SOUTH AFRICA’S YOUNG WINEMAKERS: THE CLASS OF 2002

Nelson Mandela brought a peaceful revolution to South Africa that opened the country to the rest of the world and, among other things, brought change and growth to its wine industry. Growth in wine exports and new programs introduced by the Cape Winemakers Guild and others created a unique window of opportunity for young winemakers, including those of color.

One result of these changes is South Africa’s youthful winemaking corps.

After spending a day visiting wineries in the Cape a few months ago, we had the pleasure of dining with Ntsiki Biyela of Stellekaya Winery. Our conversation with Ntsiki and, later, with her Stellenbosch University classmate Alex Starey, winemaker at Keermont Vineyards, led us to more systematically explore the career paths of their colleagues in the Class of 2002.

Hence, we decided, with Alex’s help, to see what his cohort of 2002 Stellenbosch University graduates are doing today. We found most of them, and give the details below. We also included a few other mostly young winemakers whom we met and tasted with on our recent travels in the Western Cape and who are about the same age, some of them graduates of the Elsenburg Agricultural School, others graduates of foreign wine schools, and still others self-educated.

The resulting picture is as diverse as South Africa itself. The class of 2002 includes some of the country’s first black winemakers, a large number of women, and sons and daughters of wine farmers as well as those who had no previous knowledge of wine, and even a couple of Swiss retirees pursuing second careers.

What these winemakers are doing today is equally diverse. They can be found throughout the winelands, from Stellenbosch to Elgin and Calitzdorp and the Swartland. Some own tiny boutique wineries, while others work for large conglomerates. They make all kinds of wines. One has already been admitted to the prestigious Cape Winemaker’s Guild. We reviewed many of their wines in Report #30 The Wines of South Africa.

The following list is ordered alphabetically. It excludes some even younger winemakers, like JD Pretorious (Steenberg), Peter Allan Finlayson (Crystallum) and David Sadie (Lemberg) who are making their mark, as well as slightly more mature winemakers, like Miles Mossop (Tokara), Eben Sadie (Sadie Family), Lizelle Gerber (Boschendal) and Andrea Freeborough (Die Bergkelder), who have already made major contributions to South African wine.
Pieter Badenhorst, Winemaker, Die Bergkelder. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2003. Pieter grew up in the Western Cape surrounded by wine farms. Upon graduating from Stellenbosch he became assistant winemaker at Nederburg. He later moved to Die Bergkelder, home of Fleur du Cap wines, where he leads the white wine making team. He has a special interest in Sauvignon Blanc; in our tastings we found his unfiltered one to be among the most Loire-like Sauvignon Blancs made in South Africa.

Trizanne Barnard, Owner and Winemaker, Trizanne Signature Wines, Somerset West. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. In 2008 Trizanne took the big step of starting her own winery, purchasing fruit from Elim for her Sauvignon Blanc and form Swartland for her Syrah. Previously, she was winemaker at Anwilka, the Bruno Prats led French investment in the Helderberg. Trizanne’s first release, the 2009 Signature Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon won the International Wine Review’s Southern Hemisphere Sauvignon Blanc Tasteeoff held at Steenberg Vineyards in April of 2010.

Ingrid and Luca Bein, Bein Wine Cellar, Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. After a fulfilling career in veterinary medicine in Switzerland that took them to South Africa for work, Ingrid and Luca decided to follow their hearts and purchase a plot of land in 1993. They then had to learn to make wine and so enrolled in the wine program at Stellenbosch and upon graduating started their own boutique winery specializing in Merlot. The first bottling occurred in 2004. They use infrared imaging to making harvest decisions for their small, single vineyard, and their Merlots are ranked among the best in South Africa. Although more mature than the other Class of 2002 members featured here, they are certainly young at heart.

Ntsiki Biyela, Winemaker, Stellekaya Winery. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2003. A native of KwaZulu Natal, Ntsiki won a South African Airways scholarship to study oenology at Stellenbosch. She subsequently did an internship at Delheim Winery and was named winemaker at Stellekaya in 2004. Her first love is the Sangiovese grape, and her unreleased 2009 Sangiovese shows the potential for this variety in the Western Cape.
Warren Ellis, Winemaker, Neil Ellis Wines, Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Warren is following in his pioneering father’s footsteps. He earned his BSc and MSc in Viticulture and Oenology at Stellenbosch and joined the Neil Ellis winemaking team in 2006. Neil Ellis makes very good wines that are sold at very reasonable prices.

Fanie Geyser, Winemaker, Withoek. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. A native of Calitzdorp, Fanie returned to his roots in 2008 with his move to Withoek where he is both business partner and winemaker. He previously was winemaker at Landskroon and, also, has worked harvests at KWV and Neil Ellis.

Francois Haasbroek, Winemaker, Waterford Estate, Stellenbosch (Helderberg). Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Raised in the wine country of Stellenbosch, Francois developed an early love for wine. After graduation from Stellenbosch, he worked and learned two years with Neil Ellis, who is an important influence on his winemaking. After a stint working with Jackson Estate in New Zealand, Francois joined Waterford as winemaker in 2004. Today he’s working towards getting his MW. The Kevin Arnold Shiraz and the red blend The Jem that he makes are both beautifully crafted, rich, and complex.

Nomonde Kubheka, Winemaker, KWV. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Born in Soweto, Nomonde enrolled at Stellenbosch and won a KWV scholarship that required her to work there upon completing her studies. She began as assistant winemaker in 2003 and now is winemaker in the red wine cellar.

