



Audacia Wines

Champion Shiraz

Michael
van Niekerk.

Audacious EARTHWORM PLAN reaps rewards

“It was a perfect year for Shiraz!” says Michael van Niekerk, cellarmaster of Audacia Wines, who walked away with the silverware of this year’s most competitive category. By putting extra effort into their vineyards over the past few years – combined with perfect growing and ripening conditions – this relatively small Stellenbosch producer won their first ever trophy at the National Young Wine Show.

This wooded Shiraz was made with grapes from two blocks on the farm. Michael explains that, four years ago, in collaboration with the University of Stellenbosch, they started digging profile holes in a few blocks to examine the different soil types.

“While this showed how the soils differ, it also pointed out how ‘dead’ the soil in some areas are,” he says. They consequently started treating selected blocks – and in particular one of the winning Shiraz blocks – with earthworm compost.

“We sprayed ‘earthworm tea’ (dissolved compost) on the leaves and added earthworm compost to the berms of some of the vineyards,” Michael says. “While this is an expensive treatment, we can undoubtedly see a difference in the soil and ultimately the end product.”

The Shiraz is a vigorous grower and Michael explains that they are experimenting with different pruning methods to try and counter this. “We start by pruning to half-length canes, with the aim of drawing out some of the vigour, before cutting down the shoots to two buds at a later stage,” he says.

They are now starting to reap the rewards of these viticultural practices. “Combined with a good winter in 2013 and a good growing and ripening period, we were able to produce a good, balanced Shiraz,” Michael says.

“I believe that a wine should be enjoyed – it shouldn’t be too big and tannic, but rather fruit-driven, with a soft structure,” he says. By incorporating the right viticultural practices and cellar techniques, Michael and his team continue to work towards their stylistic sweet spot.

– Elona