



# HARVEST REPORT BY BRAND 2016

DGB News Feed

May 2016

2016 was one of the earliest vintages on record, with the harvest commencing on 13 January. It was also one of the hottest and driest seasons on record. Though DGB winemakers are optimistic about the prospects of what will be bottled from this vintage, they are concerned about the drought and emphasise the dire need for good rainfall before the next growing season.

According to DGB group winemaker JC Bekker, DGB's crop intake was 9% smaller than anticipated at the beginning of the season. However, such are the contracts and options that the company has in various districts and especially in the Coastal region of the winelands where the required tonnage was secured while quality standards were maintained.

Viticulturist Stephan Joubert comments, "DGB has an advantage compared with smaller producers in being able to source from a large pool of vineyards. The company's source base, as well as its spread of suppliers, is far and wide enough that there is always something good to choose, even in challenging times. Plantings and varieties (28 varieties are sourced) can be selected from locations which are often less prone to adverse weather conditions and a shifting climate.

The 2016 harvest involved smaller grapes "up to 25% less in the unirrigated vineyards," says Bekker, reporting that in response, extraction techniques in the cellar were adapted to avoid excessive tannin compounds in the wines. "Yields were down by as much as 50% in some areas such as the Swartland and Bonnievale, but it was a year with low disease pressure and there were no fire or smoke-taint issues for us to deal with this year." Although what did cause some stress was the very condensed harvesting period, particularly for the late variety red grapes that came in over a much shorter time putting pressure on intake logistics and fermentation capacity in the winery.





## **BELLINGHAM HARVEST REPORT 2016**

“The 2016 vintage was challenging but good,” says Bellingham winemaker Niël Groenewald, who ranks it ahead of vintages 2007, 2008 and 2010, despite the industry reporting lower yields after a dry, hot growing season. “Pinotage and Chenin, in particular, are looking fantastic and will rate highly,” he remarked about several single-vineyard bottlings, explaining that the team reacted quickly to the early signs of a challenging vintage and contracted more grapes from the cooler areas at the start of the season to ensure enough quantity. Moreover, the Chenin vines relied on for the premium Bellingham labels are older and capable of better water retention, while Pinotage is an early ripener, with tannin and colour formation occurring in a timely manner (in December already) relative to Cabernet and Shiraz, which were a bit more challenging.

Most of the grapes bought in for the various wines in the Bellingham range are from the Coastal region — especially Stellenbosch, Durbanville, Paarl, the Swartland (less so in 2016), and Darling (the cooler part of the district, closer to the Atlantic). As grapes arrived at the Wellington winery, Groenewald noted standout features of the harvest in several areas: the Swartland's low yields, small berries and thick skins; Stellenbosch's relatively good yield and good phenolic ripeness; and Durbanville's lower yields, thickish skins, great flavours.

“We are sourcing more Viognier from cooler sites in Somerset West and Elgin to make for a fresher, more focused style of wine,” says Groenewald, a big fan of Rhône varieties. “More Shiraz and Pinotage are coming from Stellenbosch for the same reason.”



Currently, at the top of Bellingham's quality pyramid, The Bernard Series from 2016 might even be an improvement on previous years due to "understanding the vineyards better, excellent barrel management, and the sorting, sorting and more sorting of the grapes."

For Bellingham, the harvest started on 18 January with Verdelho brought in from Paarl, and by the end of it, four weeks later — Groenewald is especially excited about these — the excellent Malbec from Somerset West and some exquisite Petit Syrah from the Swartland.

"We are continually experimenting, considering varietal options but more often than not looking at different combinations," he says. "Our experience with blending plays a major role in challenging vintages. We thought we might also have some smoke taint to deal with regarding fruit from a block in Klappmuts, Stellenbosch, after the Simonsberg fires in January. However, lab tests showed we had nothing to worry about."



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## **BOSCHENDAL HARVEST REPORT 2016**

Another very long harvest for **Lizelle Gerber of Boschendal** in Franschhoek. She started with the Pinot Noir for the Cap Classique base wines from the Boschendal property. Things got into full swing a week later, on 20 January, when Sauvignon Blanc grapes arrived from Boschendal's own vineyards, as well as Durbanville and Stellenbosch. Chardonnay grapes followed and it was only in early April, nearly 100 days later, that the harvest ended with the arrival of wrinkled and botrytised grapes, destined to be turned into a Noble Late Harvest under the label of this famous wine estate.

