



## 2010 Southern Hemisphere Harvest Report

**A first look at vintage quality in South Africa, with eyewitness reports from growers and winemakers**

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While vineyards in the U.S. and Europe are just flowering, there's juice fermenting in the tanks down south—in the Southern Hemisphere, that is. South African winemakers couldn't sit back and dream of the upcoming World Cup. They were busy grappling with a cold spring and wet summer. Thankfully, the weather dried up before harvest.

Here's a first peek at the upcoming vintage.

### South Africa

South Africans vintners are pleased with their 2010 harvest, despite an erratic growing season and severely reduced yields. "The most difficult vintage, viticulturally speaking, I've ever seen on the Cape," said Ken Forrester, whose eponymous winery produces some of the country's best Chenin Blanc.

Following a cold, wet winter, spring was delayed and budbreak was two weeks later than normal. The early growing season saw excessive winds, which hampered flowering, resulting in yields that were 20 percent lower than usual.

"Chardonnay was the worst performer—[it] will be 35 percent below normal," said Peter Finlayson of Bouchard Finlayson, in the cool Walker Bay district. Some growers reported that entire vineyard blocks lost their flowers.

"It was very windy, so we lost a lot of flowers, and then November was very wet," said Adam Mason, winemaker at Klein Constantia in the Constantia ward. The wet November prevented growers from getting into vineyards on their tractors to spray against rot, which meant the spread of downy mildew brought another headache in December.



*Grapes for late harvest dessert wine shrivel on the vine at Klein Constantia.*

The weather then turned dry, with little to no rainfall until April in many growing areas, which was beneficial. Vineyard management became critical to deal with the odd weather pattern. "The rain and reduced yields meant the vines were in a more vegetative cycle," said Chris Mullineux of Mullineux Wines, located in the Swartland. "So canopies were large and dense and a fair amount of leaf removal was necessary."

The Cape's usual mid-January heat wave kicked in—those growers who picked whites before then reported smaller berry size and brighter acidities. Those who got caught by the heat wave while gambling for more ripening may wind up with blowy, soft whites.

Red varieties such as Syrah and Cabernet Sauvignon were able to hang through more moderate growing conditions into March and achieve good ripeness, though there were inconsistencies everywhere. "Lower yield results in a totally different ripening curve," said Forrester. "In some areas, some normal late ripening varieties actually came in before the early ripening varieties like Merlot. All in all, a most tricky vintage."

"We're pretty happy with the harvest despite being nervous with the [early] weather conditions," said Gyles Webb of Thelema Mountain Vineyards in Stellenbosch. "No heat waves [later on] so we had nice, even ripening conditions."

While vinifications are still in the early stages, many growers are happy with their reds, noting dark colors and fine, soft, but abundant tannins. "This is one of those vintages that will showcase the better winemakers and areas where site and variety are well-suited," says Martin Meinert, whose eponymous winery specializes in cool climate reds from the Devon Valley.

—James Molesworth

