

ESTABLISHED 1941

ROBERTSON WINERY



SMALL TOWN, BIG HEART.

NEWSLETTER - AUGUST 2004

So much has been happening at the Robertson Winery that we think it's high time we put together a newsletter to keep you up to date. We will be sending you this letter on a quarterly basis and including news on our wines and the people who are involved in making them. Should you require any additional information on our wines please visit our website www.robertson.co.za.

Kind regards,

Johann Meissenheimer
Marketing Manager

ROBERTSON WINERY: TAKING A BITE OF THE USA WINE MARKET

"South Africa is set to be the next brand category to hit the American wine market," says Marketing Manager, Johann Meissenheimer, confidently, "and we believe that Robertson Winery will lead the way."

Proving his point, Johann merely has to cite the recent exponential growth of Robertson's wines in this tough market. From a zero base, sales started in January 2003, and by the end of that year we had already opened up distribution channels in 12 markets. By mid-2004 our sales figures are already double that of our first year's growth and still climbing steadily with 20 distribution outlets.



Johann Meissenheimer

South Africa's impact on the US wine market is negligible, less than 0.1%, but Johann believes that with Robertson's value-for-money products, we can definitely increase that figure in the next few years.

The main reason for the minimal impact to date is two fold. Firstly, while consumers are keen on South African wines, distributors market so many wines already, they have yet to be convinced of the quality and reliability of South Africa's wines. Also, shipping a wine across to the States is expensive, taking 2 months to get from Cape Town harbour to the company's warehouse in California. Once there, the wine needs a huge amount of support in this large market in terms of PR and customer relations which also impacts the cost significantly.

The company's strategy was to establish their own company in Venice, Florida and from there find distributors in various states, beginning in the South East and working up the coast and then north and around to the West Coast. The company is called Indigo and Rufus Ashworth is the sales manager and is currently based in Atlanta, Georgia. Initially, we started with the varietal range namely, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Merlot and Pinotage, but the Vineyard Selection range was introduced at the beginning of this year and influenced sales positively, elevating the brand in the market. A semi-sweet Gewurztraminer was also introduced which has proved a big hit.

Johann has just returned from a trip to the States, visiting Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Chicago.

We have already recorded steady sales in Illinois but the other states are all new areas for development.

Robertson Winery offers incentive trips to those distributors who exceed their target. This year the prize went to Mitchell Hilt of Nashville, Tennessee and he spent a glorious week in the Cape Winelands in April this year. "We feel it is important for our distributors to experience for themselves the magical beauty of the Cape Winelands, particularly the small town of Robertson," says Johann. "The diversity and quality of the Robertson range allows for the distributor to comprehensively service the market, it's an opportunity not to be missed."

FOCUS ON: BOWEN BOTHA AND FAMILY

General Manager and Cellarmaster, Bowen Botha lives with his large family in a rambling Cape Dutch house in the Robertson village, 5 minutes away from the winery. It is reputedly the oldest house in the 'dorp', built early in the 19th century, but Bowen has had to build on extensively to cater for his family of seven children. And just when it seemed like they were mostly grown up and out of the house, his wife Ulyn began breeding rabbits, which have since taken over the garden!

Never a dull moment *chez* Botha, but then there's never a dull moment in the Robertson Winery either. Bowen has managed the cellar for 22 years and since then has played a key role in its astounding success, perhaps putting the skills acquired fathering such a large brood into managing this winery comprising 35 farms and growing 1800ha of grapes.

Originally from a stock farm in the north of South Africa near the Limpopo River, winemaking did not feature as a career option for Bowen. But after completing a Bachelor of Science degree at Pretoria University, he came down to spend the holidays with his parents, who had since moved to the Cape, and a family friend offered him a job as a cellar hand in the Perdeberg cellar. He ended up staying on and managing the place for 10 years.



Bowen and Ulyn Botha, (6th from left) with family.

When he moved to Robertson in 1982 the winery produced only bulk wine which it sold wholesale and mostly for brandy distillation. But Bowen is a strong believer that you must be master of your own destiny, and felt the future of the winery lay in making and marketing their own wine. At that time few people believed that the Robertson area could produce anything better than 'stookwyn' (wine for distillation) but Bowen strove to prove otherwise.

In 1987 Robertson produced wine under its own label but no-one was interested in buying it due to the poor perception in the market of wines from the Robertson area, particularly for reds. But Bowen doggedly stuck to his guns, bought his own barrels and matured the wine himself, producing in the end a fine wine that raised eyebrows all round. The company was therefore able to offer retailers a quaffable red wine, along with a more than respectable Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Colombar.

