

Avondale organic wine farm produces 'slow wines'

Using natural organic methods, the Avondale organic wine farm produces seven natural wines. Proprietor Johnathan Grieve pioneered the organic-biodynamic-scientific approach he calls BioLOGIC. It works as a dynamic system in which soil and water, plants, animals and people and energy are part of a complex web of relationships and networks, interconnected and interdependent.



Guided by the Avondale ethos of 'Terra est vita' or 'Soil is life', he bases his system on the simple but profound principle that healthy soil produces healthy plants.

Avondale is also at the forefront of introducing and testing the lunar tasting calendar to South Africa's wine industry. This calendar has four types of days that relate to a lunar cycle: Root, Fruit, Leaf and Flower, each of which affects the palate in a different way. The fruit notes in wines tasted on a Fruit day are regarded as more vibrant and even overpowering in some cases; during a Leaf tasting, the wines are experienced to be less sweet, with a dominant, earthy minerality; wines tasted in the Root cycle appear more subdued; while the Flower cycle is generally regarded as the best time to taste wine.

Avondale is certified under the WWF Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI), which acknowledges the responsibility that wine farmers have to preserve fynbos on their land. Grieve has gone a step further, and is restoring and re-establishing indigenous fynbos species in the vineyards themselves. He's overseen the planting of more than 2,000 indigenous trees on the farm, and includes fynbos species in the cover crop mixes. (Cover crops are sown between vine rows to improve the management of a vineyard.)

No pesticides or herbicides whatsoever are used on the farm. When a pest invades, Grieve relies on nature's solutions, making use of beneficial natural bacteria to counteract vine disease at micro level, wasp larvae to control vine mealy bugs, birds of prey to keep rodent populations down and a squad of slug-hungry ducks to manage snail infestations.

The natural processes continue in the cellar, an ultra-modern gravity-flow installation that ensures the highest-quality slow wines with the least negative impact on the wine and the environment. Only natural wild yeasts are used, and there is minimum added sulphur.

A natural waste-water system made up of three dams interlinked by spiralling channels of cleansing reeds emulate the way water is cleansed in rivers.

"It's taken us a number of years to refine our winemaking process and to create the extraordinary wines we aimed for when we started farming here in 1996," says Grieve. "It's an extraordinary process, complex and slow, but ultimately rewarding. BioLOGIC® allows us to do no harm to our natural environment while producing hand-crafted wines that are truly exceptional."

It produces seven wines: Camissa, a rosé; Cyclus, a refreshing white blend; Anima, a lively Chenin Blanc; La Luna, a classic red blend; Samsara, a Syrah; Navitas, the flagship red blend; and Armilla, a sparkling wine made in the Méthode Cap Classique tradition.

For more information, go to www.avondalewine.co.za.

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