

RUSO WINES

2010 Harvest Report

Our fourth annual harvest was very successful and we believe that the 2010 vintage will prove to be a great wine again! We are particularly happy about the many compliments we received from other winemakers for our healthy vineyard and the exceptional quality of the grapes.

Despite the late rains towards the end of 2009, strong winds over the Cape and the summer heat wave, our crop actually increased while the rest of the wine industry is down by an average of 10-15% (in some cases up to 50%). This could be attributed to our wonderful *terroir*, especially:

- the very deep and fertile clay/loam soil;
- the cooling effect of the Atlantic Ocean; and
- the wind protection provided by the Durbanville Hills.



Russo's vineyard in the early morning, just before harvest

The fact that our vineyard is not irrigated also plays an important role – the vines are stronger and although we produce less grapes than if we were to water them, the quality is certainly better.

Our first Malbec harvest

This year we harvested Malbec for the first time and we are very excited about the prospect of adding it to the blend. Even after the first fermentation, the wine was already very drinkable and we can just imagine what it will taste like after 18 months in oak!

For those of you not familiar with this cultivar, Malbec is a purple grape originating from Bordeaux and mainly used in blends such as ours. These grapes require lots of sun and heat, are thin-skinned and tend to have an inky dark colour and robust tannins, with ripe plum and blackberry flavours.

Malbec is Argentina's signature grape and is quickly building a reputation as a single-varietal, medium to full-bodied wine. This is where we first encountered Malbec on its own – the wines are rich, dark and juicy, and we loved it! We will use it in our blend, but also intend to produce a few bottles of Malbec every year.

Pigeage

No, this is not a spelling mistake nor a method to determine how old your pig is. Pigeage is a centuries-old French winemaking method still practiced by us at Russo Wines during the extended fermentation process when the grape juice are converted into red wine. This is a critical period, called maceration, while the grape juice is fermenting and drawing its best qualities from the grape skins and the seeds in the fermentation bin.



Our future winemaker hard at work – this is “pigeage”

As the wine ferments, the grape skins rise to the top of the bin and form a thick cap. It is important to break up this cap regularly to increase the extraction of colour and flavour, and to prevent the cap from drying out. Several times a day (and night!) we push down this cap into the juice using a stainless steel tool, resembling a combination of a giant potato masher and a braai grid, to ensure maximum exposure of the juice to the skins. This is really hard, physical work – we all lose a few kilo's during this period in addition to building those arm, back and

shoulder muscles. This is a typical boutique wine activity - the large wineries, by contrast, either use machines or pump the fermenting wine over the cap to do the job.

What is a Bordeaux blend and what is so special about it?

After centuries of making and drinking wine, winemakers in Bordeaux have figured out how to produce great wines. These winemakers are probably most famous for their blend. The five potential components of a Bordeaux blend are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Malbec.

Cabernet Sauvignon and/or Merlot are usually the dominant parts of the blend, while Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Petit Verdot could be added in support. These three grapes provide colour, structure and body to the blend in varying amounts. A Bordeaux blend typically uses at least three of these five grapes. The volume percentage of each grape in the blend can vary from year to year and the winemaker has the freedom to include more of the variety that excelled in a particular vintage – this is what makes blending such an art.

We love drinking Bordeaux blends, which is why we make one. Although wine regulations prevent us from labelling it as a Bordeaux blend, most wine lovers will recognise it as one by simply looking at its components.

At the moment, our flagship Bordeaux blend is made up of four cultivars – Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot. From 2010 onwards, Malbec will also be added, meaning all five Bordeaux grapes will be featured in the blend – quite unique!

The Russo Bordeaux Blend is one of only a few South African blends of four or more Bordeaux components – and all the grapes are from our own vineyard!



First juices flowing from the basket press, which is operated by hand