Tariro Masayiti, Winemaker, Nederburg. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Tariro grew up near the Mukuyu wine farm near Marondera in Zimbabwe, majored in bio-chemistry at the University and worked at Mukuyu, before deciding to pursue studies in winemaking at Stellenbosch. Upon graduating he joined Fleur du Cap as assistant winemaker for three years before joining Nederburg as winemaker in charge of white wine. He pioneered Nederburg’s Ingenuity white that has garnered five stars from Platter’s Guide. In December of last year he left Nederburg to join KWV where he is in charge of red wine production.
**Chris Mullineux and Andrea Mullineux,** Mullineux Family Wines, the Swartland. Chris studied at Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Before starting his own winery in 2007 with wife Andrea, Chris worked at the de Trafford and Rustenberg wineries and also did harvests in California and France. Andrea studied at UC, Davis, and worked in the Napa Valley before settling in South Africa. The Mullineux White Blend is in a class by itself, as is the unctuous, sweet Straw Wine.

**Tertius Naude,** Winemaker, Peter Falke Wines, Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. In 2005 Tertius became chief winemaker at Peter Falke Wines, a boutique winery owned by German sportswear king Peter Falke. Unfortunately, we’ve not had the opportunity to taste the Peter Falke wines, but the Platter Guide gives them high marks.

**Nadia Newton Johnson,** Winemaker, Newton Johnson Wines, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley. Stellenbosch University class of 2002. Nadia has worked as winemaker at Newton Johnson since 2006; her husband Gordon has done the same since 2001. Nadia and Gordon also make the wines for Downes Family (Shannon). We tasted the Newton Johnson wines with Gordon at Paul Cluver’s house. The Newton Johnson Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines are exceptionally good.

**Neil Patterson,** Winemaker, L’Ormarins. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Neil has been cellar master at L’Ormarins wine Estate since 2003. He’s responsible for the highly respected Anthonij Rupert wines. His sulphur intolerance has led him to experiment with the use of ultraviolet rays to control microbacterial activity to preserve bottled wine. Both his Anthonij Rupert Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon are among are most highly rated red wines of South Africa.

**Duncan Savage,** Winemaker, Cape Point Vineyards. Eisenburg, Class of 2002. Duncan joined Cape Point as its winemaker in 2004. He was made a member of the prestigious Cape Winemakers guild in 2007. We toured the vineyards and tasted the latest releases with Duncan at the winery; we find his Sauvignon Blancs and Isliedh Sauvignon Blanc – Semillon blend to be among the very best of South Africa.
Mariska (Schreuder) Vorster, Winemaker, Bergwater Vineyards. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Upon graduation, Mariska became winemaker at Schreuder, the only winery in the Great Karoo and home to some of South Africa’s highest altitude vineyards (700-900m).

Alex Starey, Winemaker, Keermont. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. After graduating in 2002 and doing winemaking stints in Priorat, Bordeaux, the Rhone, and Chile, Alex joined Keermont as winemaker in 2005. Alex grew up on a nearby farm and is intimately familiar with the terroir of the Blaauwklippen Valley. We tasted Alex’s wines with him at Keermont. Both his Terrasse white blend and Estate red blend are rich and beautifully structured.

JC Steyn, Winemaker, Dornier Wines, Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. After working at Signal Hill Winery, JC joined Dornier Wines where he served as winemaker from 2005-11. He has also consulted with Chateau Kalechick in Turkey.

Adéle Swart, Winemaker, Rudera Wines, Stellenbosch. Elsenburg, Class of 2001. Adéle started her career as assistant winemaker at Kanu, spent time working the harvests in California, and joined Rudera as winemaker in 2011. We met Adéle and tasted her Chenin Blanc at a meeting of the Chenin Blanc Association held at Ken Forrester’s 96 Winery Road restaurant. We found her Robusto Chenin Blanc to be sinfully rich, honeyed and creamy, especially the 2002 vintage, which she helped make while at Kanu (where Rudera used to be made).

Rebecca Tanner and Paul Nichols, Winemaker and Viticulturalist, respectively at Fable Wines in Tulbagh. Rebecca studied oenology at Charles Sturt University in New South Wales, Australia, and worked at Cullen and Cape Mentelle in the Margaret River as well as working harvests in New Zealand, Italy, France and Chile. Paul studied at Stellenbosch University, Class of 2000 and worked at Thelema in addition to stints in France, Italy and the Margaret River. We tasted the Fable wines with Rebecca and Paul in Tulbagh. Their Jackal Bird white blend and Lion’s Whisker red blend are both super delicious.
Nic Van Aarde, Winemaker, Warwick Estate, Stellenbosch. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002. Nic grew up in the winelands where his mother worked for Nederburg, so his initiation into the world of wine was early. Nic joined Warwick in 2011; he was previously at Mulderbosch, where he worked with Mike Drobovic. He has worked harvests in California, Australia, New Zealand, and France and has also consulted with Zampa Wines in India. We immensely like the Old Bush Vines Pinotage he makes at Warwick.

David Van Velden, Winemaker, Overgaauw Wine Estate. Stellenbosch University, Class of 2002 (Commerce, not Oenology). David is the 4th generation Van Velden winemaker at Overgaauw. He became assistant winemaker in 2003 and lead winemaker in 2007. He has also worked the harvest at Clos de Jacobins in St. Emilion.

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