

ESTABLISHED 1941

ROBERTSON WINERY



SMALL TOWN, BIG HEART.

NEWSLETTER - JULY 2005

FOCUS ON: BRIAAN STIPP

Until now, Robertson Winery has always employed a viticultural consultant on a part-time basis, but with the ever-increasing focus on grape quality, they realized it was time to employ someone full-time, whose soul function would be to optimize, upgrade and manage the vineyards. Hence the appointment of Briaan Stipp to oversee all 1 900 ha of vineyards that supply grapes to Robertson Winery.

Briaan has a good idea of Robertson terroir, as well as that of the Robertson Winery farms having worked as a viticultural consultant in the valley for over 10 years. In fact, Briaan was born in Robertson, and, besides the time he spent studying Viticulture at the University of Stellenbosch, he has lived there all his life.

Briaan is married to Diana and together they have 3 lively children. Their boys, Dehan (8) and Janico (5) enjoy fishing at Struisbaai with their father, but their daughter Anandi (1) is still too small for such adventure.

Briaan views his new position as a great adventure: "This job is an exciting new challenge for me," he says, "because I'm moving nearer to the market. I've spent years in the vineyards consulting as an academic, but now I have the chance to really make a difference to the quality and character of the end product."



To this end, Briaan joined Marketing Manager Johann Meissenheimer on a trip to the London Wine Trade Fair to get a taste of what the market really wants. "I've been on technical tours of Chile, France and California," explains Briaan, "but I've never actually visited the marketplace and formed a firsthand picture of what the consumer is looking for.

His comment upon his return: "It's quite intimidating to see all those wines from all those countries together - it made me appreciate for the first time just how big the competition is. We were also able to benchmark our wines against our international competitors and see just how we can improve on price and quality. The challenge is that unique combination. You see, I can spend loads of money and time in a vineyard and produce a stunning wine, but then I'll have to charge a lot for that wine to make a profit. So for me, the challenge is how to optimize different vineyards for different wines at different price points and always offer quality.

PHANTO RIDGE PINOTAGE

Rupert de Vries and his young family lived the high life in Johannesburg. He was an accountant for a multi-national company earning big bucks, living in a fancy house, driving a luxury motorcar and enjoying a much-needed annual holiday at an exotic destination.



That all changed one evening eight years ago when his brother-in-law Paul Marais, called him up and suggested they buy a farm together in Robertson. Now Paul was already farming in the area but he had heard that a neighbouring farm was coming up for auction and thought that he and Rupert might make a go of it together.

The very next morning the family hopped on a plane to come and see the farm for themselves and decided immediately to put in an offer. No sooner had the offer been accepted than Rupert, his wife, Liz and their two small children sold up everything and moved down onto the sadly neglected farm and into the tumbling down farmhouse.

Driving onto the farm today, it's hard to believe that it was once so derelict. The farm boasted a mere 15 hectares of vineyard but over the years Rupert has built that up to 115 hectares of various cultivars for red and white wines. The farmhouse has been spruced up and there are horses, chickens, cows and various litters of puppies and kittens wandering about the farmyard.

A few years ago, Rupert decided to experiment with a vineyard of Pinotage planted quite close to the Breede River, which forms the northern border of their farm. By restricting the yield severely and improving the canopy management considerably, he was able to produce grapes that Vineyard Selection winemaker Jacques Roux could get excited about.

Jacques fermented the grapes in small open fermentors, punching the cap manually every 3 hours to extract flavour and colour. The wine spent 12 months in a combination of French and American oak barrels. This is a medium-bodied wine with delicious strawberry aromas indicating its typical varietal character. The soft, juicy palate with hints of chocolate and plum pudding shows soft, ripe tannins, well-integrated oak and a velvety mouthfeel. The ideal accompaniment to this wine would be a lamb and mushroom casserole or roast pork.

Sitting out on the verandah at Phanto Ridge, gazing across toward the river and sipping this delicious wine one is struck by the tranquil, naive beauty of the place. "We didn't do this for the money," says Rupert, "It's the way of life."

Oh, for a 'farm in Africa'.

TIM AND JERRY VISIT DISNEYLAND

Tim Rands and Johann Meissenheimer, along with representatives from the Indigo Wine Group, participated in the 62nd annual Convention of the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America at the Swan and Dolphin Hotels in Orlando, Florida.



From left to right: Richard Gupta, Tim Rands, Jerry Stephan & Rufus Ashworth

Distributor meetings were scheduled in advance with both existing and potential new distributors while wine tastings were

also given. The three Indigo Wine Group associates, Rufus Ashworth, Jerry Stephan and Richard Gupta, agreed that the time and expense of the exercise was well worth it and that the interest in the Robertson Winery product was 'as good as it gets'. All agreed that there was great potential for South African wines in the US market and that Robertson Winery offered the edge on quality and a professional infrastructure provided through the Indigo Wine Group. The Phanto Ridge Pinotage referred to earlier has a great hit and already the first allocation has sold out.

Overall, Robertson Winery is fairing exceptionally well in the North America. By May this year, wine sales had already exceeded the entire sales figure for 2004 and the brand is now available in over 30 states across the USA.

GAUTENG CELEBRATES THE ROBERTSON VINEYARD SELECTION

A select group of trade and press gathered at the exclusive Cavatore Restaurant at Monte Casino, Johannesburg, a few weeks ago to taste through the Vineyard Selection range. The resident chef conjured up a superb five-course menu to match each of the wines in the range and guests were suitably impressed. A highlight was a surprise sip of the No.1 Constitution Road Shiraz 2002 which is much sought-after both here and abroad, and very hard to come by these days. The evening ended with a glass of the Platter 5-star wine, Almond Grove Noble Late Harvest 2001 that sealed the fate for any Doubting Thomas that Robertson Winery can produce a range of top quality wines to match this country's finest.



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