



The striking entrance to Nederburg Manor.

A WORLD OF WINE

Despite only being able to compete in the global wine arena post-1994, both South Africa's well-established wine farms and its emerging makers are impacting the world stage, notes **JARED RUTENBERG**

Although South Africa is the oldest wine-producing region in the New World, as a result of the sanctions imposed during the apartheid era, it was only able to compete in the global wine arena post-1994. Achieving the level of recognition it has, in such a small amount of time, is surely quite amazing.

How then has South Africa so significantly made its mark? Through many industry conversations, a collective voice has affirmed that the innovation, determination, variety and creativity that abound in the South African context are what we have to thank.

I recall speaking to one of the 2019 Wines of South Africa Sommelier Cup finalists. Seeing a dazzled look on his face, I asked what he was pondering. I have never forgotten his response: "You don't know how lucky you are. You really have the world of wine – and all within two hours' drive of Cape Town. You simply don't find this elsewhere."

IT'S IN THE SOIL

Niel Groenewald is the managing director of Nederburg – one of the country's most established wineries, which falls under the umbrella company Distell. Reflecting on the South African context, he says: "We have the oldest viticultural soils in the world.



Niel Groenewald

We have been making wine for over 350 years, winemakers and viticulturists work closely to understand and bring out the best from the soil to grow multiple varieties successfully."

There can, however, be no celebration of varietals, without a relentless dedication and some innovation. Groenewald, like so many of the country's producers, speaks with much pride at what they have achieved: "We have the integrity and sustainability seal on our bottles and some of the strictest control systems in the world, ensuring full traceability and audit trail for social responsibility and sustainability. The diverse climate and regions bring interesting offerings to the global arena that can't be copied and our price-quality equation on all quality levels is among the best in the world."

The hallmark of innovation also plays a central role. The Constantia Wine Route gives a clear example of how the elements of heritage and innovation needn't be at odds with being a New World producer. Although Constantia is both the country and

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Nederburg wines being poured for tasting.

Southern Hemisphere's first wine-producing area, this proud heritage is complemented with a forward-thinking and constantly innovative approach to telling the story.

This month, the region launches a South African first – a wine route completely dedicated to a single varietal. Since Sauvignon Blanc is where the valley hangs its hat, guests will be able to taste their way through eight experiences dedicated to the varietal, including current and older vintages. ■

POPULAR HOTSPOT

"It's our terroir (the environmental factors affecting a crop's phenotype) that makes our wines so distinctive," comments the marketing manager of the Constantia Wine Route, Carryn Wiltshire. "Our winemakers work with the natural elements that make up the uniqueness of the Constantia wine region, producing world-class Sauvignon Blancs that have depth and character as they age." Constantia is only one of the many South African regions that are celebrating their unique terroir and

finding creative ways to express the narrative of their vineyards.

Of course, part of South Africa's uniqueness is its incomparable tourism offering. The Winelands is the country's most visited tourism hotspot, after the Cape Town Waterfront. An estimated 29 per cent of all foreign visitor spending takes place in the Western Cape – a salutary effect for the industry and for introducing guests to our wine.

Writing about South Africa, Tim Atkins, master of wine and leading commentator on New World Wines, penned in a recent report: "It remains a forward-looking place whose best days are ahead of it."

We shall certainly raise a glass to that! ■

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A BONNIE EMERGING WINEMAKER

Salome Buys-Vermeulen is the winemaker at Lozarn Wines in the small village of Bonnievale, outside Robertson. She was quick to share why she considers South Africa to be such a key player in the global industry.

"South Africa was one of the very first New World winemaking countries and we certainly don't have to stand back for the older, more established countries. Through leading technology and research facilities within our country, we have certainly been able to establish our niches and develop great styles. Very much true to our South African spirit, we don't give up easily. Even in the wine industry, we have seen how boundaries have been tested and how new regions have formed because people believed it could work."

As an emerging winemaker, does she feel that in South Africa she had the benefit of being able to express her creativity and innovation?

"I think in a way, yes – we don't have the history and the stigma of Old World winemaking countries where you have to adhere to strict rules and regulations in terms of what cultivars you are allowed in what region and how you make them, but of course that all happens within the rules and structure of the Wine & Spirit Board – Wines of South Africa."



Salome Buys-Vermeulen

Buys-Vermeulen also commented on the startling variety of cultivars in South Africa.

"The fact that we can test all cultivars in different regions, and even in smaller districts, helps us to not become narrow-minded and it also proves that terroir is of the essence if we are willing to find that perfect spot. Carménère was that drawcard for us at Lozarn Wines. By trying something new in our district, we learned so much more from this cultivar – more than any book or source would have been willing to share, I think."

EMERGING FROM A HISTORICAL WINE REGION

Berene Sauls is the owner and winemaker of Tesselaarsdal Wines, not far from the Overberg's Hemel-en-Aarde region. Her story is one firmly rooted in the history of the region, and already her maiden 2015 vintage has left its mark on wine writers and drinkers, both in South Africa and abroad.

What are her thoughts on South African wines on the global stand? "South Africa produces some of the best wines in the world, expressive of site, climate and origin. Hemel-en-Aarde is known for cool maritime climate and clay-rich soils, which are perfect for Burgundian Varieties Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and is often referenced to wines produced in Burgundy, France."

The master of wine, Greg Sherwood, referred to Sauls' Red Burgundy as the "next SA Pinot Noir icon" and on the local scene, it was rated five stars in the John Platter Wine Guide.

And, what are her dreams for the South African wine industry?

"To keep the standard of quality, producing the best wines suitable to its region. Furthermore, as the owner of my property in Tesselaarsdal Overberg, soon to be planted with vines, I would love to see more generational family-owned vineyards, each with its unique history, adding to the already prestigious list of estates."



Barrels of Tesselaarsdal wines.