

OCTOBER 2017

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28
gardening
HACKS
+
*your courtyard,
revamped*

*Harvest
table*
FRESH
RECIPES
MADE WITH
SEASONAL
PRODUCE

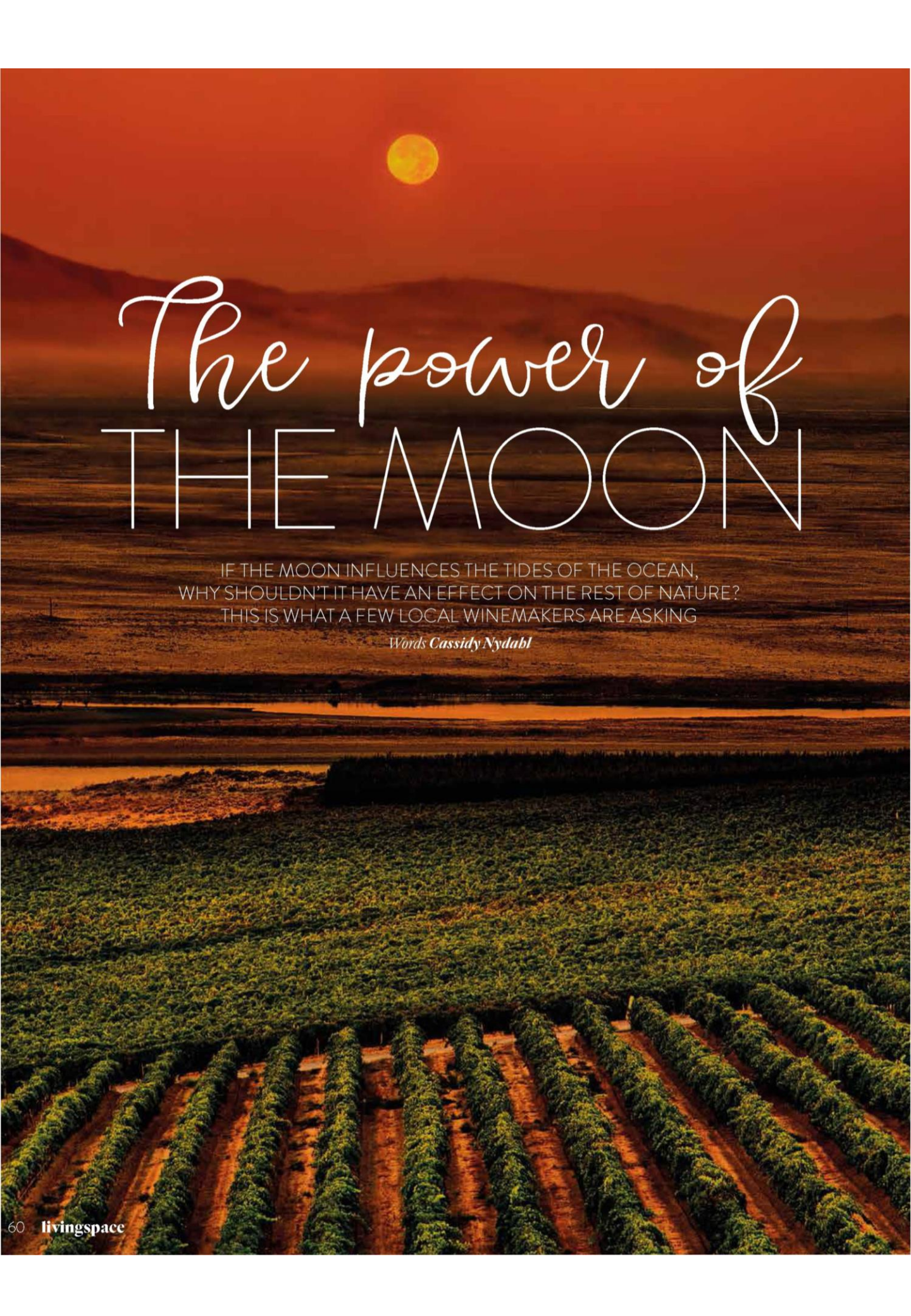
THE

green

ISSUE

SUSTAINABLE IS HERE TO STAY



A full moon is visible in a deep orange and red sunset sky. Below the moon, a range of mountains is silhouetted against the horizon. In the foreground, a vast vineyard with rows of green grapevines stretches across the landscape. The overall scene is bathed in the warm, golden light of late afternoon or early evening.

