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STRATEGIES FOR PRODUCING SAUVIGNON BLANC WITH REDUCED ALCOHOL CONTENT

PART 1: IMPORTANCE AND OVERVIEW



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BASIC WINE

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Low- and reduced-alcohol beverages have become increasingly popular and more acceptable among consumers from all over the world with different factors driving the change, the COVID19 pandemic and the local alcohol ban being a significant force for South African consumers in the past 12 months. Compared with standard wines, low-alcohol wines may have several social and health benefits and are often perceived as a way to reduce the negative health-related consequences caused by alcohol consumption and therefore suit the general trend towards living healthier lifestyles^{1,2}. Forecasts assume a continuous growth for this segment³ and **the South African wine industry must keep up with the demand.**

REDUCING THE ALCOHOL, BUT KEEPING THE QUALITY

Even though wines with reduced alcohol content are very much sought after by the consumer, the **general perception** is still that these wines are of inferior quality. **Innovations in the production process** of reduced-alcohol wine have resulted in a wine with **highly acceptable sensory properties** and a taste very similar to the standard wine⁴. The continuous technical improvements are needed to elevate the sector and tap into the growing trend while protecting the industry's reputation.

WHY USE SAUVIGNON BLANC?

The **advantage of using Sauvignon blanc** for the production of wine with reduced alcohol content is that the **consumer knows and trusts the variety**. Being South Africa's best selling variety, Sauvignon blanc will likely be considered a **safer option** to purchase compared to another variety.

Popular Sauvignon blanc styles are also well suited for a low alcohol product as sensory factors such as sweetness, increased carbon dioxide content and sufficient acidity can all help to contribute to the body of the wine that might otherwise be lacking due to the reduced alcohol content. Being an **aromatic variety**, Sauvignon blanc also provides the potential for a **flavourful low alcohol product with character and complexity**.

NO SILVER BULLET

There are **several strategies across the production chain** for reducing the alcohol concentration in wine. The idea is to **achieve balance without sacrificing flavour** and to find the sweet spot in terms of the alcohol concentration and how it fits in with the rest of the wine's components. Other than the post-fermentation strategies (where alcohol reduction can be obtained relatively quickly by using, for example, alcohol removal technology), there is **no single "natural" winemaking process or practice** to deliver a wine with significantly lower alcohol content.

Adjustments in the conventional winemaking processes can, however, bring about **small reductions** in final alcohol concentration and combining these strategies can eventually lead to an **accumulated effect** resulting in a wine with a much lower alcohol concentration compared to a wine prepared with the conventional winemaking strategies.

TECHNICAL STRATEGIES

This blog series will summarise some of the **latest international research developments in the production of quality wines with reduced alcohol content**⁵⁻⁷.

The main strategies for producing wines with lower alcohol content includes:

1) ADJUSTING THE CONVENTIONAL WINEMAKING PROCESSES TO OBTAIN A PRODUCT THAT IS NATURALLY LOWER IN ALCOHOL

- Viticultural practices
- Processing
- Fermentation
- Post-fermentation

2) ADDING WATER

- currently not permitted in South Africa
- please consult legal documentation – links below

3) ALCOHOL REMOVAL AFTER FERMENTATION

- Technology

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Please note that not all processes/products/technologies mentioned in this blog series are permitted for the production of wine in South Africa under the current Regulations (LIQUOR PRODUCTS ACT 60 of 1989) and the Wine of Origin Scheme. Please consult the relevant documentation for more information: <http://www.sawis.co.za/winelaw/southafrica.php>

Further requirements and guidelines for the production of low alcohol wine, de-alcoholised wine and alcohol free wine can be accessed [here](#).

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