

CIRCUMSTANCE

MERLOT 2017



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.

On Waterkloof we farm organic and biological, producing our own compost and microbial preparations. We then distribute these by utilising our draught 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 regenerative farming helps to produce honest, terroir-driven wines that 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 20 months, and then another year 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 2015/2016 GROWING SEASON

What looked set to be an average harvest due to the winter drought, turned out well - much to our surprise. This also attested yet again that Mother Nature will always keep us on our toes.

The 2016 Cape winter did not see a lot of rainfall – about half the average – and it was also not exceptionally cold. We barely saw any snow on the mountains. Spring arrived early, which resulted in early bud burst and flowering. Thankfully, we did not experience strong winds during this period, which helped with an even berry set. Seeing that we had already experienced drought conditions during the berry formation stage, cell formation was also impacted to produce small cells from the start.

In January, we received some rain which changed the outlook and assisted the vines to grow without being too stressed. During the rest of the season, we had beautiful cool evenings and mild day temperatures, and this ensured a proper, even ripening process.

We started picking at the end of January and were very happy to see little to no rot, small berries with a lot of concentration, and great acids!

TASTING NOTES FROM THE GLASS OF NADIA BARNARD

Light hints of cassis, 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 lighter white meat dishes, like a rack of lamb, and hearty spices like rosemary and thyme.

THE NUMBERS (11 000 bottles produced)

Alc: 13.5% RS: 2 TA:6 g/l pH: 3.42