

INDEX

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF....

AWARDS

NEWS FROM THE FARMS

UPCOMING EVENTS

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF ...**Estelle Lourens, Winemaker of Uitkyk Wine Estate**

The skills of feisty female winemaker Estelle Lourens were almost lost to the wine industry as she was set on studying Biophysics to dedicate herself to cancer research. Luckily, a year into her studies she realised that as the outdoorsy type, she didn't want to spend the rest of her life in a laboratory. Despite not knowing anything about the wine industry let alone drinking wine, winemaking appeared to be a fitting choice as it combined the outdoors, the laboratory and the cellar.

Her special winemaking talents soon kicked in and she aced top of her class with a Bachelor of Science degree in Oenology and Viticulture from the University of Stellenbosch. After graduating, Estelle headed overseas to gain further practical experience at Tatachilla Cellar in Australia followed by Simi Cellar in Sonoma Valley, California. Back on home turf, she started her career as assistant winemaker at Neethlingshof in 1997 where she worked under Schalk van der Westhuizen, followed by a three year stint at the sister farm, Stellenzicht, where she further honed her winemaking skills under the watchful eye of accomplished winemaker Guy Webber.

Estelle's appointment at the end of 2000 as Uitkyk winemaker was a completely new challenge, being solely responsible for making the wines. "At the same time, it was a great experience and opportunity to spread my wings and do my own thing," she said

Since her appointment at this beautiful estate, an extensive replanting programme has taken place to ensure that the vineyards perform at their peak. Traditional noble cultivars replaced old ones and exciting Italian varieties such as Nebbiolo and Sangiovese were added to the mix.

"My approach towards winemaking is very scientific. I want to know what is going on with the grapes, the wine and the products but one can only be in control up to a certain point and then the wines take over and do their own thing. That is the surprise element of each harvest – you can do everything in your power to ensure a good wine but in the end the inherent quality of the grapes determine the outcome of the wine," said Estelle, who loves working with Sauvignon Blanc and Cabernet Sauvignon in particular as she finds their fickleness such a challenge.

During the rush of harvest time Estelle works side by side with the winemaking team at Uitkyk, being the first one to unlock the cellar in the morning and in the evening she is the last to leave after the floors have been scrubbed. "To the great amusement of the team initially, I somehow find it very therapeutic to scrub away the last husks of the grapes at the end of the day," she added.



During the rest of the year Estelle keeps herself busy with all the day to day demands of running a cellar such as quality control, making blends, bottling, doing the necessary paperwork and attending marketing events and wine tastings. “Basically I cover a bit of everything, from getting my hands dirty during the harvest season to attending the glitzy events later in the year – it is all these different aspects of a winemaker's role that keep me hooked on the job. And although it is extremely hard work, I am passionate about what I do and very proud of what we have achieved with Uitkyk so far. I wouldn't swap my job for anything!” she concluded.

AWARDS

Five international awards for Plaisir de Merle Cabernet Sauvignon 2005

Plaisir de Merle's Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 has proved to be an out an out international winner – garnering no less than five international awards in 2008.



No sooner had the announcement been made that the 2005 Cabernet Sauvignon had scooped gold at the 2008 Swiss International Airlines Wine Awards, news came that the wine had won a gold medal at the 2008 Concours Mondial de Bruxelles. This highly regarded competition held in Bordeaux this year, attracted over 6000 entries.

The “most influential wine competition in the world”, the Decanter World Wine Awards 2008 with its 9 219 entries, awarded Plaisir de Merle Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 a silver medal. According to Decanter Awards chairman, Steven Spurrier, “winning a silver medal in the Decanter World Wine Awards is the equivalent of winning a gold from other competitions” - quite a statement from this respected wine media brand that reaches over five million readers.

At the third Wine & Spirits Asia, held in Singapore where over 500 entries were judged by influential connoisseurs in the industry, Plaisir Merle Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 was one of the only two recipients from South Africa to receive a silver from the total of 38 silvers awarded.

Latest news is that this amazing Plaisir de Merle Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 has won a silver medal at the 4th Mundusvini International Wine Award held in Germany, also one of the largest recognised wine competitions in the world with no less than 5 343 entries.

Cellarmaster Niel Bester of Plaisir de Merle has always maintained that he “likes to make wines that will be internationally acceptable”. And the achievements of his Plaisir de Merle Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 are overwhelming proof, that they are not only acceptable, but winners.

NEWS FROM THE FARMS

Spectacular Swartland Food & Wine pairing evening at Allesverloren

Allesverloren Estate, the oldest wine farm in the Swartland famous for its acclaimed Port and Shiraz, recently hosted a special 12-course food & wine evening in the Allesverloren Function & Conference Venue. Guests were treated to 12 delectable dishes each skillfully matched to one of the distinctive wines from the 12 participating cellars that are situated in the Swartland region. Allesverloren's acclaimed Port was served with a lavish cheese platter with cherries and preserved fruit as a delightful ending to this pleasurable and very successful evening.



Danie Malan (front row, far right) passionate owner and winemaker of Allesverloren Estate with fellow Swartland winemakers during the highly successful Swartland Food & Wine Pairing Evening.

Neethlingshof Lord Neethling Cabernet Sauvignon a festive favourite at The Royal Grill Restaurant

The Royal Grill restaurant at The Royal Hotel in Durban was recently the only restaurant in KwaZulu-Natal to win the highest accolade – a Diamond Award- at the 2008 Diners Club Wine List Awards.

This highly acclaimed restaurant's Executive Chef, Grant Parker, chose the Neethlingshof Lord Neethling Cabernet Sauvignon as the perfect accompaniment to his unique version of the traditional festive fare.

His dish of choice is a trio of springrolls comprising smoked green tea turkey, honey glazed gammon, chestnut and cranberry stuffing served with a light curry and saffron sabayon and crispy crackling. This dish, a fusion between the West and the East, is ideal to serve as an appetizer or a main dish. "The upfront fruit flavours of the wine beautifully complement the meat and the curry sabayon, yet its soft medium-bodied character does not overpower the flavours of the springrolls".



UPCOMING EVENTS

The Swartland celebrates 350 years of wine making in the Cape



2009 is a very special year for the South African wine industry as it marks 350 years of wine making in the Cape.

As part of this joyous occasion Allesverloren Estate will be the host when the Swartland Wine Route together with SANTAM celebrates the 350th anniversary with an enchanting evening affair at this historic farm in Riebeeck West on Saturday, 31 January 2009.

Delicious dishes reminiscent of the past accompanied by the best wines in the Swartland will be served during this festive evening. Guests can also enjoy the fresh acoustic sounds of music duo Lizette le Roux (cello) and Emrie de Klerk (violin), whilst a special performance by the Riebeek Valley community theater group, depicting the history of wine in the Cape will add a special touch to this memorable event. Tickets cost R450 per person and booking is essential. For more information or bookings contact Eugene Nortjé Tel: 076 555 7736 or send an email to info@sanctuary-interiors.co.za.



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