

Cool Climate Viticulture in South Africa

Background, trends and perspectives

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Abstract

Through many business trips to South Africa I came into contact with South African wine. A passion for South African wine and its uniqueness grew since I had my first Cape blend – a bottle of Warwick “Three Cape Ladies”. In the last 8 years I have visited most South African wine regions and tasted the wines and had interesting discussions with the people in the wineries. My first contact with South African cool climate wines was at Cederberg Winery in 2014, where I had the chance to sample their Ghost Corner range from Elim. From this moment on I wanted to learn more about the cool climate regions.

The objective of this diploma thesis is to analyse the cool climate viticulture in South Africa with a focus on the current developments and trends. The hypothesis is that cool climate viticulture is getting more important for the South African wine industry and cool climate wines have become a significant part of the market.

For this thesis all discussed regions were (re-)visited last year, to gain first-hand experience with the climate and geography and to gain knowledge from the people involved in wine making. To analyse the trade impact various Platter’s wine guides from 1995 to 2017 were used as references. The history and regulatory rules were inspected using historic books about South African wine making and the Government Gazette containing the rulings of the South African Wine and Spirit Board.

The thesis describes the historic developments of viticulture in South Africa focussing on the specific developments caused by Apartheid and the KWV monopoly. It analyses the wine regions on the Cape South Coast, the West Coast and near Sutherland in the Karoo as examples for cool climate South African wine making. The Thesis then discusses current global trends, a focus on Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc wines, lighter more food friendly wines.

Since the end of the Apartheid the wine industry of South Africa underwent massive changes from a mostly bulk wine producing country to a country that somehow bridges old and new world wine making. After some years and struggles South Africa found its own style and got a sense for the very unique terroirs in the country. This led the first pioneering wine makers to new, cooler regions which proved that South Africa is also able to produce lean, elegant wines and not only big bold wines and quaffing bulk wines.

The global trend for lighter, more food friendly wines falls into place with the new cooler regions and will be a driver for the next years. Current investments and the continuing search for new regions will carry on these recent developments. The decision of SAWIS to create a new statistics region for the Cape South Coast shows the significance of these cooler climates for the South African wine market.

Cool climate viticulture in South Africa is a very interesting field in the world of fine wine. The current developments of new wineries and wine regions will show the different terroirs

South Africa can demonstrate. This process will make the wines very interesting for the global wine market and will establish some alternatives for the consumer.

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