

Van Riebeeck's diary famously records that the first Cape wine grapes were harvested in February 1659. From the 1660s onwards the Dutch East India Company's nursery supplied vines and fruit trees to the burghers: these are the real beginnings of the wine industry. Van Riebeeck's own estate - called Bosheuvel - became a major agricultural enterprise. When it was purchased by Jacob Rosendaal after the commander had left the Cape in 1661, there were literally thousands of young vines. All this was lost over time to urban creep. Bosheuvel was acquired by the Colonial Bishopric Fund in the 1830s and renamed Bishops court. The last remnant of that era is the name of the suburb of Wynberg (Wine Mountain).

Today the Cape is full of old wine properties, many with slightly spurious claims about how long they've been in business. Groot Constantia's title deeds date from 1685: soon after Simon van der Stel occupied it he planted vineyards. Blaauwklippen has title deeds which pre-date Groot Constantia's but no evidence of grape farming. Rustenberg was established in 1682 - and has records showing that ten years later it was producing wine.

These days when we talk of old wine estates we generally mean those which were listed when the wine of origin legislation was promulgated in 1973. Graham Knox's excellent book, published in 1976, lists 64 properties, all of which had their own vineyards and cellars. Many are today virtually unknown - forgotten, renamed, transformed or defunct. Some are very much part of the modern Cape wine industry even if, with the tidal wave of new names and landless brands, they are not quite front of mind.

One such estate is Neethlingshof, originally known as Wolwedans, settled by Barent Lubbe, a German immigrant, in 1690. It rose to prominence when it was acquired by German businessman Hans Schreiber in the 1980s, who for most of the past twenty five years ran it as a joint venture with Distell. Even before his death late last year the Schreiber family had chosen to go it alone and re-build its independent presence. Under winemaker De Wet Viljoen the current releases are good (and good value) rather than striking, but with several wines worth tracking down. These include the 2018 Sauvignon Blanc which delivers fresh, bright tropical notes with great fruit intensity - all for R75. The single vineyards version (called Jackal's Dance as a tip-of-the-hat to the original farm name) is more substantial, with a price tag to match. Amongst the reds, The Owl Post Pinotage 2016 is a perfect example of new-wave pinotage, delicious accessible fruit, finely textured tannins and delivering easy, immediate drinkability.

Another estate famous from the early days of the modern wine industry is Alto, an altogether newer property only subdivided from a more ancient Helderberg farm in 1920. Its owner at the time - one Hennie Malan - sold the lower portion to his brother-in-law and elected to keep the upper slopes - hence Alto - for himself. It was destined to be a red wine property from the outset and it enjoyed instant show and commercial success. Its blended red - the Alto Rouge - won first prize in the 'dry red wine, Burgundy-type' class for six consecutive years from 1924 to 1929. Burgoyne's, a London wine merchant, bought a substantial portion of the production from 1924 to 1962.

Today Alto Rouge is still the best known of the estate's wine, with the latest release (the 2016) finer and more age-worthy than many of the recent vintages. Amongst the more premium-priced wines, the shiraz is a thoughtful balance between the leaner Rhone-like examples and the more robust Australian style. The cabernet is quite classical, though the vintages currently available (2013 and 2014), while polished enough, lack the excitement of the younger Shiraz and Rouge. At this stage Alto is a property to put on your "watch" list: under new cellarmaster Bertho van der Westhuizen and with big

investment from Distell, it should recapture some of its glorious past