

The South African harvest season of 2020 will certainly go down in history as one of the most memorable, with a dramatic end-of-harvest period for many grape growers and producers. The arrival of the COVID-19 Virus in South Africa at the beginning of March resulted in the South African government enforcing a nationwide lockdown, effective from the 26<sup>th</sup> March. At the time, this meant that all wine-related activities were placed on hold, including all agricultural activities, such as harvesting the remaining grapes. Fortunately, this was quickly amended and producers were allowed to finish their harvest, albeit with limited staff.

We were thankfully in a fortunate position, having completed our harvesting activities a few weeks prior. However, we were hit by the government's initial decision to ban all exports, as this was something unexpected due to the fact that local sales were already restricted. The wine industry as a whole took a united stand and we are thankful for the strong front put up by Vinpro and WOSA, in particular. Fortunately, the 1<sup>st</sup> May saw the lifting of the export ban and we were allowed to continue, a welcome relief to many.

Despite the uncertainty surrounding the global pandemic, we are happy to look back over a very favourable harvest season. According to the industry body SAWIS, the 2020 harvest was on average 8% larger than the harvest of 2019 and the quality of the wines from this season look to be of great quality.

Our harvest period started a few weeks earlier than in 2019 as the favourable growing conditions in spring sped up bud burst and the warm, sunny summer days that followed allowed for effective grape ripening. The summer temperatures were warm, but moderate and the grapes were allowed to accumulate their concentrated flavours. We were fortunate to bring in good yields, despite the fact that we had some variation in some of the blocks.

Fortunately, we had sufficient rainfall in the winter months, which made for a promising growing season. Our site is comprised of a granite mother material, with mainly Tukulu and Oakleaf soil types as well as a high clay content. This allowed for good water retention into the summer months, which helped in retaining moisture. Our site is also suitably positioned as we are close to the Atlantic Ocean and thus benefit from cooling breezes later on in the growing season. This, coupled with good canopy management, allowed for as much protection from the hot summer sun as possible. As a result, our bunches developed



nically and we were happy with the sugar levels and good concentration of complex flavours in the grapes.

Our main focus as a winery is to produce Cabernet Sauvignon that is of a consistently-good quality. A large portion of our vineyard is thus dedicated to this specific varietal and we have planted dedicated blocks facing north and north-east in order to absorb as much sunlight as possible. This enables the fuller, fruitier wines we have been known to produce. Our variety of naturally-formed clones provides an added complexity in our wines that we hope will be evident in our 2020 vintage.

As with all quality wines, we now wait to see what results 2020 will bring us. At the time of writing, we are still in a stage of lockdown where local sales of alcohol are banned. As an industry, we hope that this ban gets lifted as soon as possible so that we can get back to doing what we love – and for us, that is creating our Cabernet Sauvignons for you to enjoy.



In the meantime, you are welcome to purchase our wines from our online shop (<https://www.ernieelswines.com/#/shop>). We have recently launched our new Major Series range, which includes our Cabernet Sauvignon as well as our Merlot. Although purchases are welcome now, we can unfortunately only deliver your wines when it is legal to do so. We can, however, offer free delivery for all local orders over R500.

Unfortunately, the impact of the global pandemic has also affected our renovations and the building of our new tasting room and restaurant has been delayed by a few months. At the moment, we are hoping to have our winery reopened in the summer months, which we also hope will coincide with the reopening of the South African tourist season once more. We look forward to having you and sharing a glass of our Cabernet Sauvignon on our new terrace overlooking the beautiful region of Stellenbosch.

Until then, stay safe.

*Ernie Els Wines Team*