

*They are not long, the days of wine and roses; Out of a misty dream,
Our path emerges for a while, then closes Within a dream.
Ernest Dowson 1867-1900
Vitae Summa Brevis Spem Nos Vetat Incohare Longam [1896]*

February 2008

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CORNELIUS

Marlene Dumas is reportedly the highest-paid living female artist in the world. Her work, currently on exhibition in South Africa, is confrontational to say the least.

Cornelis Dumas, her brother, has been quietly making wine on the family farm near Kuils River with the same dedication as his sister, expressing himself and his family terroir with similar integrity but in an entirely different manner.

“Every artist dips his brush in his own soul, and paints his own nature into his pictures.”

Henry Ward Beecher: Proverbs from the Plymouth Pulpit 1887

You're likely to miss the turnoff to Jacobsdal as you venture along the Polkadraai Road towards Stellenbosch. Turn right at the modest signpost and then travel down the bumpy road and you'll come across a beautiful old cellar. The place is quiet and neat, just like Cornelius, even in the middle of the harvest.

Inside the cellar, the wine is gently bubbling away on its skins in open tanks. No gleaming stainless steel, no fancy yeast strains, no state of the art equipment. In fact, little has changed in this cellar since it was built in 1921 when Cornelius's grandfather and his five brothers made their first wine.



“You know at university they tell the students never, ever to try and make wine with natural yeasts, but I have been doing it for 40 years and never once have my grapes not started fermenting, and never once has the fermentation got stuck.”

Why change a recipe that works so well?” questions Dumas, who personally oversees the grapes coming in and watches himself for fermentation to start, taking it off the skins at just the right time and pumping it into the ancient settling tanks where malolactic fermentation also begins spontaneously. “We only leave the wine on the skins for 3 days because our dryland vineyards produce wines with very concentrated flavours and thick skins that give that lovely dark colour.”

CAPPELEGENDS

"I'm not aiming for a 'lipstick' wine," explains Cornelis, quoting wine legend Gunther Brozel, who eschewed the New Word tendency for big upfront fruit. "I make a wine with a shy nose that only leads you on to discover the wine in the glass."

And that philosophy has proved successful over the years. Selected on several occasions for the ABSA Top Ten and also a recent gold medal winner at the Selection Mondiales in Canada, the Jacobsdal Pinotage has also become a legend in its own right.

His daily routine has also changed little over the last 40 years. Up every morning at 05:00, he opens the cellar at 06:00 and hands out the tasks for the day to his trusty workers. "We don't really get in contract labour even in the harvest," he says, "our workers have been living on the farm for generations and love the place as much as we do."

Breakfast is at 09:00, lunch at 12:30 and everyone goes home around 17:30, "except in the harvest when we can be up all night," he smiles wryly. Cornelis spends his day between the vineyard and the cellar. "It's just me and my son Hannes, we do everything," he says proudly, "I've been making the wine so long now, I just know when the grapes are ready to pick, and when to do what in the cellar it's my life."

In fact it's his art, he's passionate about it, and it is expressed superbly in the Jacobsdal Pinotage. Tony Lord of Decanter Magazine described an early version of the wine as: "An initial impression of lightness on the palate with underlying body and an almost burgundian silkiness. A very pleasurable wine if not overtly Pinotage." And that about sums up Cornelis as well.

NEWS FROM THE FARMS

ALTO ALSO GETS A FACELIFT

Alto, meaning high up, obviously has a great view, but visitors have never had the chance of seeing it.

Now, as part of a total overhaul of the Alto cellar, visitors can enjoy a spectacular vista over the valley, False Bay and Table Mountain as they sample Alto's robust red wines.



It's obvious that the usually reserved Schalk van der Westhuizen is excited about developments on the farm. "I've got 7 new fermentation tanks and a brand new cellar which is so much more spacious," he explains, "I was always black and blue from trying to manoeuvre my way around my tiny old cellar." The maturation cellar has also been enlarged so that he can age all his wines on the premises. While his only piece of new equipment is the offloading bin for the grapes as they arrive at the cellar, the existing presses, tanks etc. have been reinstalled in the new cellar and are waiting eagerly for their first batch of Cabernet Franc due to arrive in a few days.

"We've tested everything, and we're ready to go," says Schalk with uncharacteristic impatience.

May the games begin ...

NEWS FROM ABROAD

- Christoph Merchiers from our Belgian agent, Rouseu reports: The 3-star Michelin rated restaurant 'Hof van Cleve' in Flanders served Alto Cabernet Sauvignon 1998 with their set menu in January with overwhelming success! 'Hof van Cleve' is one of Europe's leading gastronomic restaurants and is also a member of 'Les Grandes Table du Monde'.



Sommelier Martin Soenen (left) and Christoph Merchiers from Rouseu South African Wines Belgium.

- 'Taste-Monde' (French for 'Taste the World') is a famous restaurant in Paris with a reputation for serving the best wines from all over the world matched with creative dishes. For several years Stellenzicht, Hill&Dale, Le Bonheur and Uitkyk have featured on their winelist, but the restaurant recently launched the Allesverloren Cape Vintage 2003 (port), which was enthusiastically received by his clientele.



Christoph Merchiers (left) restaurant team (middle) Hervé Toulemonde, French agent for Cape Legends (right)

- Margareta Lundeberg from Sweden, reports:
We received great reviews from Bengt-Göran Kronstam, one of the most prominent journalists in Sweden who writes for "Dagens Nyheter" a leading newspaper in this country. The Lomond Syrah 2005 was awarded a "Bargain" 3+ (the best score) along with the following comment: "no secrets hidden, the taste is deep, but clean and concentrated. It is very well made, good potential and convincing style."

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