



A BLOG BY WINE & FOOD LOVERS IN HONG KONG, CHINA, & ITALY



neuras - making wine in the middle of the namib desert

in the local language, "neuras" means "a place of water plenty". in fact, the land where allan and sylvia walken-davis grow grapes and make wine is blessed with 5 sources of water. a veritable oasis in the middle of the namibian desert, theirs is a very special terroir indeed.

established in namibia for 41 years, allan and sylvia always had a passion for the desert and their dream was to find the perfect place to retire, watch birds, and write books. in 1996, after 10 years of searching, they settled on a very green and weedy farm in matahøhe ([see the location on google map here](#)). taking stock of what he had purchased, allan discovered very old table grape vines now growing wild inside the bush. he asked a friend from south-africa to come and check them out and after more analysis, they discovered that, indeed, grapes could be cultivated on this parcel of land.

in 1997, he planted shiraz grapes and in 2001 had his first commercial vintage. since, he has increased the number plantings and added merlot to their vineyard so that he now bottles the "namibian blend". oz clarke, a wine-world celebrity, came here in 2006 and rated their 2005 vintage quite favourably.

on a visit here last week, we tasted the 2007 vintage of 100% shiraz which had spent 11 months in oak. full of dark berry fruits, spices, chocolate, and black pepper, the wine was intense, concentrated, complex with a very long length. a big wine and one that i think can compare very well with other south african shiraz.

how is this possible you will ask? well, the 5 water sources are obviously key. as wine needs 750 mm of rain per year to grow and only 100 mm falls in the namibian desert, allan has build a complex network of irrigation channels from those sources to flood irrigate when he needs to. with careful canopy management and netting, he creates enough shades on the grapes so that they do not sunburn. and finally, thanks to prevalent winds from the atlantic ocean, daily temperatures in the summer do not go higher than 38 degree celcius with nighttime temperatures as low as 16 degrees creating a large diurnal range between day and night which favours acidity and help develop complex flavours. winter temperatures can go as low as 8 degrees celcius and there is actually a danger of frost is actually so real that a few years ago they lost 46% of their vintage due to frost.

still young in its establishment, neuras is developing vintage after vintage. they certainly have ambition for their production but what struck me when we visited is their intense love of their land and deep passion for what they do.

a very interesting side trip to our visit to the great desert of the namib.



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