



# Stewardship of the land and beyond

A drive along the R44 from Klapmuts to Somerset West specifically and vividly reveals how the Stellenbosch winery ownership landscape has evolved. This meandering golden road criss-crosses between some of the region's most famous wineries, the owners of which vary from multigenerational and new South African wine families to corporate entities and international investors from the USA, Germany and France. By Edo Heyns.

On L'Avenir knowledge transfer and close cooperation characterise the relationship between the French and South African teams.





1 The three founders of the Stellenbosch Wine Route – Spatz Sperling, Frans Malan and Niel Joubert – raise a glass to 21 years. 2 Victor and Nora, here with parents Spatz and Vera, are currently serving on the board of family-owned Delheim.



At Le Riche Wines the family pitches in to make and market their wines. Son Christo (left) is the winemaker, Etienne owner and cellar master and daughter Yvonne handles marketing.

Stellenbosch has indeed undergone significant changes since Stellenbosch Wine Routes were established 50 years ago by four family-owned wineries. These shifts mirror trends that have been followed in fine wine producing regions across the globe. And while some may yearn for a bygone era of being hosted by the owner/winemaker at every winery, new investment is indicative of opportunity and a dynamic ownership mix which bodes well for a sustainable wine industry.

“In fact, we should have been worried if there wasn’t new interest in Stellenbosch’s vines and wineries. It’s an indication that Stellenbosch is coming of age and, in a South African context, it’s leading the pack,” explains Christo Le Riche, second-generation winemaker for the winery that carries his surname. “Investment appeal is critical in fine wine and if we do our job right, Stellenbosch will look like Napa when the next generation takes the helm,” he adds, in reference to the meteoric rise in wine and land prices in California’s most famous wine region.

Christo suggests that while family businesses contribute authenticity and stability to a wine region through decision-making that considers the future across generations, new investment is necessary to support primary grape growers.

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Quoin Rock's tremendous tourist appeal was developed and given new vigour thanks to owners Julia and Denis Gaiduk.



This sentiment is supported by fifth-generation winemaker at Kaapzicht, Danie Steytler. "The concept of stewardship in the wine industry has also evolved. It's not just a case of planting vineyards or nurturing your farm's soil for the next generation any more, but of making a contribution to the region and community. We need to support and build Brand Stellenbosch, to ensure that wine grape producers are profitable and sustainable. That's also why conventional Bottelary Hills grape growers support the impressive Russian investment and development at Hazendal. It brings investment, jobs and opportunities to our valley," notes Danie.

Mariota Enthoven (from the family that owns and manages Spier) highlights the importance of caring for the environment and systems design – incorporating tourism and a diversity of product offerings – to achieve prosperous environmental sustainability. "Of course, development is good, but you cannot just keep developing unsustainably," she emphasises. Spier is the entrance to Stellenbosch for many local and foreign tourists and Enthoven stresses that Stellenbosch needs to retain a natural, winelands feeling and that the family's stewardship role goes beyond the borders of the property. "It shouldn't just be a highway passing through. We need to become more philosophically aligned in understanding that the natural beauty of Stellenbosch is our real natural capital. Wine is more interesting in sympathy with the environment. If we want to be a fine wine brand, the food in your plate and the wine in your glass should be from a provenance that is alive."

Enthoven notes that the Covid-19 pandemic has enabled people to reconsider their lives and has made communities more aware of food scarcity and education needs. "Families and communities connected and really started working together. We have an opportunity to cement communities and engage in new ways," notes Mariota. Environmental sustainability is a cornerstone of Spier's winemaking and hospitality, and the carbon economy will play an increasingly important role in the winery's tourism and winemaking endeavours. "The monetary value of carbon needs to become part of the whole supply chain and the profit from selling carbon will go to the workers, so that broader communities can also benefit from environmental sustainability," confirms Enthoven.

The decision to establish a vineyard in Stellenbosch, was a straightforward one for us. The region has incredible potential to produce high-quality Bordeaux-style wines. It's also a magnificent and beautiful place. Purchasing Cordoba Estate marked the turning point for our family. Considered one of the best wine farms in South Africa, it had gained iconic fame for its exceptional wines. Its location high on the slopes of the Helderberg Mountain is perfectly suited for growing Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Building on the Cordoba legacy, and the one established by Chris Keet (previous winemaker and viticulturist), we began our South African adventure in 2018 with the release of Taaibosch Crescendo. We believe that at Taaibosch we have the potential to produce the best Bordeaux blend to come from South Africa.

**Lorraine Oddo, Taaibosch Wines**



Many of the greatest diamonds that the world has ever seen were discovered in Africa. Being a diamantaire, I have a special bond with this continent. I first visited Delaire when it was a modest vineyard, and I felt an immediate connection. The glorious landscape, the natural beauty, the high-altitude vineyards, the excellent terroir – I knew I couldn't live without seeing it again. Stellenbosch is truly breathtaking, and Delaire Graff Estate is the jewel in its crown.

**Laurence Graff, Delaire Graff**



In my travels I have been fortunate to visit many countries around the world. But few have captured my heart, and imagination, like South Africa. From my first visit, I was immediately captivated by the beauty of the landscape and the spirit of the people who call this remarkable country their home.

