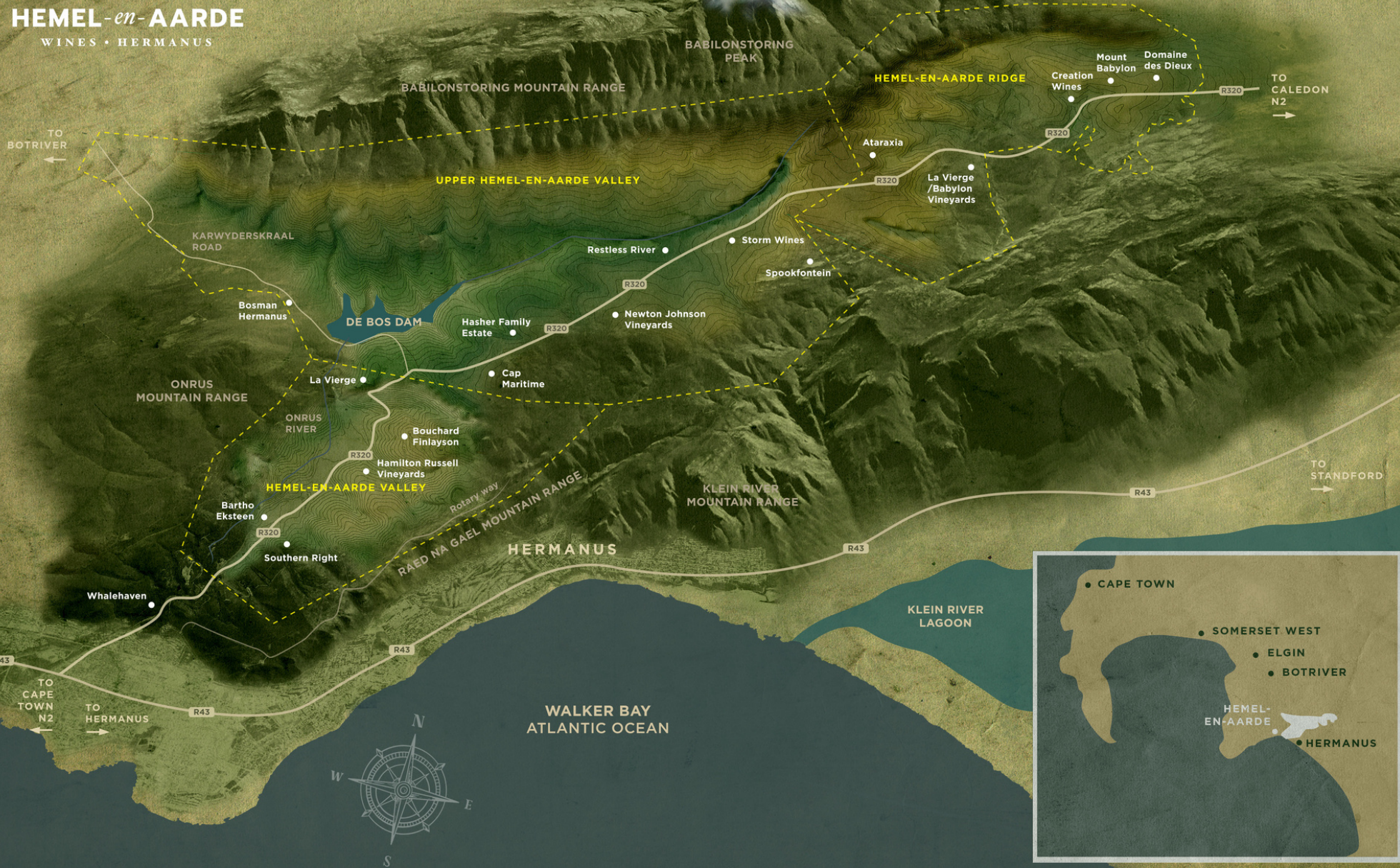




HEMEL-en-AARDE

WINES • HERMANUS



About Hemel-en-Aarde

The Hemel-en-Aarde is home to more than 20 wine producers and growing in number.

Small family owned producers crafting site specific sought after fine wines in one of the most Southerly wine district in South, Africa - the Walker bay - just behind the beautiful village of Hermanus.

Visionary owners created these unique terroir driven appellations - the Hemel-en Aarde - often scene as some of the newest, most exciting and beautiful in South Africa.

