good. The quality of the early white cultivars ranges from very good to average. With the late ripening of Cabernet Sauvignon in particular, high pH and low acids were encountered.

PAARL

Production trends

The 2003/4 season will surely be remembered as one of the driest seasons over the past 15 years. A large crop was nevertheless harvested. The most recent figures show that the 2004 crop (130 639 tons) will be approximately 9% smaller than the record crop

of 2003 (144 833 tons). Smaller crops of Chenin blanc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon blanc and Merlot.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

The 2004 season was a huge learning curve from a viticultural point of view. The winter rainfall of 2003 was practically two months late and much less than usual, and vineyards starting budding approximately 14 days late. Budding was uneven, especially in the case of Chenin blanc, Chardonnay, Merlot, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon.

The past season's temperatures were comparable to the long term average, although in Wellington and Northern Paarl it was moderately warmer than in 2003.

Due to low winter and summer rainfall the level of dams in the Boland was much lower than at the beginning of the season. The amount and frequency of irrigation were adjusted downwards.

After the initial delayed budding vineyards started to grow very well and dryland vines were surprisingly vigorous. As the canopies developed the unevenness that occurred during and shortly after budding disappeared (also aided by the correct tipping actions). Lots of bunches were removed to achieve even bunch ripeness in vineyards.

Heatwaves did occur; namely on 4 January as well as 9 - 11 February. Late cultivars and blocks struggled to achieve the correct levels of ripeness and there was good reason to be thankful for the 10 mm of rain at the beginning of March.

There was hardly any downy mildew, but oidium was widespread, especially after the good rains between Christmas and New Year (30 – 65 mm). Isolated instances of Botrytis occurred. Good spraying programmes in winter limited mealybug populations during the growing season.

Grape and wine quality

Winemakers are optimistic about the wines of 2004. Fermentation went without a hitch and melolatic fermentation in particular was completed in most cases without any problems.

In most instances bunch samples rather than berry samples gave a better indication of the degree of ripeness of a block. Here and there higher pH and lower acid concentrations occurred at the same sugar levels as in 2003. The analyses are largely ascribed to the dry and moderately warmer conditions.

Chenin blanc – Delightful fruity wines.

Chardonnay – Very fruity wines. Full ripeness was achieved at lower sugar levels ($\pm 24^{\circ}\text{B}$).

Sauvignon blanc – Slightly less flavour than in 2003, but the quality at present is good.

Pinotage – Quality is good. Numerous rosé and Blanc de noir wines were made this year from press juice that was drawn off Pinotage.

Merlot – The grapes were mostly crushed after the 8 - 11 February heatwave and had high sugar levels, but not always the desired cultivar character.

Shiraz – An excellent season. Wines have good colour and flavour.

Cabernet Sauvignon – Very good grapes and wines from blocks that were harvested early.

SWARTLAND

Production trends

The past season will be remembered as one of the driest in many years. Despite the fact that the 2004 crop (102 571 tons) is approximately 6% smaller than the record crop of 2003, it is approximately 28% bigger than in 2002. Chenin blanc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon blanc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon crops were smaller.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

Budding in vineyards occurred up to 14 days later than usual. This is mainly because winter rainfall only started in the region towards the end of July. Late cold and wet conditions caused uneven budding especially in Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay.

Temperatures were moderately cooler than in 2003. Winter and summer rainfall was considerably lower than the long term average. Dryland as well as irrigated vineyards kicked off with a much lower soil moisture status. Even so the vineyards experienced vigorous growth. Lots of bunches were removed to obtain even bunch ripeness.

Very welcome summer rainfall occurred throughout the region between Christmas and New Year (30 – 60 mm) and saved the crop. Heatwaves occurred on 4 January as well as 9 - 11 February. Late cultivars and blocks struggled to achieve the desired levels of ripeness and everyone was grateful for the 10 mm rainfall at the beginning of March.

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cases of Botrytis. Good spraying programmes in winter limited mealybug populations during the growing season.

Grape and wine quality

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Chenin blanc – Delightful fruity wines, especially from the early blocks.

Chardonnay – Very fruity wines. Full ripeness was achieved at lower sugar levels ($\pm 24^{\circ}\text{B}$).

