

Organic sauvignon blanc a wine to savour

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By Myrna Robins [Comment on this story](#)

Cape Town -Wines with heart are worth more than a glance. When they offer impressive quality at moderate prices they require sampling. Add organic certification with moderate alcohol levels and one is sipping a pretty unique product.

The story behind the 2014 Solara Organic Sauvignon Blanc adds immeasurably to its appeal: commitment and determination are inspiring characteristics, all the more so when the person involved is heading toward her nineties and operating like someone 30 years her junior.

Pat Werdmuller, a business woman with enterprises on three continents under her belt, has an abiding passion for animals, both wild and domestic, which plays a major role in her lifestyle. Some 12 years ago she bought a neglected 14 hectare farm outside McGregor and set about renovating buildings, vineyards and orchards. Setting up paddocks and kennels for rescued animals was a priority, as she continued to drive far and wide across the Boland and Breede River Valley to rescue stray, injured and abused animals. It something she has done for decades, wherever she has lived.

Going organic, she decided a few years ago, was not only the right thing to do, but a necessity in today's environment. Only those who have been through this demanding exercise will appreciate the dedication required and high costs involved to transform agricultural land and outbuildings to meet the exacting standards of the European organic auditors who annually inspect, approve and verify premises. As South African legislation governing organic farms is yet to arrive, accreditation remains international.

Today Houtbaai is a model farm, pretty as a picture, with well-mulched vines and perches for predator birds. Camera traps have been installed to snap nocturnal visitors and Pat is delighted with her gallery of caracal cats, small antelope and more. A pair of camera-shy Cape leopards passed by recently.

A cordial relationship with the management and technical team at Rooiberg winery has seen them not only offer her invaluable viticultural advice, but install a special cellar, meeting organic requirements, to make her maiden sauvignon blanc last year. It was carbonated and snapped up by Woolworths. Now, after a decade of nurturing, the 2014 harvest has yielded a single vineyard organic sauvignon blanc. Pat has named it Solara, designed logo and labels and is donating R3 from the sale of every bottle to the Landmark Foundation, an NPO doing sterling conservation work, that includes the Robertson Corridor Leopard Project.

With alcohol levels of just 12.5 percent Solara is a gentle sauvignon blanc, fresh without high acidity, offering a pleasing combination of fruit alongside discernible structure, depth which bodes well for longevity. Those who suffer ill effects from sulphur will appreciate its purity. Solara can be found at the Rooiberg Winery outside Robertson and at La Verne wine boutique in the town, selling at R69. The sole Cape Town stockist is Wine Concepts in Newlands where it costs R80.

Rooiberg bubbles with red hot tippie

A red letter day indeed. Media and guests assembled in the gardens of Rooiberg winery earlier this month where the staff created an outdoor shelter from strong winds whipping valley orchards and vineyards.

A half century had passed since a group of local farmers established the cellar where 4 000 tons of grapes were processed, a figure that has quadrupled today. A maiden Cap Classique added agreeable bubbles to the occasion, a limited edition classic brut available boxed only from the cellar at R145.

Land artist Strijdom van der Merwe first created red symbols around the winery in 1996 when Rooiberg celebrated six double golds from Veritas. Red flags, mysterious male cut-outs, pretty sailboats and finally a giant red chair decorated the cellar and surrounding hills over the next decade, drawing in visitors, who stay and dine at the rustic restaurant after tasting wines that deliver constant quality and value for money.

Woolworths' customers and many others overseas also enjoy Rooiberg products, flowing from a cellar which is a BWI member and certified ISO and IPW, as well as boasting an organic component. Grapes arrive from three wards in the vicinity, Vinkrivier, Eilandia and Rooiberg. It is the first, in the foothills behind the cellar complex, where one of the oldest farmsteads in the region is concealed.

Today Orange Grove, owned and well renovated by shareholder Carlos Araujo, is attracting tourism awards. Six self-catering cottages perch among vines and olive groves, against a background of mountain fynbos. Media guests were treated to lunch at this captivating venue which falls into the Rooiberg-Breede River Conservancy Corridor project. Mountain bikers can experience stretches of this territory when the Rooiberg Conservancy Trail is launched in late January.

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