

When I first visited Lafite in the 1970s the great Bordeaux estate had a very primitive packaging line: it took several months to bottle the vintage. The wine which came off the line last was clearly going to be different from the bottle which had been first off some time earlier. At Chateau Margaux in the same era the wine ran from the fermentation vats to the barrel cellar along open concrete sluices - a distance (from memory) of at least 20 metres - picking up oxygen and "sediment" along the way. This was how wine was made at two of the top estates in the world less than half a century ago.

Nowadays the wine business is intensely competitive. It's easy to find the wreckage of poorly conceived, ill-planned, and under-managed ventures which have failed. They stand as monuments to the naivety of those who threw (often enormous) quantities of money at trophy properties, imagining that passion and cash were all that was required for success.

In fairness, there was a time when strategies like this had a better chance - but that was a few decades back when much less was known about the importance of cellar hygiene and the science of viticulture. Today there's no room for perceptible defects. Too much oak, discernible acidification, lack of fruit intensity, over-filtration, high alcohol levels - the market has a long list of no-nos, which leaves very little room for enthusiastic amateurs.

There's evidence of this new professionalism in the Cape. Several of the high profile investments of the past decade are now starting to yield impressive results. Vitaly Gaiduk (from the Ukraine) acquired Quoin Rock in 2012 following the famous Auction Alliance "faked" auction. In the past six years the family has overseen essential redevelopment. While some older Stellenbosch vineyards were retained, 36 hectares were replanted. An extension to the winery also addressed some technical issues, such as the humidity levels in the barrel cellar. The estate - replete with the newly launched Gâte restaurant and luxury accommodation - is now back in business.

Visitors will find a whole new generation of wines, made mostly in a more modern, Californian idiom by Jacques Maree. The entry level Namysto range (with packaging inspired by Ukrainian beadwork) is the more savoury option, with shiraz and cabernet in the red blend and sauvignon and semillon in the white. The premium Quoin Rock range is more opulent. The estate's flagship red is plush and opulent, the tannins polished to a deep lustre, the 15% alcohol kept in check by appropriate acidity. The Quoin Rock chardonnay, like the estate red blend, is full and intense, the oak evident but balanced by the massive undertow of fruit. The top cuvées are beautifully packaged, as befits their R350 - R600 price points

Less than 10 kms away as the crow flies is Babylonstoren, where Naspers's Koos Bekker has spent serious money restoring and developing one of the most beautiful old properties on the Paarl side of the Simonsberg. In addition to the now famous gardens, restaurants and spa, the estate has returned to its roots as a wine producer. For several years the wines were offered with diffidence, a restraint appropriate to the youth of the vineyards. (Lest this sounds like damning with faint praise, consider this: most new owners pump their over-priced wines made from young vines into the market as soon as possible to claw some cash flow. It takes vision - and deep pockets - to follow this less aggressive approach).

The latest vintages reveal that this is no longer necessary. They show a thoughtfulness in the winemaking which suggests that the best wines of Babylonstoren will offer as much justification for a visit as the gardens and bakery. The Nebukadnesar 2016 is cabernet dominated, with the other Bordeaux varieties offering breadth and dimension to complement the cassis notes. The Chardonnay 2017 was my preferred wine - intense, Burgundian, with fruit-weight to match the time in barrel.