Sauvignon blanc – Slightly less flavour than in 2003, but the quality at present is good.

Pinotage – Quality is good. Numerous rosé and Blanc de noir wines were made this year from press juice that was drawn off Pinotage.

Merlot – The majority of the grapes were crushed after the 8 - 11 February heatwave and had high sugar levels, but not always the desired cultivar character.

Shiraz – An excellent season. Wines have good colour and flavour.

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ROBERTSON

Production trends

During the 2004 harvest 184 027 tons of grapes were crushed in the Robertson Wine Valley. This is 4% more than in 2003. The early cultivars, especially Chardonnay and Pinotage, produced bigger crops. Extensive plantings of young red grape vineyards came into full production.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

The 2003/2004 harvest was preceded by a cold but dry winter. Budding occurred 10 - 14 days later. Budding was even in early budding cultivars, but more uneven in later budding cultivars. Vineyards were growing vigorously right from the start thanks to favourable climatic conditions and the absence of strong winds. Flowering occurred 10 - 14 days later, with favourable conditions resulting in good even flowering and good set in the early cultivars in particular. In later flowering cultivars there was more attention to green bunch removal.

After the thunder storms and rain in January, followed by humid conditions, Botrytis as well as grey rot became problematic, in the early cultivars especially. Regular light rain in Bonnievale further exacerbated the problem. There was hardly any incidence of rot in the later cultivars. Late in the season downy mildew and oidium resulted in delayed ripening and early leaf drop. Erinose occurred on the young leaves of especially Sauvignon blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon and mealybug was once again a problem, although ants were better controlled this year.

The 2004 ripening period will be remembered for the warm, humid conditions before the harvest, with heatwave conditions early in January and early in February. The harvest started 7 - 10 days later. During the second half of the harvest sugars increased suddenly and even ripening of most cultivars put pressure on red wine facilities especially. Acids were low throughout and acid adjustments required.

Grape and wine quality

The overall wine quality is good. As usual Chardonnay is looking very good, while the Sauvignon blanc that was crushed before the heatwave appears very promising. Once again the Colombar wines are very fruity. In general the colour and quality of the red wines are good; Merlot in particular is much better than last year. Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon are also promising.

WORCESTER

Production trends

The 2004 crop is the biggest in the history of Worcester/Rawsonville. The crop was 17% bigger than in 2003. Production of premium white and red grapes increased by 28% and 31% respectively.

The bigger crop can be ascribed to favourable climatic conditions, next to zero fungal disease incidence, better production practices, sensible irrigation, gradual expansion of vineyard surface and regular uprooting of unproductive vineyards.

The harvest was approximately 10 – 14 days later with certain cultivars being crushed approximately 30 days later, e.g. certain blocks of Pinotage. This put huge pressure on processing capacity later in the season.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

Rainfall was more than 50% below the long term average. This contributed to an exceptionally fungus and disease free year.

Average maximum and minimum temperatures were on the whole higher during the ripening period, and there was less humidity. Botrytis occurred during the harvest. Mealybug infestation remains high. Leafroll and delayed ripening are on the increase.

Grape and wine quality

The large harvest put pressure on cellar facilities and a significant part of the harvest was converted to rebate. More complex wines with slightly less fruity white wines can be expected. Dry white cultivars that were crushed before the heatwave in the middle of February are looking good. There are some exceptional wines from selected blocks. Chardonnay once again proved that the cultivar is well adjusted to the Worcester/Rawsonville area.

KLEIN KAROO

Production trends

The past season the region could be divided into two definite areas, namely eastern and western. In the west (from Montagu to Barrydale) production figures were higher than in 2003, while production in the east (from Ladismith to Oudtshoorn) was lower than in 2003. The 2003/2004 crop amounts to 43 951 tons, which is 3,9% bigger than the 2003 crop. Bigger Colombar production, in the western area especially, contributed largely to the bigger crops.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

The 2003/2004-season was preceded by a dry winter with regular bergwind conditions. The good rainfall during March 2003 meant that the season kicked off with the highest dam levels ever. There was good accumulation of cold units and light snowfall occurred towards the end of winter and early in spring, on the Swartberg mountains especially.

