

ESTABLISHED 1941

ROBERTSON WINERY

PROUDLY
SOUTH AFRICAN



NEWSLETTER – APRIL 2007

PROFILE: BARRY KOK

Barry Kok has recently joined Robertson Winery as the Marketing Manager, taking over the reins from Johann Meissenheimer who is now holding the fort in the US.

Barry is married to Anlia and they have a little girl, Caley, who is 7 months. The family live in Somerset-West, which makes the commute to the Stellenbosch marketing office pretty easy, as well as the trip to the airport, which is just as well as Barry travels around the country quite a bit. "Thankfully Anlia is very supportive and understanding, as I am away from home quite a bit," he says.

After 10 years in the wine industry, working in the cellar, production, as well as the sales and marketing environments, Barry is more than qualified for the hefty task before him: "I am really excited about establishing my position as Marketing Manager, Robertson Winery is such a dynamic brand; there is still so much potential for development."



HARVEST UPDATE

As is usual for this time of the year, the cellar is a hive of activity with grapes being tipped into crushers, pipes snaking between tanks and cellar hands running up and down furiously.

Vineyard Selection winemaker Jacques Roux is ecstatic about the quality of the grapes he is receiving in the cellar. On the day I visited he had just pressed the chardonnay grapes destined for the Kings River Chardonnay and he was very pleased with the quality.



The sauvignon blanc grapes from Retreat made it through the heat wave with their flavours in tact, a bit of a tricky thing with sauvignon blanc. What is fascinating is that they picked the outsides of the vineyard first, and vinified them separately to the grapes in the middle of the vineyard, which lies in a dip. These 'middle' grapes had lower sugars and therefore were less ripe, and the resulting flavours in the tanks are so different. The tank with the riper grapes showed great aromas on the nose, while the grapes picked from the middle of the block had a shy nose, but much more flavour on the palate with a lingering aftertaste. Jacques will ultimately blend these two tanks together in a ratio that will perfectly balance nose and palate, and display a variety of Sauvignon Blanc aromas.

I also tasted the Phanto Ridge Pinotage and was blown away by the full flavours and soft tannins so early on in maturation – this one is definitely going to be a winner.

COLOUR PROJECT

Quality Manager John Moolman is very busy these days managing the Colour Project. This project, undertaken with Stellenbosch University, aims to find a scientific manner of categorising vineyard quality. To date, the vineyards supplying to the Robertson Winery cellar have been categorised into groups according to their visual appearance and expected wine quality. A trained eye can make pretty good predictions by viewing the vineyard, assessing the canopy, leaf quality, crop level etc. and categorising that vineyard in terms of the quality grapes it will produce. These categorisations dictate not only the wine they will eventually become, but also the payment that the farmer will get. In a large winery such as this, different vineyards are vinified together and therefore an accurate assessment of the resultant wine from each vineyard is difficult to achieve.



Robertson Winery's aim is to make this certification more scientific and therefore more accurate. So they have selected 30 of their vineyards across the spectrum and a Ph.D. student at the university is taking samples of grapes as each of these are harvested and vinifying them in their 'cellar' to see if they do actually produce the quality, and colour intensity, that we think they do.

The project also can be extended into all sorts of areas. For instance, we can scientifically ascertain whether mechanical harvesting is better or worse than hand harvesting and other similar issues.

This is a three-year project but we will already have data after this harvest, which we can use to improve the next one.

IN THE VINEYARDS

"This is a dream harvest," states Viticulturist Briaan Stipp as he compares it to last year when the 2005 drought made an impact on the vineyards. "We had a great run-up to this harvest in 2006. Besides sufficient rain, we had no significant winds during the early part of the growing season, with a relatively cool December. This year the harvest is bigger," he continues, "partly due to the overall yield but also because we have some new vineyards coming into bearing for the first time; and also because we are managing our vineyards better and better every year, so the quality versus quantity ratio is changing.



Briaan was keen to show off the Winetech Regulated Deficit Irrigation (RDI) project, which is overseen by Dr Philip Myburgh and is conducted in a Shiraz vineyard on Wansbek, one of Robertson Winery's member farms. One of the main aims of this industry RDI trial with drip irrigation is to establish just when and how much water a vine needs to produce the ultimate grapes. Briaan explains: "Very little water results in small berries with thick skins and lots of flavour, and a lot of water results in big juicy berries with thin skins but not much flavour. Somewhere in the middle is a grape that ripens sufficiently without stress and offers good flavour concentration, but produces sufficient quantity to make it worthwhile for the producer, and this is what the project aims to establish.

Several irrigation treatments with the necessary replicates were scientifically demarcated within the trial vineyard. The different treatments will receive varying amounts of water during different growth stages and the effect of this on the growth, crop, quality and overall vine performance is being monitored and measured. Grapes of the different treatments are being vinified on a small scale and the quality of the resultant wines will be evaluated.

"By the end of the project we hope to have a better idea of just how much water a vine needs during a specific growth stage to enable us to create a specific wine style," explains Briaan.

NEWS FROM THE USA

Johann Meissenheimer and family arrived in Florida on Sunday evening, March 11th: "Amike handled the flight (via London) the best sleeping peacefully most of the time. We have settled in a house on Pelican Point Golf Estate in Venice, Florida and are slowly getting used to the American way of life. Richard Gupta, Jerry Stephan and their wife's, Gwen and Julie, have gone out their way to help us feel comfortable but we still really miss South Africa and our friends and family.

Johann's comments on the US wine market: "Extremely big, very complex and awfully expensive to do business in, due to the very competitive nature of the market. However, the potential is absolutely enormous, South Africa screams opportunity but needs significantly more support. The trade is far more receptive to SA wine than four year ago, but the window of opportunity will not stay around for ever and we need a combined shove from South Africa including tourism, travel, government and the wine industry to drive brand South Africa."

Always keen for adventure, Johann says: "Every day is filled with challenges. We are in for long hours, hard work and plenty of air miles but I really am excited about what lies before us. Robertson Winery is giving baby steps, broadening distribution and putting support programs out to drive the brand, but we are going forward with the Robertson Winery brand every single day."

La lutea continua! Good luck Johann!



Johann and Marike Meissenheimer were thrilled to welcome their baby daughter, Amike, into the world on January 8th, weighing in at 3.6kg



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