The power of THE MOON

IF THE MOON INFLUENCES THE TIDES OF THE OCEAN,
WHY SHOULDN'T IT HAVE AN EFFECT ON THE REST OF NATURE?
THIS IS WHAT A FEW LOCAL WINEMAKERS ARE ASKING

Words Cassidy Nydahl

A determined duck pecking at insects among the vines is not an uncommon sight in South African vineyards – wine farmers have long come to the realisation that a well-planned ecosystem on the farm pays dividends. The cows stop the grass in the pastures from growing out of hand and produce rich manure. The manure attracts flies and other insects, and the ducks and chickens eat the bugs and spread out the manure – all part of a well curated and self-sustaining system. The more types of animals and plants on the farm, the greater its biodiversity. And biodiversity is just one element of the holistic system known as biodynamic farming.

HOLISTIC APPROACH

Biodynamic agriculture employs various markers of biodiversity. Practices usually incorporate sustainable organic farming methods that use all biological aspects of a farm, from its soil to the animals that live off the land. The ‘dynamic’ part, however, draws its philosophy from the formative forces that control the physical world. Instead of looking at the farm as the bigger picture, one looks at the whole universe as part of the ecosystem affecting crops, and ultimately, the wine.

The concept draws on the ancient philosophy of our ancestors, brought to life again by the Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner in the early 19th century.

‘I believe that biodynamics is all about biodiversity in its true sense – we want a holistic natural system on the farm,’ says Johnathan Grieve, proprietor of Avondale wine estate. When the farm was starting to fray around the edges from an overload of pesticides and herbicides, he knew they needed to head back to the drawing board and reassess their systems.

‘We need to realise that we are part of a greater system – something bigger than ourselves. This means that if we create life and work with the “living system” – as opposed to killing everything – we’ll reap the benefits.’

FULL CYCLE

In addition to holistic practices such as using herbal preparations to spray the vines, biodynamic farmers believe

TASTE TEST

*Want to check for yourself?
Take a peek at Avondale's
online Luna Tasting Calendar
and see if you pick up these
changes in your tasting:*

Fruit days: Full-bodied fruity notes are picked up.

Root days: Wines seem subdued – considered a bad time for tasting.

Leaf days: Minerality and earthiness come to the forefront.

Flower days: Expressive, structured and elegant wines shine.

the moon plays an important part in the success of their crops. ‘Biodynamics follows a specific planting calendar that suggests that certain parts of the plant are affected by certain lunar phases,’ explains Johan Reyneke of Reyneke Organic Wines, a Stellenbosch wine farm that applies the biodynamic method. ‘One would harvest lettuce on a leaf day, carrots on a root day and grapes on a fruit day, for example.’

As a student, Johan worked on the farms as a labourer. ‘Being a worker, as opposed to a farmer, was key, as I had to personally handle herbicides, pesticides and fungicides on a regular basis,’ he recalls.

Years later, when he had his own farm, his postgraduate degree in environmental ethics gave Johan the scientific knowledge and understanding to do things differently. While he was researching environmentally friendly farming options, he came across biodynamics and applied it to his farm, with great success. Reyneke Wines now has a range of biodynamic wines to add to its organic offering.

SEEDS OF DOUBT

Much like horoscopes and crystal balls, biodynamics has received a fair amount of scepticism. ‘We need to understand that biodynamics is a very old form of organic farming,’ Johan explains. ‘It originated during a time when there was a spiritual focus surrounding all of life in general and farming in particular. We live in an age today when we prefer a scientific understanding of both. In this context,

a lot of the biodynamic methodology can come across as being unscientific.’

Many wine farmers, however, are not dismissing science in favour of biodynamics – on the contrary, they believe the two work in tandem with each other. At Avondale, the biodynamic practices complement sophisticated modern technology to give winemakers a holistic view of the health of the farm and the wine. ‘I believe our ancestors were much more “connected” to the influences of the constellations and planets,’ explains Johnathan. ‘If we can reteach ourselves this knowledge and combine it with the advances science has made, then we can get a better knowledge of how nature can and should work.’

ASK THE EXPERTS

Many wine farmers believe that the moon and its cycles affect the taster’s experience of a wine. The Luna Tasting Calendar, compiled by Maria Thun in the 1950s, is based on the theory of the four ‘tasting’ phases of the lunar cycle, namely: fruit, root, flower and leaf. According to this theory, different notes are prominent in a wine during different cycles.

To showcase the science behind biodynamic methods, Johnathan and his team did a controlled-tasting experiment in 2012 with some of South Africa’s most lauded wine connoisseurs. And the verdict? The judges were surprised when they all tasted the same wines differently at each cycle. Even more surprisingly, all panellists tasted the same differences.

‘The Luna Taste Test has convinced us that there is merit to the theory that the moon and planetary cycles influence the way we enjoy wine,’ are Johnathan’s last words on the matter. □

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avondalewine.co.za

REYNEKE ORGANIC WINES
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