So when sanctions dropped in the early '90s, Robertson Winery was perfectly positioned to take on the international market, which is why it has been able to stay ahead of the pack even now. Today, besides the above-mentioned cultivars, the winery produces a comprehensive range including Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Merlot, Pinotage, Ruby Cabernet and Chenin Blanc as well.

And as for Bowen, with all but 1 child out of the house, and Robertson Winery ticking away merrily, one would think he deserves to rest on his laurels, but not so. To keep such a large ship on course requires hands-on management and a clear vision. Quiet and unassuming, with a friendly, open manner, one is easily fooled by the modest Mr Botha. But don't be, this astute man plays a key role in pumping the big heart of Robertson Winery.

THE FLEET-FOOTED MESSENGER

Long and lanky Alfred Esau is the messenger for Robertson Winery, running errands for all and sundry. "Running" being the operative word, because this champion long-distance runner has just completed the 87km long Comrades Marathon, one of the world's most grueling ultra-marathons.

Alfred has been working for the company for seven years but has lived in Robertson all his life. He started running while still at school, winning success in the 3000m and 5000 metre races and progressing to marathon running later on. He's completed three Two Oceans Ultra Marathons, Cape Town's slightly milder yet more scenic version of the Comrades, and was selected to take part in the South African Championships in 1997. But this year saw his first entrance into South Africa's no.1 race which is run between Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

To enter for the Comrades, Alfred had to complete several qualifying marathons around the Western Cape, something which proved quite tricky for the 37 year old. Not having his own car, and public transport being non-existent in these parts, Alfred had to hitch-hike to the races, which normally start at dawn, and sometimes, if lifts were slow and infrequent, he would miss the race. "And I had to pay the entrance fees long before," he explains. But the Winery flew Alfred up to KwaZulu-Natal for the Comrades race, putting him up in a hotel along with the rest of his running club, Harmony Western Province Athletic Club. He completed the race in a respectable 7 hours 54 minutes, which earned him a Bill Rowan medal, missing the Silver medal by only 24 minutes.

"After the race I was very tired, and my legs were sore for three days," he says, "so now I know how Bruce Fordyce felt." But Alfred is determined to participate again next year and will try and improve his time.



Alfred Esau

Alfred runs every single day, usually twice a day for an hour at a time, getting up at 5am and running another 12km after work. Then on the weekends he runs for three hours on Saturday and Sunday. Before a race he tries to carbo-load but finds mealie meal much more affordable than pasta, the traditional runners' grub. Running shoes are also an expense, as he goes through two to three pairs per year: "My wife complains about the shoes because they are so expensive."

Alfred is the father of three children, two girls aged 13 and 9 and then a son, also Alfred, aged 12, who sometimes accompanies him on his runs. "Running is good because it keeps you away from a lot of bad things," he says, "that's why I encourage my son to do it too."

And how does he stay motivated? Well, it seems that Alfred needs little more inspiration than reading the odd Runners' World Magazine. "It's mostly in your head," he says quietly, "I enjoy running, and so I can motivate myself."

PROFILE: JENNY RATCLIFFE



Jenny Ratcliffe

At 29, Jenny Ratcliffe is the youngest person ever to achieve South African Master of Wine. Quite a mean feat considering her age, but also her very demanding job as Export Manager for Robertson Winery.

The company exports 600 000 cases annually to over 25 countries, which amounts to filling 15-20 containers per week. Imagine the logistics getting the wine labeled correctly, packaged, transported to the docks and loaded onto the right ship so often, especially when she seems to spend most of her time out of the office, visiting customers and developing new business across the globe.

Jenny comes from a well-known Cape wine family but a career in wine was not her initial choice. She originally had set her heart on the catering industry, putting in a year at a cooking school in France before completing a degree in French and Political Science at Stellenbosch University. Once she had graduated Jenny set up her own catering company in Cape Town but soon got tired of the odd hours: "food was also becoming a bit one-dimensional for me, wine was proving much more exciting and challenging," she says. Thereafter followed a 2 ½ year stint as the Wine Selector for Woolworths, South Africa's top end retailer: "I spent my time going out to farms, tasting and selecting wines, and so I developed a good feel for what the market wants and how to respond to that."

It was during this time that Jenny began her Master of Wine course. The course is mainly self study but entrants are required to pass eight exams in total covering all aspects of the wine industry and including stiff tasting exams.