There are several factors that, in combination, set it apart from other South African wine producing areas. Firstly, the Hemel-en-Aarde is an area of unusual grape varietal focus for South Africa. While there are highly sought-after wines made from a number of different cultivars, plantings are overwhelmingly made up of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Secondly, there are no large volume producers and production is on average small and very high-end. In terms of the number of trophies, classic scores, gold medals and 5 star ratings per case of wine produced, the Hemel-en-Aarde is unmatched. Thirdly, the properties are almost all family owned and operated and in some cases still by the original families that established them from unplanted ground.

Unusually close proximity to the cooling influence of the South Atlantic Ocean and a more southerly location than the traditional South African winelands, makes the Hemel-en-Aarde one of the coolest, most maritime, wine producing areas in the country

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HEMEL -en- AARDE
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A Brief History

Soils

Unlike much of the wine world, the soils of the Hemel-en-Aarde, and indeed South Africa in general, are particularly ancient. 400 million years ago, the underlying bedrock for the soils of the area was formed under the shallow Augulhas sea as part of the Cape Supergroup sediments. On top of Cape Granite (particularly old and non-sedimentary), Malmsbury Shale was formed, topped by Table Mountain Sandstone, which in turn was topped by Bokkeveld Shale. 330 million years ago the Falklands Plateau came crunching back into what is now South Africa, slowly forcing up what are now called the Cape Folded Mountains. This was completed around 290 million years ago and this folding, followed by erosion, formed the mix of Bokkeveld Shale, Table Mountain Sandstone and Decomposed Granite soils which underpin the character of the Hemel-en-Aarde wines. The soils have not been under sea, or indeed ice, for a very long time in comparison to most of the world's major wine growing regions.

A Brief History

Mankind

Again, unlike much of the wine world, the history of hominid occupation of the Hemel-en-Aarde is particularly ancient. Beginning with Homo Erectus from around 2.5 million years ago, whose stone tools litter the area, the Hemel-en-Aarde moved into a period of occasional occupation by small bands of Homo Sapiens hunter gatherers, from approximately 250,000 years ago to as little as 300 years ago with the San (called Bushmen by the first settlers) eventually loosing out to slightly more settled semi-nomadic Khoi herders (called Hottentots by the settlers), who only began to depart the area with the arrival of the first Europeans. At first the land was rented out to Dutch settlers for grazing by the Dutch East India Company in the mid-1700's. It was finally offered as freehold by the British (who had taken the Cape Colony) in the mid-1800's. Repeated subdivision, and the tightening of previously easier markets for sheep - mainly wool - and wheat, led to a period of poverty from the turn of the last century, which became even more severe in the 1930's.

A Brief History

Vineyards

It was into this impoverished agricultural environment that the first modern winegrowing enterprise was introduced with the pioneering and visionary purchase of a Hemel-en-Aarde property by the Hamilton Russell family in 1975. It wasn't long before it became apparent that Pinot noir and Chardonnay were the most successful grape varieties in this cooler area, producing individual and exciting expressions of the site and soils. The early local and international success of these wines encouraged the development of numerous other properties in the Hemel-en-Aarde. The Hemel-en-Aarde wines are not just getting more numerous, but better and better, as committed landowners and unusually talented winemakers and viticulturists continue to engage with a terroir seemingly ideally suited to these two specific noble varieties. Excitingly, as knowledge and understanding of the minutiae of the three appellations are uncovered, a clutch of other noble grape varieties is vying for consideration and recognition. The future is bright.

The terroir of the three Hemel-en-Aarde appellations (Wine Wards)

Background

In May 2004 the Walker Bay Wine Ward was reclassified as a Wine District – one of 21 in the South African winelands. Given its size (close to that of the Stellenbosch District) and the greater and greater number of wine producers active in the area with a multitude of different wine styles, the Walker Bay was increasingly unable to justify Ward Status. A Wine Ward is the smallest unit of appellation after an individual Wine Estate and is supposed to delimit an area of relatively homogenous terroir – similar to a sub AVA in the US.

