

A pocketful of Pinotage

01 November 2004 by Graham Howe

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Take three adjoining vineyards with award-winning Pinotage - and one winemaker with a hand in the making of all three wines. What have you got? A pocketful of Pinotage that is the origin of a spectrum of styles from single vineyards planted 300 hundred metres apart. The man with the winery in the middle is Pinotage guru Pierre Wahl, winemaker at Rijk's Cellar and consultant at both neighbouring Tecoma and Manley Private Cellars.

Is Tulbagh the new terroir for Pinotage? Two of the wines from adjacent vineyards made the top twenty finalists in the Absa Top 10 Pinotage Competition 2004 - Rijk's Private Cellar Pinotage 2001 (a top ten winner for the third time) and Tecoma Unfiltered Pinotage 2002. Pierre Wahl gave us a lesson in Pinotage at the awards luncheon at the Mount Nelson, describing the different slope orientation of the vineyards and the different styles of wine produced by distinctions in micro-climate and cellar treatment.

Winner of double gold at Veritas 2001 and a trophy winner at the International Wine Challenge 2002, Rijk's Pinotage 2001 bears more medals than an American general. Made from low yields (1,4 tons per ha) from a single vineyard, the succulent, spicy Pinotage with hallmark plum and banana flavours was thoroughly pampered - night-harvested, handpicked and romanced in new French and American oak for 18 months.

The result is a blockbuster - from a cellar which put Tulbagh reds on the map with Rijk's Pinotage 2000, winning Wine's Champion Pinotage 2002 and a Absa Top 10 place.

Pinotage is big business in these hills. On a walk through the vineyards, Pierre Wahl pointed out the highly-prized patch of Pinotage in a picturesque landscape of mountain peaks and rolling vineyards. Rijk's cellar also makes and sells Tecoma's Pinotage (winner of Veritas 2004 gold) from the fruit farm next-door - an elegant wine with a rich complex nose, intense purple colour and spicy berry, plum and coffee flavours with ripe tannins.

On the other side of Rijk's, we strolled through the tiny patch of vineyards of Manley Private Cellar located at Hunter's Retreat guest-house. David Jordan has won acclaim for its maiden wines, with a big individualistic Pinotage 2002 matured in all new oak in the micro-cellar with ripe berry flavours. Jordan says, "I tore out a pear orchard to plant wines. Winemaking is my passion now. We've disproved the notion that you can't grow reds in Tulbagh. I'm just a mechanic really - I do the simple things like designing a tumble drier as a destemmer to gently handle the berries!"

While Stellenbosch continued to dominate the Absa Top 10 Pinotage Competition 2004, taking the lion's share of the awards, Raka winery made history by winning a place with the first certified wine of origin from the new Kleinrivier ward near Stanford, Hermanus. Made by woman winemaker Teresa Fourie, the Raka Pinotage 2003 was made from a single vineyard and matured in a combination of first, second and third fill French oak. Other areas performing consistently on the show include Wellington and Franschoek.

* For more info on Pinotage, visit www.pinotage.co.za

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