**Dr Mark Voloshin, Hazendal**

As an international investor, I have had my eye on South Africa since my first visit as a teenager. When a 22-hectare vineyard at the end of the Annandale Road in the Golden Triangle of Stellenbosch came up for sale, I knew immediately that this heavenly place would be mine and went on to build the winery in 2005 and Longtable Restaurant five years later. Of all my investments, Haskell Vineyards is especially close to my heart. The Stellenbosch winelands are possibly the most beautiful place on earth. With scenery to feed the soul, majestic mountains flanking well-tended vines that produce internationally recognised, award-winning Haskell and Dombeya wines. Truly paradise found.

**Preston Haskell, Haskell Vineyards**



Stellenbosch has truly impressive terroir, vineyards and wines, but importantly, also extraordinary people. From a French perspective, there are many aspects that we can relate to in Stellenbosch in terms of lifestyle and a shared passion for wine and the soil. Our investment in Stellenbosch is not only in the wines, but also in the land and the people – particularly future generations and leaders. Stellenbosch holds an important leadership position in South Africa, as the most reputable wine region and the centre for education and wine training. With deep roots and heritage in Stellenbosch, Pinotage is a unique variety and a valuable asset, which produces world-class wines.

**Antoine Leccia, President of Advini**

In 1993, I became president of the International Wine and Spirit Competition and I sponsored a trophy, called the Pichon Lalande trophy, that was awarded every year to the best red blend from around the world. To my great surprise, this trophy was awarded almost every second year to a South African producer, and always from Stellenbosch. This triggered me to start looking very closely at what was happening in the South African industry. Furthermore, I became good friends with Dr Anton Rupert, who convinced me that I should become part of the industry's development in South Africa. This is when I found Glenelly Estate, right on the edge of town, a sleeping beauty! My family and I have fallen in love with the area, and I am so glad I made this big decision 18 years ago.

**Madame May-Eliane de Lencquesaing, Glenelly**



The recent acquisition of Hidden Valley – the Helderberg winery which is also home to chef Bertus Basson's flagship restaurant, Overture – by businessman and president of the Confederation of African Football, Patrice Motsepe, is a key example of black investment kicking off in what used to be a predominantly white industry.

Consolidation of properties through acquisitions has resulted in the emergence of new players with greater scale, which can positively impact the region's global reach through larger volume brands. Furthermore, investment in new vineyard plantings can result in some properties returning to their former glory. MAN vintners' investment in Lieland Estate as well as Warwick's merger with Uitsig through its new US-based owners are prime examples of this. The investment of German real estate investor and industrialist Baron Hans von Staff-Reitzenstein in Stellenzicht, Ernie Els Estate and Alto Estate, has resulted in the consolidation of more than 1000 hectares in the Helderberg.

Foreign investment in Stellenbosch very often entails much more than the acquisition of land and vineyards, with extraordinary investment in hospitality, specifically resulting in the establishment of some of the world's most impressive wine tourism attractions. The magnificent Delaire Graff Estate is a key example of this, while more recent developments at Hazendal and Quoin Rock have added to the region's significant tourism appeal.

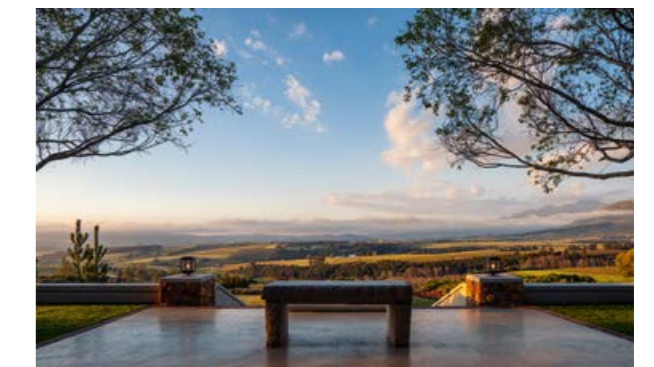
Managing partner at Swiss-owned De Toren Private Cellar, Albie Koch, adds that the value of foreign ownership in terms of global wine distribution channels should not be underestimated. "Investment in Stellenbosch by foreign owners is also an endorsement of the wines and region," notes Koch. De Toren's chairman and co-owner Cedric Nicolas Schweri owns and manages restaurants across Switzerland and the rest of Europe, which has rapidly become De Toren's most important market.

L'Avenir Wine Estate has also benefited from route-to-market advantages through its French owner Advini, but managing director Naretha Ricome adds that a symbiotic relationship between French and South African teams has been equally rewarding. "Advini's investment in Stellenbosch is a commitment to fine wines in Stellenbosch. This not only involves investment in people and

vineyards, but knowledge transfer and close collaboration between French and South African teams. Just like the French can benefit from South African best practice in wine tourism, our South African winemaking team is taking hands with their French counterparts for guidance in the conversion to organic production, which is a strength of Advini in France," explains Ricome.

If the trajectory of the Napa Valley is followed by combining the authenticity and cross-generational horizons of established and new Stellenbosch wine families, as well as the distribution, influence and sheer ambition of global and corporate investors, this dynamic mix should stand Stellenbosch in good stead.

This combination will also hugely benefit from a more significant proportion of local, black South African ownership, which is currently an acknowledged void in the broader wine industry. Furthermore, in the case of Stellenbosch, broader community participation and stewardship that does not follow the borders of properties will result in a prosperous and sustainable ecosystem of aspirational African excellence.



Golfer Ernie Els saw the future when he, in 2004, acquired a farm in the Helderberg as home base for Ernie Els Wines.