

Make it a hands-on harvest



THE VALLEY is alive with the pattering of tractors pulling bins piled high with colombar and chenin blanc grapes. Now and then a large truck swerves to overtake, and bunches from its harvest load hit the tarmac, to be rendered into sticky pulp by passing wheels. At the co-op, hillocks of skin and pips grow higher every day. The aroma of crushed grapes fills the heavy 40°C air as the harvest of 2011 moves into top gear.

This is when the Robertson wine valley hosts its annual Hands-on Harvest festival, enabling novices and connoisseurs, fun-seekers and families to take part in this seasonal journey from vineyard to cellar: choose to get hot, sweaty and sticky as you pick your share, or stay cool, watching from a distance with a glass of wine in hand. It takes place next weekend, and the programme embraces winemaking and blending, river cruising, breakfasts, tractor trips, spit-braais, tastings, talks and demos.

For something different, try your hand at grappa-making this

year. In this first-ever initiative, Robert and Anette Rosenbach invite enthusiasts to their boutique distillery at Tanagra, a couple of kilometres outside McGregor village, to see the process begin, as the gleaming still is fired up, and selected grape skins are shovelled into the pot. Recently these consisted of young sauvignon blanc from Springfield estate, which had been very gently pressed in that cellar, and there are high hopes that they will produce an outstanding single vintage grappa. The events take place next week Friday and Saturday, are limited to 20 visitors, and include grappa and wine tasting and snacks. The cost is R75 a head. Tanagra will be open for tastings of their fruity eaux de vie and 2007 reds and the 2010 cabernet franc rosé (R40) – one of the best pinks I have tasted in a long while.

For more information, phone 023 525 1780 or e-mail tanagra@tanagra-wines.co.za.

De Wetshof is offering vineyard and cellar tours throughout the festival, and the estate is hosting the judging of the valley's first *mosbolletjie* competition. These traditional, seasonal treats are no longer easy to find even in the winelands, so this is a good chance to stock up on buns, which will be on sale.

Weltevrede estate outside Bonnievale invites winelovers to take



FESTIVAL FUN: Grape-stomping is a messy business.

part in the bubbly-making process. Visitors will be given a bottle that's ready for disgorging. This done, they will add the required *dosage*, seal and label their bottle and take it home. The farm is also offering cooking lessons with well-known chef Vanie Padayachee from Prince Albert, who will demonstrate summer fruit dishes in the cool underground cellar. After tasting a quartet of Weltevrede Cap Classiques,

a picnic will follow. Phone Elzette at 023 616 2141 for details.

The Robertson Hands-on Harvest festival starts next week Friday and continues until Sunday.

Bookings need to be made with the individual cellars and farms before Wednesday.

Find the complete programme at www.handson-harvest.com or phone 023 626 3167 for more information.

