



— White Lady Chardonnay 2016 —

Varietal information

This wine is made from 100% Chardonnay of which there are two clones. The clone CY 5 (which originates from the University of Davis, California), gives full bodied wines with a strong citrus character. The CY 95 clone is from Dijon, France and gives a tropical character, with plenty of peach. It is the most widely planted clone in Burgundy.

Wine of origin

Stellenbosch – Warwick Estate and Helderberg

This wine incorporates Warwick's Block 18 which is NW facing, 24-26 years old and first planted in 1991. There are two vineyards from the Helderberg, both west facing with one planted on a block known as "Koffie Klip" and the other on cooler, higher-lying block on sandy loam.

History

The vineyard at Warwick ranges between 24 and 26 years old, first planted in 1991. It is NW facing. The Helderberg vineyard is west facing.

Season

Good reserves were accumulated after the 2015 harvest and this led to a later leaf fall. Winter was late with winter rains and cold weather only occurring from June to the end of July. The winter was exceptionally dry with far below expected rainfall and this led to low soil water and very low dam levels. August also surprised us with above-average heat.

Bud burst occurred on time. The initial shoot growth was even, with an increase in growth caused by above-average temperatures. October and November were warmer than usual, which accelerated flowering and berry set. It was also a very dry period which placed immense pressure on the vineyards and led to the reduction in the number of berries per bunch. There was a very small amount of rain that fell during December but this did not give much relief.

Véraison occurred earlier than normal. The growth of the canopies in several of the vineyards halted before véraison which facilitated canopy management and constituted good vineyard balance.

A very warm and windy January placed immense pressure on the vines. The wind damage appeared to be minimal during this period which is positive. The drier conditions during the cell enlargement and division phase led to smaller berries.

Warwick's Block 18 (25 years old) came in a week earlier on 5 February 2016 hastened by dryland conditions and a very small leaf canopy. The bunches and berries were tiny and yield was down by 45% on average. We got very little juice extraction but there was a great concentration of flavours. The two vineyards where we buy fruit from on the Helderberg mountain in Stellenbosch came in one week and three weeks late. The Helderberg mountain had a better rainfall than the Simonsberg during the 2016 growing period that led to sufficient underground water that delayed ripening. There was better canopy growth to support bunch development and berries and bunches were slightly bigger.

A combination of Simonsberg grapes with their low yield and intense flavour concentration and the Helderberg grapes with their bright acidity and vibrancy led to two very good blending components..

Winemaking

The grapes were picked by hand at sunrise while icy cold and transported to the cellar for whole bunch pressing. The reason we whole-bunch press is to limit phenolics and to extract only the best quality juice. The press was set to a delicate champagne cycle and the juice was pressed to a stainless steel tank. The juice is coldsettled for one day at 10 degrees and then racked to barrel with some fine lees. The barrels are left to start wild fermentation (where no yeast is added, only the natural yeast is used) and fermentation lasted for 6 months. Some of the barrels went through malolactic fermentation, about 25%. The barrels are regularly stirred up near the end of fermentation to build body in the wine. Once the wine has fermented to dryness the barrels are sulfured and rolled once a week to stir up the lees. After 10 months in barrels the wine is racked, fined and given a light filtration before bottling.

Barrel selection

The wine is matured in 100% French oak. The barrels used were 228L Burgundian coopers sourced mainly from Demptos with some Francois Frere and Damy. We used 1/3rd new oak, 1/3rd second fill and 1/3rd third fill for a period of ten months. The barrel toasting was medium and blonde which adds a mineral richness to the wine without overpowering the fruit.

Tasting profile

With 2016 being a drier vintage, the resulting wine is concentrated with a medium, fresh acidity and rich mouthfeel. The nose has layers of flowers, minerals and stones, with loads of white nectarine fruit interspersed with the nuttiness of poached pear. The palate is silky yet austere, with a rounder finish that gives its personality but with a clean and long lemon flavoured finish. It shows the epitome of balance with delicate flavours that keep emerging throughout its exceedingly persistent finish.

Ageing potential

The trend seems to be to drink Chardonnay younger these days as wine lovers seem to enjoy the primary fruit aromas of freshly cut pear, mandarin and mineral notes more than the more secondary, developed, aged ones of vanilla beans, honey, anise and honeysuckle blossom. Drink it in the way that you best enjoy it. This Chardonnay will benefit from 2-3 years of bottle ageing and will continue to develop for up to 10 years, if you are disciplined to wait that long.

Food match

Try it with an Oriental dish like Hokkien noodles with chicken, chilli and bean sprouts, the wine can certainly hold a touch of heat, or more classic with a béarnaise gratinated salmon and a fresh herb salad. This Chardonnay is very versatile, and a simple Camembert and crusty bread will work just as well.