The cool weather in September meant that budding in the vineyards occurred 10 – 14 days later than normal and the early cultivars in particular were influenced. Initially vineyards grew slowly as a result of regular cold fronts. Early cultivars flowered over a very long period, to be followed by very vigorous growth.

The summer was characterised by warm, dry weather with little rainfall. Heatwaves early in January caused sunburn damage, especially on the north-south rows in the vicinity of Montagu. Heatwaves also occurred on 9 and 10 February. Regular thunderstorms and rain occurred in the eastern parts of the Klein Karoo especially and caused rot on the early cultivars.

The early cultivars were harvested up to 14 days later. This put great pressure on the cellars during the middle part of the crush. Skin ripeness was a much better indication of optimal ripeness than sugars. Acids were low on the whole.

It was a very healthy season except for isolated cases of early downy mildew. Oidium and downy mildew occurred late in the season. Mealybug remains a problem in the Klein Karoo.

Grape and wine quality

Wine quality looks very promising, especially where grapes came from blocks that were properly managed throughout the season.

OLIFANTS RIVER

Production trends

The total crop will probably amount to just over 180 000 tons, that is approximately 12% less than the 2003 crop. This decrease is ascribed mainly to Colombar, Chenin blanc and especially Hanepoot and Chardonnay which produced much lighter crops this year. The past season's drought and the water restrictions limited producers to less than half their allocated volumes of water per hectare, with an accompanying decrease in bunch masses compared to last year. Although the yield per hectare of almost all red wine blocks is restricted, the percentage red grapes nevertheless increased from 17% in 2003 to 19%. This year at least 8 000 tons of grapes were delivered to cellars in the Boland, approximately 5 000 tons of which were red grapes, once again confirming the region's potential to cultivate premium quality red grapes.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

There were only two exceptionally hot days in January and February. The average February temperature this year was almost the same as in 2003, i.e. 22.5°C, with averages of below 19°C measured closer to the coast. The cooler ripening period meant that cultivars ripened more slowly and over a longer period, resulting in much less pressure on the cellars.

Bunch masses of red grapes were considerably lighter this year, especially with regard to Shiraz and certain Pinotage blocks. The very compact bunches of Pinotage complicated correct sampling. The season was particularly disease-free with only isolated instances of downy mildew and rot. Mealybug infestations occurred late in the season.

Grape and wine quality

As it did last year, the quality of the red and the early white cultivars is very promising. The 2004 harvest was handled with relative ease by the cellars and should produce wines of above average quality.

ORANGE RIVER

Production trends

The 2004 crop is a record, with 16,6% more wine grapes than the previous biggest crop (2002) being crushed. Large volumes of Sultanas and table grapes were crushed after the inclement rain which fell in the area from 6 January onwards, as well as the low price of raisins. The wine grape cultivars fared exceptionally well and younger plantings also came into full production.

Climatic conditions and influence on vine growth

After the 2003 harvest there was hardly any rain and the vineyards remained very healthy. Light frost occurred on 26 May and heavy frost on 6 and 7 June. The vineyards retained their leaves right to the end and the shoots were therefore properly ripened. The winter was characterised by cold nights and average to warm days, with abnormal heat early in August. It then remained cool until the beginning of October, with rainshowers in September.

Budding was 10 days later and flowering 3 days later. On the whole budding was excellent, although delayed budding and growth arrest did occur in places. Monday morning 22 September will be remembered as a Black Monday since extensive and serious black frost occurred in the area. Hundreds of hectares, sultanas in particular, were severely damaged by the frost. At that stage only very slight budding of the wine grapes had occurred (only at the starting phase of budding) and frost damage was therefore minimal. At the end of October hail caused serious damage to some areas.

Irrigation water was ample throughout. During the post-harvest period downy mildew and oidium occurred.

Grape and wine quality

It was a long pressing season and the large intake put great pressure on cellar facilities. Even though the sugars and the quality of grapes delivered to the cellars were good despite the rain, the quality of the wines might not be as good as last year.

III. VINTAGE GUIDE

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

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.