

BOSCHENDAL 2017 – UNUSUAL VARIETIES' TIME TO SHINE

Boschendal sources grapes mainly from the Boschendal vineyards in Franschhoek and from suppliers in Somerset West and Stellenbosch. The crush started on 9 January and finished on 10 April. In fact, as group winemaker JC Bekker remembers, it was mostly done and dusted by mid-March. “We tripled the intake for Boschendal’s rose-gold Chardonnay Pinot Noir blend that has grown hugely in sales volume, and we took some of the pressure off the cellar by handling some of the load up the road at Franschhoek Cellar.”

Red wine maker at Boschendal, Richard Duckitt, confirms that the harvest began very early. “It was shorter than in 2016, and once again most of our vineyards and those that we source from were reaching full ripeness at the same time. Over 60% of our harvest took place during a period of two weeks, one of which was a really crazy time – lots of late nights and one stint that went on until 3am, with trucks bringing in grapes from as far afield as Elgin or Darling.”

Duckitt is upbeat. “I’ve heard winemakers say that 2017 is okay, fairly good, above average, but for Boschendal, I feel that this year is a really good vintage. Amazing! We’re looking at riper styles, big wines but still with an element of freshness. Drought can sometimes have a positive influence on quality. If not too extreme, warm and dry can result in interesting wines.”



He feels that 2017 is similar to 2015 in that the berries are smaller than in 2016. In 2016 the heat affected the colour and the wines were generally lighter in style. In 2017 the wines are again bigger and more concentrated.

Lizelle Gerber, the winemaker responsible for white wines, Pinot Noir and the Cap Classique bubbles at Boschendal, recalls that management of the juice separation was more finicky than in previous vintages. “Due to the drought and the stress, the skins were thicker in general – a saving grace for a lot of the wines, insofar as the vines were able to acclimatise over a longer period. And the glucose/fructose ratio during fermentation increased the challenge of avoiding excessively high residual sugar levels in finished wines intended to be dry in style.”

DGB viticulturist Stephan Joubert is very optimistic about Boschendal's Merlot, Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc – the old-vine Chenin for Boschendal Sommelier's Selection mostly from Stellenbosch, Durbanville and Agter-Paarl. Whereas Duckitt's highlights also include an interesting Sangiovese as well as an unusual Tannat from Wellington, some of which he hopes will go into bottle on its own under the experimental Playpen label sold exclusively at the cellar door.



The Sauvignon Blanc from Elgin is now just as important to Boschendal as the Sauvignon from Durbanville and Faure, Stellenbosch. "The quality of the free-run Sauvignon juice was magnificent in 2017," Gerber beams. "And we've been experimenting with further varieties from Elgin," says Duckitt, "especially with Shiraz and Merlot. We took in some really good Cab for the 1685 label from the cooler areas such as Durbanville this year and there was also some good Cabernet for the Classic label from Agter-Paarl and the Perdeberg. From the Swartland we've always had a good crop from a spectacular Shiraz vineyard and this year we also have a good Durif (Petite Sirah) under the Playpen label."

As regards developments in the cellar, there is an upgraded roller-sorter capable of removing green berries and raisins from the bunches, plus a better pump-over system allowing for more gentle tannin extraction and improved fermentation aerations. There's been an increase in the quantity of barrel ferments for Boschendal reds, partly because of better oak integration, partly as a good base for the icon wines. The team has acquired some 2500-litre foudre barrels, "and for the first time we're using 700-litre clay amphorae from Italy," beams Gerber. "It's both nerve-wracking and very exciting, beginning with a variety that's very unusual for Boschendal, namely Marchand, and with some Chardonnay from Elgin."

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Yearly Harvest Summary:

VINTAGE	GENERAL RATING	OTHER COMMENT
2017	Very, very good	Short vintage, no heat waves, cool nights and a very cool January
2016	Fair to good	Short, dry, hot vintage
2015	Very, very good	Round, rich wines with concentrated flavours
2014	Fair to good	Wet; some elegant whites, good medium-bodied reds
2013	Fair to good	Hot vintage; big, solid wines, good concentration
2012	Fair to good	Cool vintage; some of the reds surprisingly promising
2011	Average to good	Hot, short vintage
2010	Average to good	Rich, ripe styles
2009	Very, very good	Big wines
2008	Average to good	Elegant, fresh
2007	Fair to good	Structure, elegance