But Boschendal wines are not made exclusively from grapes grown at Boschendal anymore. Growth in the consumer demand has necessitated this. An increasing percentage of the fruit is sourced from Stellenbosch, Somerset West, Durbanville, and Darling — areas that complement the styles produced at Boschendal. And also now from Elgin, a district that has become very special to Lizelle and her team. So much so that a flagship range of wines has been developed called The Appellation Series, bearing labels that point to a cooler climate basin of vineyards. This Elgin range benefits from its close proximity to a natural airconditioner, the Atlantic Ocean. The winemaker is confident the Elgin class of 2016 will show pronounced elegance with extreme finesse. It seems the Elgin area wasn't much influenced by the heat spikes in the rest of the Western Cape, and expectations are high that the quality of the fruit will be exceptional.





Some of the Sauvignon Blanc is looking good too. “The fire on the Simonsberg in January came very close to our vineyards on the Pniel side of Boschendal,” as Gerber recalls, “but the South Easter was blowing like crazy, blowing the fire away from us. We did not lose any vineyards and were fortunate not to suffer any smoke taint. We feel for the vineyard owners on the other side of the Simonsberg that had real damage.”

It is a promising year for Riesling, as it is for Pinot Noir — riper but more delicate. Moreover, for the second year, some Marsanne was made using grapes from Stellenbosch. “In the magnificent wine-lands of South Africa, we do not have disastrous seasons as they regularly experience in parts of Europe,” smiles Gerber. “Rather, there are years when certain varieties excel more than others.”

“Maybe one can talk about the best vintage when all of the varieties end up being great, which during the past ten years, in my opinion, were in 2007, 2009 and 2015. In the dry, hot vintage of 2016, the farmers who had irrigation were far better off than those who did not. With proper water management, the irrigated vineyards did not stress as much or as early. At Boschendal we are also fortunate to be able to source grapes from such a vast area — a great advantage when trying to maintain consistency.”

Nevertheless, 2016 was demanding at times. “We are used to hot and dry Februaries, but this vintage was hot and dry from late December,” says Gerber. “The acidity/pH balance was not always ideal. We had to make quite a few adjustments, mostly before fermentation, and probably the biggest challenge was pressing the grapes as soon as possible. Most of the white grapes came in over a two-week period and there were nine or ten particularly stressful days during which we were on 24-hour shifts.”

**Richard Duckitt, winemaker responsible for Boschendal Reds,** says that he will remember the 2016 harvest mainly for its early start and the very small crops from Darling and the Swartland. He has high hopes for the vintage, expecting elegant wines that are not forced, not overripe, and not ‘too much’. Harvesting earlier meant lower sugar and therefore lower potential alcohol — but still rich and structured. The colour and concentration are good, and with some of the batches there is the promise of fine, chalky tannins with good mouthfeel.

“Though production at most of the vineyards was down, Boschendal volumes were not affected,” Duckitt reports. “Among the challenges of the vintage were the tiny green berries (millerandage) among the good ones on certain varietals and the raisin sunburn on others, but thankfully we have a de-stemmer/sorter that can remove these before fermentation. It has made a huge impact and is definitely an advantage to have in our winery.”

Exciting things are going on in the red wine cellar including trials of barrel rolling instead of punch-downs during the fermentation. Bordeaux varieties are where Boschendal’s strengths lie — Cab Sauv, Merlot, Cab Franc, Petit Verdot, and Malbec. Although there is also an old-vine Shiraz (planted in 1978) that has gone through a natural fermentation in barrel which is looking really exciting.

Moreover, there are three new blends in the making that will soon be released in the classic 330 Boschendal bottle.





## FRANSCHHOEK CELLAR HARVEST REPORT 2016

The Franschhoek Cellar's harvest began with Sauvignon Blanc from the valley on 22 January. Winemaker JD Rossouw and his team regard the Semillon and Shiraz from Franschhoek vineyards as their flagships. Sourcing from producers in various parts of the Franschhoek Valley and the Coastal region gives them access to some very old plantings to consider for the top of the range while benefiting from many options in putting together their bargain-priced champions.



Rossouw says that the Franschhoek Cellar's 2016 harvest was in line with the general trend. "A dry, hot summer. Small crops, small berries. The cooler the climate, the better the quality and yields." Moreover, he expects the reds to be better than the whites from this vintage. "Less primary fruit."



Though yields were down in most areas of the Cape Winelands, Franschhoek Cellar sourced more grapes than usual due to market demand — Perdeberg and Elgin areas were some of the leading suppliers outside the valley. Times were somewhat tricky and testy when most of the white varieties ripened at the same time — the cellar team will not forget the late night pressings anytime soon.



This year the crop was characterised by low acidity. "Luckily we can compensate for this," says Rossouw. Of the reds, he remarks that there was less spiciness, more blackcurrant, softer tannins, and good mouthfeel. Of the whites, he has particularly high hopes for the outcome of Franschhoek Chenin made in a reserve style, and there's an exciting Semillon from 80-year-old bush vines.

