

It's become fashionable to celebrate the small volume hand-crafted wines produced often in tiny quantities using grapes acquired from growers who don't have wineries. This is no bad thing: before young, entrepreneurial winemakers sought out these unique parcels, the fruit landed up in massive receiving bins at co-ops where whatever virtues and charms they may have had was diluted by the averaging effect of the crush. These sites make it possible for landless winemakers to produce fabulous wines. Their successes have saved valuable old vineyards which would certainly have been lost (to other crops, or to more commercial replanting), while their enterprise has raised the profile of the Cape wine industry wherever journalists focus their craft on the excitement of "discoveries."

While the pursuit of the new is very much a 21<sup>st</sup> century phenomenon, there comes a point where the enterprise becomes self-defeating. London - fashion centre of the world of wine - demands a "new" and unknown cultivar more or less every year. Aglianico had its moment on stage a few years back, so did Assyrtiko. There's no point in producers slavishly following the expectations of so fickle a market. You can't plant the vineyards in time to catch the fashion: even if you could, you cannot expect to keep your wine on the pedestal for long enough to recover the planting costs, and the vineyard down time.

As soon as you accept that fashion should never be the overriding consideration, you can begin the slower, harder work of building a brand. Here is where the edgy newcomers to the market may stumble and fall. Great reviews for your first or second vintage may be the kind of encouragement you need to get up and running, but the business model needs a sustainable programme. The requirements here include secure fruit sources, sufficient working capital to maintain multiple vintages in the trade, and margin enough to accommodate a distributor who can deal with retailers (and collect debt). Without this kind of backing and infrastructure it will take only one less exciting vintage, one less enthusiastic review for the momentum to dissipate and the fragile nature of wine production cashflow to catch up with you.

On the other side of this equation are the producers who have been around for some time, who control their own production facilities, and who have equally splendid fruit sources. Several Stellenbosch properties come to mind. Of these, Bellevue (the Bottelary estate from which the original and now legendary Lanzerac Pinotage fruit was harvested in 1959) has been a little invisible for some time, but is now easing its way back into the market with some impressive Malbec and Pinotage.

Nearby Kaapzicht is also increasingly visible as the next generation takes over at the helm. While red wine has long been regarded as the cellar's primary focus, the fruit of some ancient Chenin blocks has played a major role in transforming the image of the estate. The most famous of these wines is the 1947 (now - as the name suggests - 71 years old) a Platter Five Star laureate with the weight, balance and intensity that can only emerge from perfect management of great fruit. I'm also a fan of Kaapzicht's Kliprug Chenin, as well as the Skuinsberg Cinsaut. Incidentally, Kaapzicht and Bellevue both share in the Kaapzicht 1952 Cinsaut, the fruit coming from Bellevue, the wine vinified at Kaapzicht.

Tertius Boshoff runs the Stellenrust winery situated on the slopes of the Helderberg, probably no more than 15 kms as the crow flies from Bottelary. Not all the fruit he crushes comes from this more maritime part of Stellenbosch. In fact, his 52 Barrel Chenin Blanc (from 52 year old vines) is made entirely from Bottelary grapes. This too is a Platter Five Star wine, a tribute as much to those who have nurtured the vineyard for more than half a century as it is to the winemaker who has, for the past decade, given the fruit the treatment it deserves.