

Meet Vergelegen winemaker André Van Rensburg



By [Cari Van Wyk](#)

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Vergelegen recently shared the good news that they are [winning the fight against leaf roll virus](#) and a critical part of the team that accomplished this feat was Vergelegen winemaker André van Rensburg. We asked Van Rensburg to share a little more.



1. What does your average day look like?

André van Rensburg: It all depends on the season: in summer we start at 5.30am to taste grapes and to make harvesting decisions. In winter we start at 7.30am and then it is all about filling barrels, blending and topping up evaporation losses. In spring we start bottling white wines of the current vintage and reds from two seasons ago while late spring/early summer is all about preparing the cellar for tourism and equipment for the coming harvest.

2. Favourite thing about being a winemaker

Van Rensburg: I get to work in and with nature. And I am also fortunate to meet people that you only read about!

3. Least favourite thing about being a winemaker

Van Rensburg: Everyone thinks they know better and do not hesitate to share their wisdom!

4. Favourite farm to table dish?

Van Rensburg: Rack of lamb, new potatoes, petit pois and Vergelegen Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon in my favourite Zalto glasses. Lamb into oven for +/- 90 min at 180° with plenty of fresh rosemary, a thyme leaf or two and some finely chopped fresh garlic. Firm, fresh lettuce leaves are put into a pot, your garden peas/petit pois are put on top of the leaves (with four to five drops of water) and steamed to perfection! Shared only with Maritza, my lovely wife!

5. Name three things you must have on the farm – essentials for producing the perfect bottle of wine

Van Rensburg: Site, microclimate and healthy, virus-free vineyards.



6. Favourite implement or technology

Van Rensburg: My Bucher press which uses an inert gas during the pressing cycle to protect the must/wine against oxidation and flavour losses; my new bottling line that minimizes oxygen uptake and that will ensure that my Vergelegen wines – both red and white - will be my legacy.

7. What is your biggest concern about the industry currently?

Van Rensburg: The worldwide economic down-turn and basically zero recovery since 2008. Consumers have it very tough financially with high levels of personal debt and it will be difficult for them to justify the purchase of luxury goods like Vergelegen wines.

8. How does Vergelegen get its products to market and where do they go?

Van Rensburg: Locally we use our own sales-people with distribution by a national company. Internationally we use agents who import and sell our products according to a mutually agreed marketing plan.

9. How has the drought affected the industry and what are you doing to fight back?

Van Rensburg: The drought of 2015/16 is the worst in 104 years! So the global warming debate is done and dusted. It is already calculated into our future production plans. Virus-free vineyards, only the best sites, and no vineyards planted without irrigation. The effect of years like 2016 is not only the immediate reduction in yields but also potential damage to vines if you cannot supplement ground water.

10. What are you doing in terms of sustainable production?

Van Rensburg: The industry as a whole has implemented a programme called IPW - Integrated Production of Wine - with the emphasis on sustainable production and sustainable utilisation of resources.

11. What has been your greatest achievement so far?

Van Rensburg: Production of virus-free vineyards, two Pichon Longueville Comtesse De La Lande trophies for the best blended red wines in the world, numerous Platter five star wines and simply being the Vergelegen winemaker for 19 years.

12. Words to live by?

Van Rensburg: “When your life flashes before your eyes, make sure you’ve got plenty to watch.”

ABOUT CARI VAN WYK

Cari Coetzee is a contributor to Bizcommunity Tourism, Agriculture and Lifestyle.

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