



FRANCOIS *Van* NIEKERK

FRANCOIS VAN NIEKERK WINES

Creating Occasions

MY STORY

I grew up in the world-renowned surfing paradise of Jeffreys Bay, a coastal town situated in the beautiful Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

From a young age I've always been intrigued by the beauty of nature and all its complexities, and this led me to studying Forestry at the Saasveld College in George. It was here where I became intrigued by winemaking through my roommate's family's involvement in the industry. After I completed my studies, I came to the realisation that a full time career on a forest plantation was not exactly what I wanted to do. An extended six-month harvest stint at Slanghoek Cellar in Rawsonville was followed by another six-month tenure at the famous Kendall-Jackson Wine Estate in California in the USA, and needless to say, I was hooked!

Upon my return to South Africa, I enrolled for my winemaking studies at the Elsenburg College. It was during this period, while working a harvest at the Koelenhof Cellar outside Stellenbosch, where I met my current day mentor, Beyers Truter. Known as the "Pinotage King" of South Africa, he played a profound role in evoking a deep love and understanding of the Pinotage grape varietal within me.

After I completed my studies, I was appointed as assistant winemaker at Windmeul Cellar in the Agter-Paarl region, and in a relatively short period of time worked my way up to head winemaker where I remained for a further ten years. In 2007 my employer granted me the incredible opportunity to work a harvest at the famous French Château Angélu in Saint Emillion, Bordeaux. At this historic family-owned winery, specializing in Premier Grand Cru Classé Bordeaux wines, I learned an incredible amount about the tradition and finer nuances of winemaking. It was as if my passion and love for winemaking clicked into a higher gear!

In 2012 I completed my MBA at the University of Stellenbosch Business School. The decision to embark on that journey was driven by my thirst for greater insight into the challenging environment of making and selling wine, as cellars need to be sustainable both in how they make their wine and care for their people, but they also have to be economically viable.

In 2014 I was appointed as the Cellar Master of Wellington Wines – an amalgamation formed in 2013 between Wellington Co-operative, Bovlei Co-operative and Wamakersvallei Wines – where I continue to work to this day.

CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS

- International harvest experience at Kendall-Jackson Wine Estate (California, USA) and Château Angélu (Bordeaux, France)
- Completing my MBA at the University of Stellenbosch Business School
- 6 x ABSA Top 10 Pinotage Trophies
- Double Gold medals at the Veritas Awards and Michelangelo International Wine & spirits Awards
- 4 x SA Champion Pinotage awards at the SA Young Wine Show (of which one won the General Smuts Trophy for best wine at show in 2018)
- The launch of my own wine, the Francois van Niekerk Pinotage, in 2019

MY ETHOS

I'm a firm believer that my forestry background helped me tremendously with my winemaking skills, as both fields focus on the relationship between plant, soil and the sun for optimal production.

Nature has always been at the centre of my life's decisions, and is the ultimate guide when it comes to viticulture - knowing which cultivars suit which slopes, soil and altitudes best.

My winemaking ethos is based on three pillars:

- Creativity
- Science
- Passion