

CIRCUMSTANCE

MERLOT 2018



IT'S REALLY ALL ABOUT THE VINEYARDS

Once regarded as Cabernet Sauvignon's lesser sidekick, Merlot is now considered its equal by many. Little is known about the origin of the varietal, but it has been cultivated in Bordeaux since the 18th century.

The block used for our Circumstance Merlot is planted on the south-west facing slopes of the Schapenberg, at an altitude of 240 to 260 meters above sea level, and a mere 4 kms from the Atlantic Ocean. Strong south-easterly winds help control growth and crop yield. Soils are of sandstone origin with medium size stones, helping with both drainage and moisture retention. Production was approximately 5 tons/ha.

At Waterkloof, we pride ourselves on not spraying any chemical herbicides, fungicides or pesticides in our vineyards. We produce our own compost and biodynamic preparations, which we then apply with our work horses, as opposed to heavy tractors. These practices ensure loose soil with more life, where the vines can spread their roots as they please, taking up everything they need from our rich and complex earth. We believe that biodynamic farming leads to terroir-driven wines, which are truly made in the vineyard.

A GENTLE HAND

We harvest according to taste and spend a lot of time in the vineyards to see how the flavours develop. Grapes are picked by hand into small picking crates, taking care to not over fill them. The whole bunches were hand sorted and placed into our open-top wooden fermenters via gravity. Natural fermentation started spontaneously by utilising the wild yeasts present on the fruit. Punch downs (twice a day) by feet were used during fermentation to ensure a soft and slow extraction of colour and tannin. The wine spent 40 days on the skins to help integrate the tannins and stabilise the colour. The skins were separated from the juice through a gentle basket pressing. The wine went through malolactic fermentation in barrel and was then aged in new (11%), second and third fill (90%) French barrels for 30 months, and then another four months in our wooden fermenters, to ensure an elegant wine with silky soft tannins. The wine received no fining, which allowed the grape to be purely expressed in the wine. Only sulphur was added and no other additions, such as tartaric acid or enzymes, were allowed.

AND A FEW PRAYERS TO MOTHER NATURE: THE 2017 / 2018 GROWING SEASON

The Cape experienced a very dry growing season from the end of the 2017 harvest and also during the beginning of 2018. The 2017 winter was not exceptionally cold but still colder than the previous three years, which helped to ensure an even budburst. The rainfall was the lowest that we have experienced in the last 10 years on the farm.

Budburst started earlier than usual seeing that the winter was not very cold. We could see some of the first buds appear early in September. From there on the vines were struggling to grow due to the dry conditions and veraison only took place in early January. The dam levels were also low and we were only able to irrigate the younger blocks. The best practice during dry conditions is to always have a complete weed-free vineyard to prevent excessive water usage and to limit stress on the vine by suckering if needed- sometimes this also happens naturally.

In early January we did receive rain and also a bit in early February. We believe that this was the saving grace for our vines to help them ripen the fruit more evenly. During this time, we did not see excessive heat spikes and had lovely cool evenings which helped to have a longer growing season and have all the flavours develop over a longer period.

Harvest started about 10 days later than in 2017. We saw a decrease in berry size on some blocks. Fortunately, little to no rot was found on the grapes, which helped to have a stress-free sorting table. Overall, we are more than happy with the quality of the 2018 harvest.

TASTING NOTES FROM THE GLASS OF NADIA LANGENEGGER

Strangely enough this wine reminds me of a young Burgundy with its hints of cassis, sour plums and some savoury notes on the nose. Elegant, medium bodies, firm with a silky tannin. It pairs well with lighter white meat dishes, like a rack of lamb, and hearty spices like rosemary and thyme.

THE NUMBERS (4,300 bottles produced)

Alc: 14 % RS: 2 g / l TA: 5.5 g / l pH: 3 . 6