

CIRCUMSTANCE

MERLOT 2016



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 5 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 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 were destemmed, 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) were used during fermentation to ensure a soft and slow, colour and tannin extraction. The wine spent 30 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 (15%), second and third fill (85%) French barrels for 18 months. We then aged the wine for another year in our wooden fermenters to ensure a 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 2015/2016 GROWING SEASON

The Cape did not experience a very cold winter in 2015, with near perfect days lingering at 20°C. The evenings were cold but not excessively so. We also experienced the driest winter to date with half the normal rainfall.

Budburst took place at the beginning of September, which was definitely earlier than usual. It was a proper spring with lots of sun and warm temperatures.

We started picking a week earlier than last year (which was already early). A lot of the producers were significantly down on crop yield (some even up to 50%). Fortunately, our biodynamic vines have a deep root system (approximately six metres deep), compared to conventional vineyards (digging only one meter deep) and we were not down on yield by too much.

With the berries being very small this year the flavours were fantastic. Some raisins still

developed on the later varietals, which we got rid of in the cellar. The skins on the reds were thicker than normal but brimming with concentration.

TASTING NOTES FROM THE GLASS OF NADIA BARNARD

Light red berries, sour plums and some savoury, earthy aromas greet and entice the nose. Elegant, bright acidity with juicy fruit on the palate. Great length with fine tannins and a balanced acidity on the finish. It pairs well with duck and lamb dishes.

THE NUMBERS (10 200 bottles produced)

Alc: 13.4% **RS:** 1.4 **TA:**5.1 g/l **pH:** 3.54 **VA:** 0.62