With the reclassification of the Walker Bay as a Wine District, the way was open for producers in the District to create their own more relevant Wine Wards with the assistance of a committee of soil specialists and viticulturists. Three Wards were created in the Hemel-en-Aarde Area - 1. Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, 2. Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, both created in August 2006 and 3. Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, created in June 2009. These three appellations have the beautiful seaside resort town of Hermanus as their “service centre” and are aligned along the scenic Hemel-en-Aarde Road (R320) as you leave Hermanus towards Caledon in the above order, with the nearest beginning 1 km from the turn-off and the furthest ending 18.2 km from the turn-off.

Common Factors

Particularly strong maritime influence. Collectively, the three Hemel-en-Aarde appellations enjoy probably the strongest maritime influence of any winegrowing area in South Africa. The closest point to the Atlantic Ocean Walker Bay, with its cooling influence of the cold Benguela current flowing up from Antarctica, is only 1.5km and the furthest point 10.6km. The prevailing summer wind, the Southeaster, blows across this bay towards the vineyards enhancing the cooling effect of proximity to the sea. This means cooler days but warmer nights and cooler summers but warmer winters. The climate, as for the rest of the Western Cape, is Mediterranean.

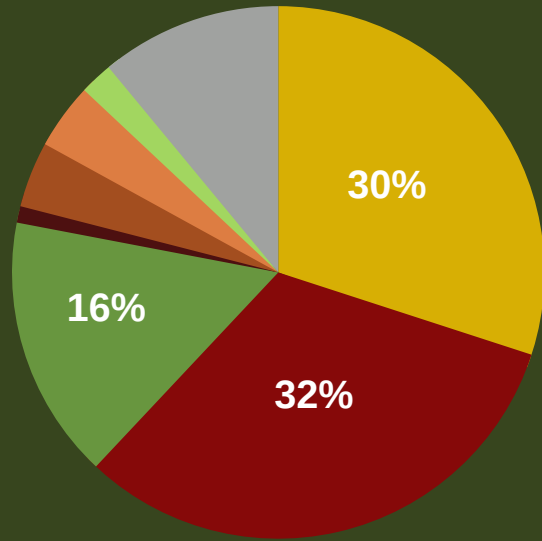
Cool in a South African context. Most international measures of average temperatures for wine producing areas, use minimum and maximum temperatures and therefore tend to distort more maritime areas upwards and more continental areas downwards. The average of the maximum daily temperatures for the four hottest months of the year, when there are grapes (immature or otherwise) on the vines is a more appropriate measure for South Africa. Based on this the Hemel-en-Aarde Area averages around 25 Centigrade over a 10 year period – similar to Elgin and Constantia, while Stellenbosch averages around 28 Centigrade, Franschhoek 29 Centigrade and Robertson 30 centigrade. In other words the Hemel-en-Aarde Area is significantly cooler than most winegrowing areas in South Africa for the most important months of the year for wine quality.

Common Factors

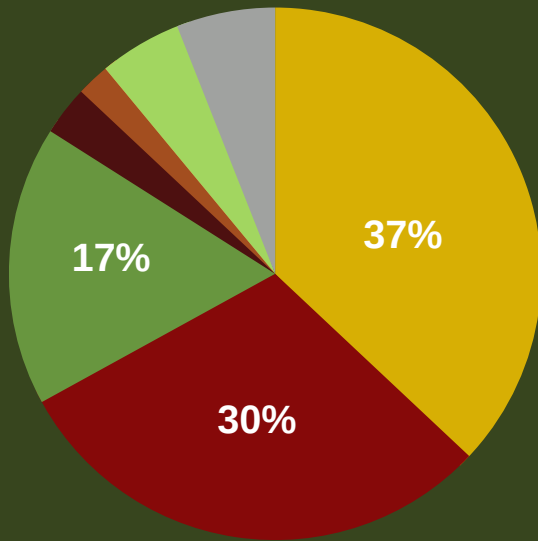
Higher than average rainfall for the winelands. Annual average rainfall is in the region of 750 mm if a ten year average is taken. This can vary substantially year on year, but rainfall is significantly more than for areas such as Stellenbosch, Paarl, Worcester, Robertson, Darling and the Swartland for example. Around 43% of the rainfall is in the winter months, 23% in the spring, 10% in the summer ripening season and the remaining 24% falls after harvest in the autumn. This is a more even rainfall distribution than for many of the growing areas further to the west and affords the possibility of dispensing with irrigation.