Asked what impact her new MW title affords her, and Jenny is quite modest: "Well, it does give me more credibility in the industry, which means I get invited to taste on wine panels quite often, and that is always good experience for me and my job." And speaking of the which, it appears that Jenny loves her job: "The marketing of wine is a fascinating phenomenon and our wines are showing double digit growth in every country we operate in, which makes my job very exciting and challenging."

So does this go-getter get time to do anything else? "Well, I run in my spare time - watch out Alfred! - and I love scuba diving when I get the chance. "Oh yes and I'm writing a book," she adds quickly, "it's a tongue-in-cheek, entry level book for first time wine drinkers that I'm hoping to publish next year."

All this by the age of 29! Seems like the sky's the limit for this mover and shaker.

WHAT'S UP?

I caught Robertson winemaker Jacques Roux racing between laboratory, barrel cellar and bottling line. There's often the perception that winemakers work their butts off during harvest, and then park off with their feet on the desk in between times, waiting for the wine to do its thing. Not so, post harvest is almost as busy as harvest, ask Jacques, right now he's making up the final blend for the 2004 whites, and blending the reds to go into barrels for maturation. He's also bottling the 2003 red wines that have just come out of the barrel and is also racking the King's River Chardonnay 2004 putting it back in the barrel until September when it too will be bottled.

The viticultural team has just finished the 'voorsnoei' which is the initial basic pruning of the vineyards, and then in a week or so they will start the 'stompsnoei' where the canes are cut right down to the 10 buds that will form the foundation for the next season's vines.

In between all this activity, every now and then, someone gazes heavenwards wondering when the winter rain is finally going to make its appearance. We were thrilled with the ½ inch we received last weekend and apparently there is another cold front on the way which will hopefully bring some more much-needed rain.



Jacques Roux

VINEYARD SELECTION: NEW RELEASES

To date the Vineyard Selection range represents Robertson Winery's premium wines. These are limited release wines made from single vineyards that have been carefully selected by the winemaking team and represent the terroir of that specific area and the quality that the Robertson area is capable of producing. Each wine takes its name from the particular farm on which the designated vineyard is found. This is only the second vintage that has been released, the first being very well-received by the market place.



Robertson Valley

The **Retreat Sauvignon Blanc 2004** was made from the grapes of a single vineyard with well weathered shale soils on a south-facing slope of the Riviersonderend Mountain range, 350 metres above sea level and the highest vineyard in Robertson, on the farm Retreat, which has been in the De Wet family since 1896.

During the summer this vineyard is cooled in the afternoon by breezes from the southern ocean, enabling an extended ripening season and therefore good quality fruit with concentrated flavours and a fine acidity.

The wine exhibits appealing aromas and flavours of ripe granadilla, pineapple and melon, with a touch of flintiness. The crisp acidity balances well with the fruit and ends on a mineral note.

The 2003 vintage was served in South African Airways' First Class and achieved 91 points in Wine & Spirits Magazine, USA and we are sure the 2004 vintage will do even better.



The **Prospect Hill Cabernet Sauvignon 2003** comes from a south-east facing vineyard on the slopes of the Zandvliet Mountains on a farm owned by the Bruwer family since 1956. Deep, well-drained red Karoo soils with a generous lime content result in a low yield with excellent flavour concentration.

The wine was fermented in traditional open tanks and then matured for 12 months in a combination of new and second fill barrels resulting in a wine with intense blackcurrant aromas leading to ripe cassis, chocolate and an earthiness on the palate. Strong tannins ensure a well-defined structure and excellent ageing potential.

The 2002 vintage was awarded a silver medal at the International Wine & Spirit Competition so we have high hopes for the promising 2003.

The grapes for the **Wolfkloof Shiraz 2003** were picked from a south-facing vineyard at the foot of the Langeberg Mountains, with excellent water-retaining soils. Careful vineyard management resulted in a low yield of small berries with excellent flavour concentration. The farm has belonged to the Viljoen family since 1886.

Also fermented in open tanks, malolactic fermentation took place in the barrel. Delicious aromas of mulberry, cinnamon

and cloves follow through to blackberries and spice on the palate. Soft, ripe tannins and well-integrated oak provide structure and a velvety mouthfeel.

The previous vintage of this wine was a real winner achieving four stars in the local Platter Guide, a gold medal in the local Veritas Awards and selected to be served on South African Airways' First Class. Internationally it was also highly rated with a silver medal at the International Wine & Spirit Competition.



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