

CIRCUMSTANCE

MERLOT 2021



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.

At Waterkloof, we pride ourselves on not spraying any chemical herbicides, fungicides or pesticides in our vineyards. We produce our own compost and natural 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 regenerative farming leads to terroir-driven wines, which are truly made in the vineyard.

A GENTLE HAND

We harvest according to taste and spend many hours in the vineyards to see how the flavors develop. Grapes are picked by hand into small picking crates, taking care to not over fill them. The grapes were hand sorted and placed into our open-top wooden fermenters via gravity. Natural fermentation started spontaneously by utilizing the wild yeasts present on the fruit. Punch downs (twice a day) were done during fermentation to ensure a soft and slow extraction of colour and tannin. The wine spent 30 days on the skins to help integrate the tannins and stabilize 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 second and third fill barrels. French barrels for 27 months, and then another four months in 600 L French oak barrels, 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 2020 / 2021 GROWING SEASON

South Africa's Western Cape is privileged to have a vast array of soils and climates, all within a relatively small area. Here at Waterkloof it is no different in our amphitheater of vineyards.

This vintage dates back to the old normal, which is great. A cold, wet winter. Warm spring and summer, without excessively high temperatures. The famously ferocious winds of Waterkloof have played their usual hand, naturally controlling yield and fungal disease such as mildew. Perfect. In 2021, we were picking everything at well over a hundred days from flowering. We saw very high acid levels during this vintage because of these cooler growing conditions. As with all years we had to spend a lot of time in the vineyards tasting to determine optimal ripeness and find a good balance.

We were happy to see slow ripening in the vineyards which always goes hand in hand with good quality.

The last vintage similar was the great 1997

TAUSTING NOTES FROM THE GLASS OF NADIA LANGENEGGER

A vibrant nose with aromas of plums, sour cherries, tomato leaf and an earthy undertone. The wine has a great tannin structure and lingers well. I especially enjoy the lifted acidity on it that helps to carry the aromas on the palate. A lamb chop on the braai would pair nicely with our Merlot. I normally like to decant the wine and also chill it down a little to around 16 ° C.

THE NUMBERS (3,500 bottles produced)

Alc: 14 % TA: 5.8 g / l pH: 3 . 6