Further south than most of the winelands. Situated 34° 24' 3.2" and 34° 19' 51.5" south, the three Hemel-en-Aarde Area appellations, while southerly for the Cape winelands, do not come close to approximating the latitudes of the great European winegrowing regions and are cooled more by close proximity to the cold Atlantic Ocean than latitude. Even though the Hemel-en-Aarde Area is close to the southern tip of the African continent, South Africa simply does not stretch far enough south to reach classic European wine growing latitudes. The analogous wine growing region (latitude-wise) in North America would be the Santa Barbara area.

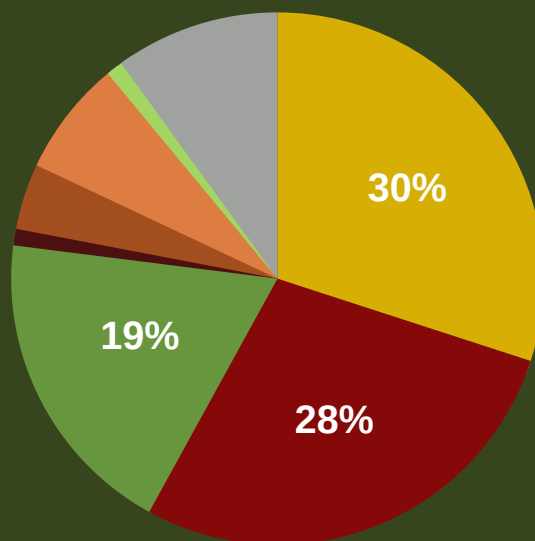
The Hemel-en-Aarde's combined plantings consists of the following varietals



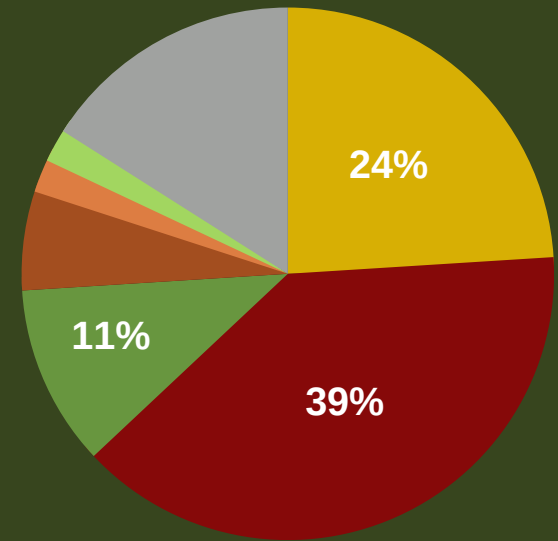
-
- | | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| Chardonnay | Shiraz |
| Pinot Noir | Cabernet Sauvignon |
| Sauvignon Blanc | Semillon |
| Pinotage | Other |



Hemel-en-Aarde Valley



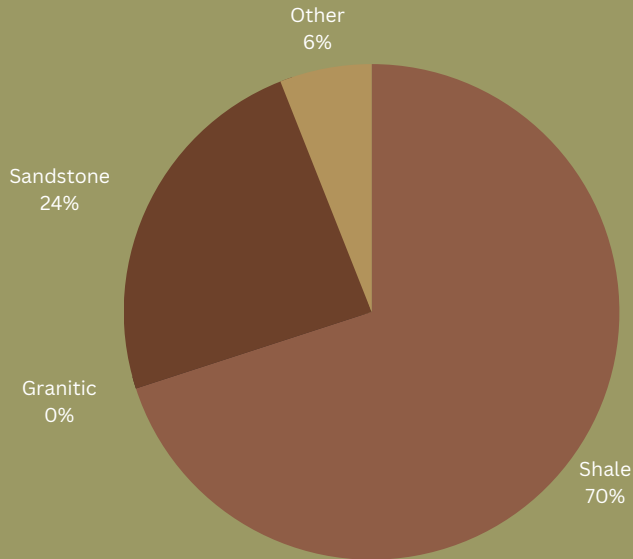
Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley



