

Ernie Els

WINES · STELLENBOSCH

HARVEST 2023

The wine industry is a vital part of the South African economy – a source of national pride – and the quality of each year's yield is closely watched by industry experts and wine enthusiasts alike. As the 2023 harvest season draws to a close, it is an opportune time to reflect on the conditions and factors that have affected this year's crop.

At Ernie Els, we believe that great wines start in the vineyard. Our viticulturist, Leander Koekemoer, and legendary winemaker, Louis Strydom, can often be seen wandering the Helderberg slopes keeping vigorous growth under control and ensuring our vines are in great shape.

After a warmer winter over the growing period with marginally fewer cold blocks than in previous years, the increased wind flow from the Atlantic Ocean, combined with light showers before the festive season, did a great job at keeping temperatures steady over the summer and producing lush canopies. This led to controlled growth and predictable vine phenology, allowing for ideal grape development and optimal sugar levels by late April to early March.



Winemaker, Louis Strydom

Harvest at Ernie Els officially began with our highest blocks of Merlot on the 16th of April and we continued steadily down the slopes making our way across the farm to our Cinsault, Grenache and Shiraz. Our prized Cabernet Sauvignon was left to hang till last, allowing further maturation, which is not uncommon for the varietal due to its small berry size and tight clustered growth formation. These Cabernet grapes have grown favourable thick skins and are set to produce another outstanding vintage.

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We officially celebrated the beginning of our 23rd Cabernet harvest on the 2nd of March – a moment commemorated by raising the harvest season flag on our chipping green, along with a toast by our winemaker, Louis Strydom.



Viticulturist, Leander Koekemoer

With majority of the hand-picking complete, the focus in March fell on cooling, destalking and hand-sorting, before pressings and punch downs could begin. An equally important but often disregarded step in the winemaking process involves the post-harvest composting phase. At the winery, we like to repurpose the grape skins and stalks into nutrient rich, natural fertiliser which will keep the land nourished and ready to withstand the upcoming winter season.

We should also mention that we are extremely grateful to have back-up power systems in place to counteract the national loadshedding, an added variable that left many farms across the country under strain. The introduction of concrete Nico Velo tanks in our primary fermentation cellar will play a big role in controlling temperatures, alleviating potential power concerns during this year's fermentation process.

The majority of the 2023 grapes shall spend a minimum of three to five years maturing before they reach our palates, but one can be rest assured that the 2023 vintage will be a worthwhile addition to your own vinothèque!

The celebrations this year, however, were brief as the cellar team had a lot on their plate, racing against the clock as storm clouds were looming. Whilst rain during any fruit harvest is an added element of risk, the momentum in the cellar and the vineyards did not falter, and it was evident that under the guidance of experienced hands, the bad weather was hardly troublesome.

“The rain did disrupt our harvest efforts, but there’s nothing our team can’t adapt to. We picked during the early hours of the morning, and fortunately, from our position we have a great vantage point to keep an eye on the rain.”

- LEANDER KOEKEMOER

Despite industry predictions of a smaller yield this year, the Helderberg slopes maintained their quantity, and credit must go to Leander and his team - the grapes that arrived at the cellar were of impeccable quality despite this year's challenging harvest conditions.



Post-Harvest Composting Phase