

Surprising at this may seem, most of the more vocal members of the local wine scene prefer innovation to tradition. Unsurprisingly wine writers focus on “discovering” new talent and neglect the reliable and long-established wineries which form the heart of our quality wine trade. The volume of editorial dedicated to Meerlust, Rustenberg, Kanonkop, Vergelegen, Thelema, Tokara, Neil Ellis, Steenberg, Graham Beck and Jordan - to name but a few - is disproportionately small compared with the importance of the wines they produce, their presence in quality wine spaces and their share of high-end wine sales.

In the first decade of this century the number of wine producers in South Africa doubled. Even in the past five years, when the pace of change slowed perceptibly, there were at least 25 (usually more boutique-size) new wineries each year vying for a share of shelf-space. The long-established cellars don't appear to have lost much to these newcomers - a sign, perhaps, of how robust the top end of the business is, (but also how its expansion into foreign markets has made it possible this number of newcomers.)

Springfield Estate in Robertson is one of those frequently unsung producers. The property has been in the hands of the Bruwer family for four generations, and has been producing and bottling its own wines (as opposed to selling fruit or bulk wine) since 1995. During that time it has acquired an enviable reputation for its sauvignon blancs (in particular) - and as a result it's not often associated with other varieties. In fact, winemaker Abrie Bruwer is a dab hand at managing chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon, as well.

Both Abrie and his sister Jeanette (who handles the commercial and marketing side of the business) would happily admit to being a little unconventional. Some of this they attribute to their father, who would take them out of school for weeks or months at a time so that they could learn more from life, and less from a syllabus-driven education system. Perhaps it was this kind of upbringing which has inspired Abrie to risk experimental strategies with all of the main cultivars. Long before natural yeast ferments were fashionable, they were mandatory for several of his cuvées. (He also aged some of his *Methode Ancienne* Cabernet under water in Struisbaai for a couple of years - longer, in fact, than he had intended because it took some time to find).

Neither of the Springfield sauvignons need any introduction. Their hallmark feature is extraordinary intensity of flavour, the Life from Stone (unsurprisingly sourced from vines in the stoniest of sites) showing particularly concentrated passion-fruit and tropical aromas. The Miss Lucy blend of pinot gris, sauvignon and semillon is less showy, more textured, and clearly more of a food wine. The Wild Yeast Chardonnay is fermented and aged on ancient cement tanks. Despite the fact that it sees no oak, it has a wonderful leesy richness.

Probably my favourite wine is the *Methode Ancienne* Chardonnay (current release 2016). Always a high-risk wine to produce (there was no 2014 or 2015 because the ferments went wrong), when it comes right it delivers fabulous creaminess on the palate, plenty of citrus-like freshness, ample flavour and great longevity.

Both of the Springfield Cabernets are delicious - but in different ways. The Whole Berry delivers richness and nuttiness, the *Methode Ancienne* - the current release is the 1997 and it has aged beautifully - more earthy tertiary notes, with whiffs of forest floor.

Finally, the one Springfield wine everyone should buy doesn't come from Springfield at all: sold under the Thunderchild name it's a regional joint effort for the local orphanage (which turns 100 next year). Everyone involved in its production works pro bono. Except for inevitable third party costs (transport and possibly packaging) the entire proceeds of the R100 per bottle price goes to Die Herberg, to help deliver a better quality of life - and a better chance of a future - to the orphans in the community.