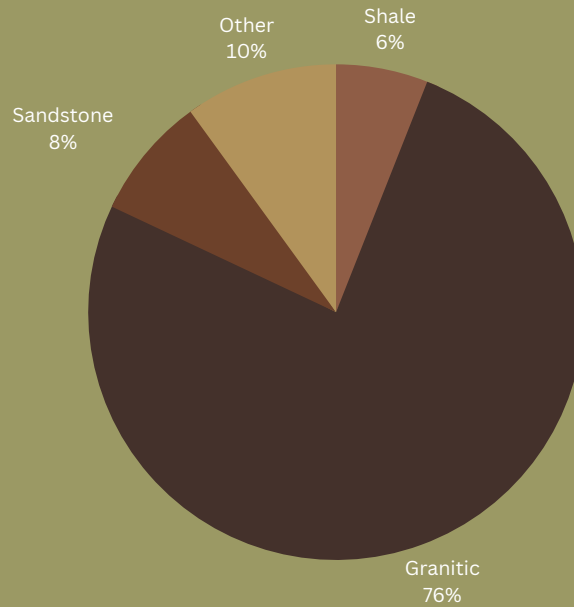
Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge

Soil compositions of the Three Hemel-en-Aarde Appellations

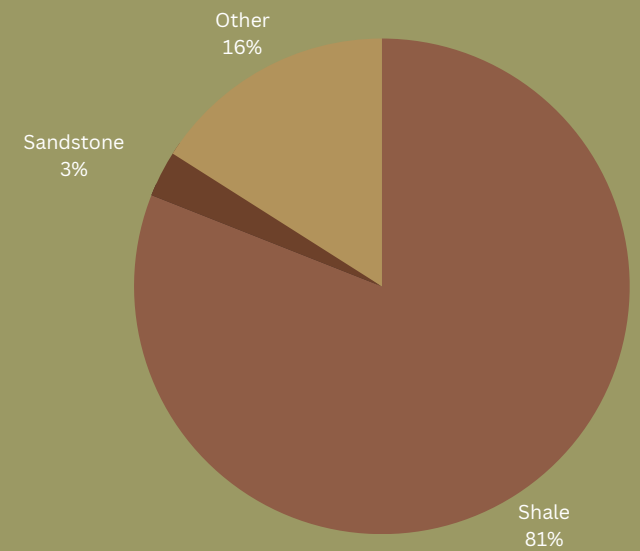
Hemel-en-Aarde Valley



Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley



Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge



The three Hemel-en-Aarde appellations

Hemel-en-Aarde Valley

(Stretches for 6.7 kilometres along the R320 from Hermanus)

This is the first appellation as you leave Hermanus and enter the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley (geographically speaking). It is also home to the first vineyards planted in the area and is the closest to the Atlantic Ocean of the three appellations.

The overwhelming majority of the vineyards in this appellation are planted on northeast, north and northwest facing slopes of Bokkeveld Shale-derived soil on the southern side of the Onrust River. This soil has an unusually high clay content which although it varies from 25% to 55% tends on average to be much higher than the Malmsbury Shale-derived soils of the west coast. The clay contents of these soils approximate the clay contents of the Cote D'Or in Burgundy, although they tend to be shallower and far stonier. In addition, they do not have the limestone content or limestone bedrock, but have pure clay subsoil and solid shale bedrock. For the South African winelands these soils would be classified as low-vigour and more marginal.

Higher up the northern slopes of the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley and on the south facing slopes of the valley, the soils are Table Mountain Sandstone-derived. These quartzitic, sandy soils have a very low to non-existent clay content and are light structured, generally far deeper and have the potential for greater vigour.

The three Hemel-en-Aarde appellations

Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley

(6.7 kms from the R320 turn-off for a further 6.6 km)

This is the second appellation encountered as you proceed northeast up the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley (geographically speaking) from Hermanus, and is the largest of the three Hemel-en-Aarde Area appellations. Ripening tends to occur later here than for the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley appellation. It is the second closest Hemel-en-Aarde Area appellation to the sea.

The vineyards in the Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley are planted on both the north facing slopes (on the southern side of the Onrust River) and the south facing slopes (on the northern side of the Onrust River). The soils change in this appellation away from Bokkeveld Shale-derived soils to lighter structured Table Mountain Sandstone-derived soils, largely on the north facing side of the Onrust River, and a rare occurrence of decomposed granite soils, largely on the south facing side of the Onrust River. In places these lighter structured soils overlay a subsoil with a significant clay content.

As for all of the Hemel-en-Aarde Area appellations there are numerous different soil structural classifications within these broad groupings of soil types.

