



PRESS RELEASE

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Stellar Organic Wine Discovery in Namaqualand

The sparsely populated Namaqualand, South Africa, with its clean air, clear dark nights free of light pollution, is home to more than a spectacular cosmic display.

Amidst this setting that has been humbling man for eons, a group of dedicated farmers and vintners from Stellar Winery pay homage to nature with organic farming and wine production.

Stellar Winery is situated in the peaceful town of Trawal in Namaqualand, 275 km north of Cape Town on the road to Namibia. The winery is a joint venture between four farmers and the cellar, and makes use of a semi-arid climate, unrivalled refrigeration capacity and extensive in-house engineering skills to produce modern organic wines.

The cellar processes upwards of 5000 tons of organic grapes from farms straddling the northern boundary of the Olifants River wine region and Namaqualand. This is an area famous for its spring flowers and is also the only semi-arid Biosphere hotspot in the world.

By their nature Namaqualanders don't do anything in small measures. Stellar Winery is the largest in South Africa, and now into their sixth year of organic farming and wine production.

Stellar winemaker Dudley Wilson works closely with the farms, often pushing the edges of the envelope to produce organic wines that surprise and delight.

Stellar Winery has the vision to bring organic wine to the local and global market, farmed and produced according to strict organic guidelines, and with the quality of boutique wine. In addition, fair labour practices and social and economic upliftment are an integral part of the Stellar ethic.

“There are no compromises on ethics and production values, and the farms are kept and managed in as natural a state as possible,” says Dudley Wilson. “A walk through the vineyards bear testament to this - the leaves on the vines are healthy, species of insects are varied and abundant. A soil examination will reveal masses of earthworms - all indications of a healthy ecosystem.”

According to Willem Rossouw, director of operations, their independent cellar shares the same values as the farms. “All of our wines are made from high quality organically grown grapes. Our size does not mean that we compromise on our standards. We boast leading-edge facilities and production methods and are not scared to take risks in order to improve the quality of our wines.”

The Five Organic Farms:

Nuwehoop: Deon Van Rhyen. Vredendal district. 41.4 hectares.

De Duinen: John Wiese. Van Rhynsdorp. 11 hectares.

Troe-Troe: Albert Wiese. Van Rhynsdorp. 13.8 hectares.

Swartsbooisberg: Jannie Spannenberg. Adjacent to Oranje River, Northwest of Kakemas. 2 hectares of organic vines.

Kolsvlei: Rossouw brothers. 5 km South of Trawal. 24.78 hectares of young vines.

The Vineyards:

Organic farming means that no chemicals, pesticides or herbicides were used in the growing of the grapes, says Wilson. "Only compost and organic materials are used, with indigenous vegetation for mulching. Apart from operations to maintain the organic status of the vineyards, we implement recognised viticulture practices in order to ensure the best possible grape quality."

"Additional trellis wires have been attached to extended trellis poles and vines are trained to the vertical shoot positioning system (VSP). A lot of work is done to the canopy to prevent bunches and leaves from experiencing deep shade. Aerated and "thin" canopies are less likely to develop fungal diseases and allow for even grape ripening and quality. This allows good colour development and reduces the potassium levels in the juice."

The hot growing conditions dictate that irrigation is done with the aid of sensors and computers. Water is given via drip lines and regulated deficit irrigation (RDI).

Harvesting

Winemaker Dudley Wilson decides when to pick. Chemical analysis is used as a tool, but the final decision relies more on the flavour and tannin ripeness. Most picking is done by hand, into small plastic lug boxes or 450kg fruit bins. Care is taken to pick only ripe grapes and to ensure that the bins remain free of leaves and canes.

Winemaking

"As this is the first year we have made our own organic wine, experimentation has been the order of the day," says Wilson.

The cellar is built next to a table-grape packing facility. "This means that we have an unrivalled refrigeration capacity, as the table grapes are only processed for eight weeks of the year, and the end of the table grape season dovetails with the start of the wine making."

The lug boxes of both red and white grapes are force-cooled to 0°C before being de-stemmed and crushed. The low temperature of the crushed grapes makes it possible to avoid the use of sulphur (SO₂) at this stage, as the low temperature inactivates bacteria and yeast.

The red grapes are de-stemmed, and the rollers are adjusted so that a large percentage of berries pass by uncrushed. They are then dropped into a tank, via a bin on a forklift, and left to cold macerate for at least two weeks at 0°C.

"After this time, the juice is pumped to fermentation tanks and the whole berries are shovelled into a forklift bin and transported, via an enormous crane, to the top of these same fermentation tanks and dropped in. This method means that we avoid putting the unfermented skins and pips through a pump, giving us fresh fruit, dark colours and soft tannins."

