

Peter-Allan Finlayson

It's hard to move around the Cape without bumping into a Finlayson. Members of the extended family are in charge at Creation, Edgebaston and Bouchard Finlayson, as well as at Crystallum and Gabriëlskloof. There's also an historic connection with Hartenberg (where the first generation of the Finlayson winemaking dynasty, Dr Maurice and Eleanor, started in 1948) and Glen Carlou, founded by yet another Finlayson.

The family tree is actually a little simpler than it sounds. Maurice and Eleanor had two children (Walter and Peter), whose offspring (Carolyn and David in the first instance, Peter-Allan and Andrew in the second) have continued the winemaking tradition.

Peter-Allan is the baby of the family, born in Hermanus in 1981, when his father was the first winemaker at Hamilton Russell. 'I grew up around wine and saw how much fun it was,' he says, 'although then I was mostly interested in its effects rather than making it.'

The natural progression was to study oenology at Stellenbosch University, but in year three of a six-year course, Peter-Allan dropped out and switched to philosophy and economics. 'That's when I really got interested in wine,' he jokes. 'An arts degree gives you more perspective on the world. Also, a lot of the stuff you learn about oenology at university isn't that useful when it comes to making small quantities of fine wine. But if I'd gone on with the course, it would have saved me from some horrible mistakes.'

Some people assumed that, after graduation, Peter-Allan would join his dad, Peter, at Bouchard Finlayson, the Hermanus winery the latter helped to create after he left Hamilton Russell in 1990, and where he is still cellar master. But given that Peter had sold his shares in the business in 2000, this was a less appealing option for Peter-Allan than setting up his own business, Crystallum.

The first wines, made at

Creation – where owners, cousin Carolyn Finlayson and her husband Jean-Claude Martin, gave him free cellar space – were mostly a 'total f*** up'. Both the Chardonnay and Pinot Noir were poured down the drain, although Peter-Allan did make 4,134 bottles of Sauvignon Blanc. In 2008, he tried again with much greater success, using purchased fruit to make one Chardonnay (Clay Shales) and two Pinot Noirs (Peter Max and Cuvée Cinéma). Suddenly, there was a buzz about another Finlayson project.

Eight years on, Crystallum has established itself as one of the best cool-climate producers in the Cape, adding a further four wines to its line-up: a Chardonnay called Agnes, two single-vineyard Pinot Noirs, Mabalel and Bona Fide, and a Rhône blend, Paradisum, that Peter-Allan makes with his architect brother Andrew. Like many in South Africa's self-styled 'Zoo Biscuits' group of producers, he does not own vineyard land, preferring to source fruit from nine separate parcels in various parts of Walker Bay, covering 9.5 hectares.

In 2010, Peter-Allan met his now wife, Nicolene, whose father, Bernhard Heyns, had established Gabriëlskloof in Bot River in 2002. After a period sharing a cellar with university friend Chris Alheit of Alheit Vineyards, he now has a more permanent home at Gabriëlskloof, where he is also the cellar master, effectively combining two jobs. 'I don't have time for long lunches any more,' he says.

And what of his own father? Is Peter proud of what Peter-Allan has achieved with the two grapes that he helped to establish in Walker Bay? 'Every now and then, he'll say I've done OK. He's a man of few words, but it's great to be working in the same industry. I think he's secretly very happy about that.'

Two to try

Crystallum, The Agnes Chardonnay, Western Cape, South Africa, 2015 94

£20.99-£22.99

Liberty Wines, The Wine Reserve, The Wright Wine Co, Winedirect

From vineyards in Greyton and Overberg, this is the best Agnes release yet, combining zesty citrus peel notes with subtle oak and a creamy texture. **Drink** 2016-2021 **Alc** 13.5%

Crystallum, Peter Max Pinot Noir, Western Cape, South Africa 2015 92

£22.99-£24.99 Liberty Wines,

The Wine Reserve, The Vineking

This is always the earliest release of the Crystallum Pinots, and it's made in a juicy, fragrant, crowd-pleasing style, with summer berry sweetness and whole-bunch spice. **Drink** 2016-2019 **Alc** 14%

Tim Atkin MW is an award-winning writer, author and broadcaster, whose annual South Africa Special Report is available via his website timatkin.com ➤

'Every now and then, he'll say I've done OK. He's a man of few words, but it's great to be working in the same industry'