The three Hemel-en-Aarde appellations

Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge

(starts 13.3 kms from the R320 turn-off and ends 18.2 km from R320 turn-off)

This is the third and smallest appellation encountered as you proceed along the R320 and the furthest down the Hemel-en-Aarde road. Ripening here generally occurs later than the other two Hemel-en-Aarde appellations, due in part to the lofty elevations of the Ridge.

Bokkeveld Shale-derived soils re-occur in the Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge and the overwhelming majority of the vineyards are on these stony clay-rich soils. The vineyards are planted with many different aspects from southerly to northerly, and the average altitudes of these vineyards are the highest of the three Hemel-en-Aarde Area appellations. The highest mountain slopes of this appellation have lighter structured Table Mountain Sandstone-derived soils.

About Hemel-en-Aarde Valley Pinot Noir

Few places on Earth, discovered so far, give rise to an expression of Pinot noir which transcends the essential varietal simplicity of this thin skinned, bright red fruited, fickle grape variety. Many regard the challenge as being how to make Pinot noir. The challenge would better be expressed as where to make Pinot noir. Much of the Pinot noir made outside Burgundy, however carefully, remains an attractive but unchallenging - almost unintellectual - varietal expression. Bright fruit charm and soft ease, without real depth, structure, or age-worthiness.

The particularly ancient and marginal, iron and clay-rich soil of the pioneering Hemel-en-Aarde Valley appellation, climatically moderated by unusually close proximity to the cold South Atlantic, developed an early international reputation for producing extraordinary Pinot noir. Expressions of site and soil reaching way beyond the constraints of the variety.

The wines have a muscularity and structure which has them often confused with the great wines of the Cote de Nuits in Burgundy, and their aromatic and flavour profile leans more towards a dark spice and savouriness than bright upfront red fruit. They are certainly not everyone's idea of what New World Pinot noir should taste like, but they are of great interest to aficionados of fine Burgundy and of intellectually-styled, site and soil expressive, age-worthy red wines in general.

About Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley Pinot Noir

Meandering up the R320, Pinot Noir is grown in the porphyritic Granite soils of the Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley. This intrusion of granite formed 630 million years ago as molten rock crystallised deep in the earth and has since been exposed by successive erosion. The iron rich granite in our appellation is described as porphyritic, having cooled in stages to distinct sizes of crystals, and decomposed further in to the soil structure. Clays formed lower down on the mid-slope that buffer the vines from temperature change and dehydration. We believe that the impact of granite expresses itself in the linear and perfumed characters of our wines.

This appellation ranges from 4 to 8 km in proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and vines are planted at 200-400m above sea level. The climate is cool and temperate, where parallel mountain ranges channel the southerly oceangoing winds through the appellation during the summer. These southerly winds in turn create regular sea mists and overcast conditions, moderating the temperatures in the upper valley. The annual rainfall is 850mm, with 50% falling in the winter months (May-August).

These conditions produce Pinot Noir of an ethereal nature. It's fine fruits and perfumes are deep and profound, though they glance off hastily and change form. Pure and vivid red fruit embroidered with fresh violet and wilted rose petals, accentuated by the bass tones of dark fruit and earthiness. The thick velvet fruit and texture in the mouth is framed with fine, brittle tannin that reaches long into the finish.

About Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge Pinot Noir

Pinot noir is peerless in its innate ability to capture the essence of the place where it is grown. Compare it to more robust, almost imperious cultivars, where expression of terroir is often and easily overwhelmed by grape narcissism, and one is inexorably drawn in, romanced and entranced by Pinot noir's elegant, accurate articulation of the concept of earth. This noble variety needs to be grown under cool conditions, ideal for the slow ripening of the grapes. The elevation of the vineyards in the Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, together with moderating breezes coming off the cold Atlantic Ocean keep the vineyards healthy and disease-free.

As is the case with producers in the other Hemel-en-Aarde appellations, the Ridge producers keenly monitor and take strident measures to ensure that the healthy, virus-free status of their vineyards are maintained. Healthy vines produce healthy fruit which naturally and importantly impacts the quality of the wines produced.

The Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge is richly endowed with ancient clay-derived Bokkeveld Shale soils. Pinot noir wines grown on these soils seem to possess an added structural dimension and subtle gravitas not always found in wines grown on lighter structures soils.

Pinot noir at its best is an inspiring, elegant, multi-faceted and eminently drinkable wine offering astonishing complexity, poise and depth. It is at once regal, resplendent, magnificent and delicate, fine-boned, ethereal.



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