According to Dudley the wine then has to warm before it can be inoculated with yeast. "Invariably a wild ferment starts before the optimum temperatures have been reached. If it smells good we let it carry on, otherwise yeast additions are made as soon as the temperature is correct. Yeasts are well activated and above-average numbers ensure that they take over from the wild yeasts."

A computer regulates the temperature of the ferment and automatic valves maintain an even fermentation temperature. To wet the cap during ferments they make use of the delestage technique and aerated pump over. (Delestage is the draining of the fermenting juice to a lower tank and the letting of the weight of the cap press out the concentrated juice around the skins.) After three to four hours, the wine is pumped back over the top of the cap so that it rises up through the must (juice) like a reverse coffee plunger. This makes sure that all the skins are

surrounded by fresh must and that all the yeast is aerated and brought back into circulation.

The two Bucher XP 150 Ortal flow Presses used are the most modern in the industry and help ensure the best quality juice and wine from the grapes.

Twenty-four hours after pressing, the wine is racked off its gross lees. A second racking is given twenty-four hours later and malo-lactic cultures are then added to the wine to ensure a rapid and clean malo-lactic fermentation.

Stellar Winery Organic Policy

A commitment to the principles of organic production is shown by:

A shared natural respect for the land and its harvest.

Commitment to organics and relish this opportunity to put their vision into practice, with no compromises on ethics and production values.

Farms are kept and managed in as natural a state as possible.

The winery is a processing facility and its task is to maintain the organic status of the grapes during the production of wine and to do so in an environmentally responsible manner.

All waste products are recycled, or treated before being released from the cellar. Raw materials, such as grape seed oil, compost and tartrate, are used wherever possible.

Water usage in the cellar is audited. A pattern of how much water enters and leaves the cellar has been established. Water has the solids screened from it and goes through aeration and an effective micro-organism treatment, before being used for irrigation.

Chemicals for cleaning and for use in winemaking are kept to a minimum and alternatives such as steam is used where possible.

Wine is at all times recognized and respected as a natural product and additions and manipulations are therefore kept at a minimum so as not to compromise the integrity of the farms, the cellar and its products.

The organic policy will be formally reviewed before the start of each crush, but is open to review on an on-going basis.

Stellar Winery is endorsed by the highly respected SKAL International, the Dutch Accreditation Council RvA, as following their very strict organic production methods. Stellar Organic Wine Cellar's Certificate of Accreditation number is: *C412*.

STELLAR ORGANICS

The wines are assembled from different farms, ferments and yeasts. Each wine in the blend starts with deep colour and ripe fruit and tannins. Individual nuances arise from organic agriculture, saline irrigation water, cooling afternoon winds, wild ferments and other still-to-be-discovered influences. Lightly wooded for structure rather than flavour, these wines offer a tasting experience that will provide a convincing argument for the ascendancy of organic over conventional wines.

Wines in the Range

Organic Colombard/Sauvignon Blanc 2005.

Organic Merlot 2004, Organic Pinotage 2003, Organic Shiraz 2004 and Organic Cabernet Sauvignon 2003.

THE SENSORY COLLECTION

This is an offering of wines displaying particular character. The wines are not made to a formula but are chosen because they exhibit special flavours and textures. The experience of texture, sight and smell is captured in the name and label of this series.

"Whilst showing our wines in Germany, we came across "sensory" paintings that illustrate the tasting experience of individual wines, says winemaker Dudley Wilson. " In theory this sounds improbable but in practice most people correctly link a wine to the painting that depicts its taste."

Paintings of the first two wines in our collection have been commissioned and the painting that matches the specific wine will appear on its own individual label. This "sensory" label allows one to visually "taste" the wine before opening it.

Wines In The Range:

Organic Shiraz 2003, Organic Merlot 2003, Organic Pinotage 2003 and Organic Cabernet Sauvignon 2003.

THE LIVE-A-LITTLE RANGE

The Live-a-Little range comprises the delightful trio, Organic Really Ravishing Red and Organic Wildly Wicked White and Organic Rather Revealing Rosè – titillating, uncomplicated and excellent value for money. Ideal for lazy lunches, spontaneous celebrations and late night socials, the range radiates friendly exuberance, cheeky personality and charm.

"It offers wine drinkers an affordable option for light hearted enjoyment," says Dudley Wilson, winemaker at Stellar Organics Wine Cellar. "Wine-geeks, though, will be impressed with the care that goes into creating this entry-level range that doesn't take itself at all seriously."

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