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NEWS FROM THE FARMS****A DAY AT PLAISIR DE MERLE**

Plaisir de Merle has a rich, fascinating history. It all started when Huguenot Charles Marais left the hamlet of Le Plessis Marly in France in 1687 and set sail for the Cape of Good Hope, lured by the promise of a new life free of religious persecution and poverty.

The Marais family was granted the farm near Simondium in 1693, which they named after their home town, Le Plessis Marly. The name gradually evolved over the years to become Plaisir de Merle. The farm remained in the Marais family for close on 200 years and they built the beautiful Cape Dutch manor house in 1764.



Plaisir de Merle is one of the largest single, continuous wine farms in the Cape, spanning 974 hectares. Of this area about 365 hectares are planted with a variety of noble grape cultivars. An area of only about 80 hectares of prime vineyards has been set aside for the Plaisir de Merle cellar.

The wine farm is unique with its variety of soils, slopes and elevations – the highest point above sea level is 500 metres and the lowest 140 metres – facilitating optimum growth conditions suited to each variety planted.

Ecological awareness is an important concern at Plaisir de Merle and in 2005 it was one of the first wine farms to have been awarded membership of the Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI), in recognition of its efforts to re-establish the natural habitat on large areas of the farm.

Efforts to rehabilitate fynbos at Plaisir de Merle were begun 20 years ago through the ongoing removal of invasive alien vegetation, mainly hakea. Five years ago, this programme was extended to include other aliens such as black wattle and pine trees. Much has already been spent on rehabilitating the land, funded from the income derived from a large commercial pine plantation on the farm.

Where the trees have been harvested, fynbos has been re-established with many wild olive trees also making their appearance. Other indigenous plants and trees are being planted, such as Cape Yellowwood, Henkel yellowwood, Acacia, Fever Trees, red and white alders, etc. The final section of the former forest will then be rehabilitated to fynbos.

In other sections where the trees have been removed from a large area of the farm indigenous buchu, known for its natural oils and its medicinal uses, have been planted.

The person driving this project is farm manager and viticulturist, Freddie le Roux.

The farm, stretching from the Simonsberg escarpment virtually to the Berg River down in the valley, supports a rich biodiversity of animal and plant life while the two rivers flowing through the land also harbour indigenous fish species.

The fynbos high up on the Simonsberg abounds in protea species while indigenous trees and thicket cover the ravines, providing a habitat for the extensive wildlife that ranges from various buck and porcupines to leopards and lynxes.



Waterfowl are plentiful as are guinea fowl and pheasants with frequent sightings of fish eagles and black eagles.

In the cellar, the philosophy at Plaisir de Merle is one of simplicity rather than excessive sophistication and although the latest technology is employed in the winemaking process, cellarmaster Niel Bester still believes in a hands-on approach and the integration of vineyard with winemaking practices to produce wines of unsurpassed quality which are extremely sought-after locally and internationally.

The Plaisir de Merle range consists of a Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot, whilst special wines such as a Shiraz and Grand Plaisir are available on a limited basis only from the cellar.

NEWS FROM THE FARMS

A night of a thousand glasses



Sumptuous tables festooned with rows of glimmering, shimmering glasses welcomed 100 guests at Cape Legends' Night of a Thousand Glasses in November.

The gala occasion at the V & A Waterfront's luxury One&Only Hotel, was held as a tribute to the award-winning winemakers in the Cape Legends stable and featured their best-of-best wines, ahead of the summer season.

Guests were treated to an enviable line-up of ten wines, each paired with a taste-size portion of contemporary international cuisine. The inventive, original but finely composed dinner was conceived jointly by the hotel's executive chef, Nick Hazzard, and sommelier André Bekker, who introduced each course.

Gansbaai estate Lomond showcased its Decanter International Wine Awards trophy winner, the single-vineyard, cool-climate Pincushion Sauvignon Blanc 2007, with a plump, briny oyster topped with bacon. A different interpretation of oyster, succulently offset with cucumber, was matched with the 2009 vintage of the more tropical Le Bonheur Sauvignon Blanc from Stellenbosch. Stellenzicht's

celebrated 2006 Semillon was paired with paper-thin veal carpaccio, rocket foam and shaved potato crisp, while the 2006 Plaisir de Merle Grand Plaisir was matched with duck leg confit and spiced red cabbage. Neethlingshof's lauded 2009 Weisser Riesling noble late harvest, The Maria, was served with a clear tokai jelly, peaches and white chocolate.

Uitkyk's 10 Year Old Potstill brandy provided the grand finale rounded off with feather-light macaroons.



Johann and Sharon Crafford with Naas Erasmus and Deidre Samson, both of Cape Legends

New mouthwatering delights at Plaisir de Merle

Plaisir de Merle has embraced the festive season by offering a host of tasty pleasures with their wine tastings to celebrate summer.

The special Flavour Sensation tasting promises an experience that will trigger the taste buds whilst enhancing the dominant flavour of each of Plaisir de Merle's superb wines.



Delightful matches such as the Sauvignon Blanc served with sundried tomatoes, the Cabernet Sauvignon paired with fruit cake and the Shiraz with biltong are just some of the exiting combinations on this flavoursome journey. This unique tasting experience costs R50 per person.

For a light lunch, choose between a selection of mouthwatering quiches served with a glass of wine of your choice at R30 per person. You can also enjoy your favourite wine by the glass served with delectable bites such as olives, hummus and freshly baked bread at R30 per person. For more information contact Plaisir de Merle at Tel: 021 874 1071 or visit www.plaisirdemerle.co.za.



Bart Gijtenbeek, Managing Director of WalravenSax – one of the largest wine distributors on the Dutch market that also distributes the Cape Legends portfolio – recently paid Neethlingshof Estate a visit. Here he is with winemaker De Wet Viljoen (left) and Naas Erasmus (right) who heads the Cape Legends team.

Keep up with Flat Roof Manor and Hill&Dale on Facebook and Twitter

Flat Roof Manor and Hill&Dale devotees can now keep up to date with the latest news on their two favourite brands through Facebook and Twitter. Both brands went live recently, so click on the following links to become a part of their circle of friends.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Flat-Roof-Manor-Cat/165779104554?ref=nf>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/HillDale/201167633377?ref=nf>

<http://twitter.com/HillandDaleWine>

<http://twitter.com/FlatRoofManor>

Beverly Hills Hotel pairs its fine cuisine with Cape Legends wines

Holder of a coveted 2009 Diamond Diners Club Wine List Award, the Beverly Hills Hotel situated in Umhlanga Rocks is renowned for its superb personal service, luxury accommodation and fine dining. Executive Chef, Shaun Munro, selected two of his personal favourite Cape Legends wines as delightful taste partners for two of the restaurant's sought-after dishes.

For the steamed queen prawn and avocado cocktail he chose the Stellenzicht Semillon as this elegant and fresh, lightly wooded wine perfectly enhances the equally fresh flavours of the dish.

Red wine and meat lovers will find the ultimate taste combination in the Lomond Merlot paired with the study of lamb comprising a rosemary buttered roast rack, grilled Parma ham wrapped loin and slow-cooked shoulder wonton. "The great complexity of this Merlot pairs very well with the richness of the Karoo lamb," said Munro.





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