



Harvest Festival Frenzy

As the harvest rolls in, the winelands erupt in a frenzy of festivities celebrating the fruit of the vine, says Jacqui Latimer

Hanna Floris has worked her way to the front of the queue in the drinks tent and is patting her chest. “*Ek’s moeg!*” she says proudly, looking for an audience. I’m it and happy to dish out compliments to the diminutive farm worker. “You sang like an angel,” I say of her performance with the local Delta Optel Band, which opened the musical programme at the **SOLMS-DELTA FRANSCHOEK OESFEES**. The compliment hits the mark and Hanna preens with pleasure.

I emerge from the tent, glass of Cape Jazz Shiraz in hand, to an eclectic crowd. Farm workers, visitors and dignitaries tuck into their lunch of *waterblommetjie bredie*, tripe and wood-fired bread on the lawns overlooking the tree-rimmed stage.

With the region’s first full-scale harvest festival, Solms-Delta has pulled off what Mark Solms describes as “an inclusive and authentic celebration of the harvest, and of the vernacular musical styles of the Cape winelands”. Music certainly unites vineyard worker and wine lover on the dance floor. Old gents in high-waisted slacks twirl purple-rinsed *tannies*, limber labourers gyrate and local dignitaries *sokkie* their hearts out. As the sun sails across the sky, performers from The Elginaires and the Hoosie Boois, to spoon-wielding guitar maestro, Hannes

Coetzee and folk legend David Kramer, grace the stage and the crowd knits and *jols* together.

In South Africa, as in many wine growing regions across the world, harvest festivals are no longer the sole preserve of rural communities, but have spilled over into the public domain. Throughout the winelands, the rolling



Singing to the vines. Frank and Tienie Papier of the Papier Langarm Orkes, playing in the vineyard at Solms-Delta

harvest season is punctuated with regional festivals and celebrations on individual farms. From early morning picking parties to grape-stomping marathons, tastings of new wines and cultivated soirées, the winelands is learning how to leverage a good party to promote its lifeblood.

BEAUMONT WINES near Bot River on the Green Mountain Eco Route holds pre- and post-harvest celebrations each year. “We’ve been running our pre-harvest Beaumont Open Day in

February for over a decade,” says Ariane Beaumont of the celebration, which combines wine, food, art, jewellery and music, with family picnics on the house lawn, and pétanque and swimming in the dam. “Guests are entertained by our marimba band while they tuck into farm produce available from the winery. Our mill is also up and running on the day, so visitors get the chance to see a working historic grain mill and buy fresh stone-ground meal.”

A few weeks later, the farm is again buzzing with Beaumont’s Annual Port Stomp, celebrating the end of the harvest. Guests descend from as far afield as Mozambique and California, and are put to work stomping in rather deep cement tanks filled with Pinotage and Tinta Barocca grapes. “We set the mood with

candles, and the sound system churns out some good old classics to keep spirits up and feet stomping,” says Ariane.

Harvest-goers also get their feet wet at **GRANDE PROVENCE** in Franschhoek. “We give guests coffee, muffins and croissants before their early morning tractor ride into the vineyards to start picking,” says Margaret Kloppers. “Jaco, our winemaker, explains how it all works and after about one and a half hours of hard work, the crates full of grapes are loaded onto the tractors.”

While harvesters are shown around the cellar, the grapes are loaded into big bins, ready for stomping. “Everyone really gets into the spirit of it,” says Margaret. “Those who don’t want purple feet play *boules* and croquet under the trees, while others stomp their hearts out working up an appetite for the *spitbraai* lunch.”

Of course, when farms within a region co-ordinate harvest celebrations, festivities reach a whole new level. Paarl and Wellington did just that this year, with Paarl’s **ROUND THE ROCK FESTIVAL** providing out-of-the-tank tastings of the young 2008 wines from all eleven participating wineries, and much more. “This is the first step to starting a new tradition—similar to the Federweisser, which is enjoyed from early September to October in parts of Germany, Austria and Switzerland,” says Sandra Lotz of **PAARL VINTERS**. “The wine still has a slightly cloudy appearance as a result of suspended yeast cells. The tingling sensation this wine produces on the tongue and the murky colour explains the name—‘White Feather’, if one translates directly.”

While **WINDMEUL’S** Tin Lizzie, a fully restored 1942 Boeing Stearman, takes visitors on 20 minute flips around Paarl Mountain, the brave and fit join Charles Back of **FAIRVIEW** on his daily 10km circular walk around Paarl Rock. Walkers are rewarded with Fairview’s cheese and breads on top of the mountain.

Other offerings vary from eat-as-much-as-you-like table grapes at **RHEBOKSKLOOF** to the strains of Valiant Swart’s guitar, or chocolate and brandy

tasting at **KWV**. The teamwork of **KWV** and **HUGUENOT FINE CHOCOLATES** makes for an indulgent chocolate, wine and brandy pairing. Why eat grapes raw, when you can imbibe them, smoothly distilled and accompanied by handmade chocolate?

Those favouring manual labour over chocolate-indulging hedonism pick grapes and stomp to their heart’s delight at **RIDGEBACK, NELSON’S CREEK** and **SIMONSVLEI**.

At another regional festival, in Wellington, food, fun, wine and music are once again the winning ingredients.

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“The **WELLINGTON HARVEST FESTIVAL** is a huge success for us,” says **LINTON PARK** Marketing Manager Alana Lochner. “Our crayfish braai is a hit, and our competition for golfers to land a ball inside a wine barrel standing in the vineyard is always fiercely contested. We also sell a lot of wine—within two hours on the first day, we are replenishing stocks.”

Rugby fans head to Schalk Burger and Sons, where they admire the Webb Ellis Trophy and photographs of the 2007 World Cup while listening to Bok van Blerk and leading local musos. Energetic grape stompers give themselves grape-pulp foot massages at **DUNSTONE** or head to **NABYGELEGEN** for a leisurely game of *boules*.

Festivals to Look Out For

6–8 JUNE: Wacky Wine Weekend in Robertson. www.wackywineweekend.com.

14 JUNE: Wines of Hermanus Festival in Hermanus. www.hpf1855.co.za.

28, 29 JUNE: Christmas in Winter in Tulbagh. www.tulbaghtourism.org.za.

11, 12 JULY: Franschhoek Nedbank Bastille Festival in Franschhoek.

20, 21 JULY: Port Festival in Calitzdorp. www.portfees.co.za.

25, 26 JULY: Soetes and Soup in Rawsonville. www.breedekloof.com.

31 JULY – 3 AUGUST: Stellenbosch Wine Festival in Stellenbosch. www.wineroute.co.za.

Must, the juice and pulp produced from crushing grapes, is such an integral part of the harvest that the enthusiastic team at **HERMANUSPIETERSFONTEIN** decide to make it the focus of their harvest festival held at the winery’s weekly Food & Wine Market. “We let visitors sip the must and they can enjoy harvest bread along with *moskonfyt*, *mosbeskuit*, Kaapse Jongens, rum and raisin cake, *rosyntjie rotskoekies*, grape tart, *rosyntjiebrood*, and of course our fabulous wine,” says Gerard Schol. “The harvest festival is so successful that we repeat it on Easter Saturday and then host the **WINES OF HERMANUS HARVEST FESTIVAL** in April with more than 10 wineries present.”

With so much happening around harvest time in the winelands, there’s no excuse for an empty social calendar and pale feet from February to April. If you didn’t manage to make the most of the harvest festivities this year, make sure you’re prepared in 2009. Don’t miss out! **GT**