

Sunny Solara makes an organic statement



One look at the Solara Organic Sauvignon Blanc label and you will realise this is not just another wine competing for a place among the thousands of bottles on South African shop shelves.

The bold “organic” word and Landmark Foundation sticker immediately denotes that there’s much more to the product.

The story behind this newcomer is one of dedication and perseverance by a grand lady from McGregor, whose unconditional caring for the environment and all living creatures is embodied in each bottle of her maiden 2014 vintage of Solara Organic Sauvignon Blanc. This is in fact the culmination of Pat von Elgg’s unrelenting efforts since purchasing the run-down Hout Baai farm just outside McGregor 12 years ago – so named after the mountain river that runs past it.

The result is that today a myriad of live creatures and natural fynbos vegetation flourish as an interwoven whole around her 10.52 hectares of vineyards (Sauvignon Blanc, Colombar and Pinotage) – with several animal species having a stake in the wine, including the leopards represented on the bottle sticker. In fact, a R3 donation for each bottle sold, goes to the Landmark Foundation and its leopard research and rescue projects.

Yes, the woman with the formidable name of Patricia J L Werdmuller von Elgg is big in sharing her entrepreneurial success with environment and health conscious wine consumers and her farm population alike. The latter including stray and abused animals from the district, housed in kennels and paddocks which make up part of the Hout Baai complex of restored buildings and replanted vineyards.



Pat von Elgg

Here no stone is left unturned in the dedication to preserving the environment and to comply with international standards of organic production of wine as audited by SGS Organic (Lacon Certificate).

Ms Von Elgg explains that, having previously lived in Prince Albert, she purchased Hout Baai farm in 2003 for the purpose of providing accommodation for needy domestic and wild animals rescued through her

animal welfare efforts. She provides an animal welfare emergency service to the local community, free of charge for the disadvantaged. This includes the services of a qualified veterinary paramedic, Ms Delyth Jones, who is also her farm manager.

She was also instrumental in placing 15 donkeys for 'retirement' at Eseltjiesrus McGregor Donkey Sanctuary and supports them by supplying labour and raising funds. Hout Baai is actually also home to two donkeys, in addition to two head of cattle, six dogs and several cats.

On the farm she was immediately compelled to educate herself in viticulture at an

advanced age – having previous experience in mixed farming in Mooi River, KwaZulu Natal, and in business and design internationally on three continents. This includes India where she was born.

She soon needed to have her crop vinified and Rooiberg Winery near Robertson started to buy her grapes for its own wine production from 2004. This led to an arrangement in 2008 whereby this winery processes Hout Baai's grapes as organic, with full certification of the cellar, followed by Woolworths adding her bubbly to its range.

This cordial and fruitful relationship has resulted in Rooiberg producing the Solara Organic Sauvignon Blanc 2014 as a joint venture – with specialised inputs by their management and technical teams.

Von Elgg says that having been actively involved with World Wildlife Foundation since 1975, "it was a natural progression to embrace the strict protocol of certified organic agriculture. This farm was run down, and riddled with disease, pests and trash, wildlife practically non-existent. A laborious process of rehabilitation took place requiring much patience and fortitude.

"After the first four years, a marked transformation took place. At present the natural balance is restored, by organic farming and the preservation of substantial areas of indigenous veldt, fauna including caracal, bat ear foxes, antbear, civet, mongoose, four species of buck, hare, hundreds of guinea fowl, and all the local bird species abound. These animals live and breed on the farm and are fearless in their acceptance of human presence".

Her vision for this picturesque farm and its products is achieving sales and profitability levels that ensure long-term sustainability as a model of achievement in organic production, hopefully to be emulated by other producers and thereby benefitting the ecological system as a whole.

"Vital elements are to restore the land by eliminating the application of artificial fertilisers, insecticides, herbicides and all unnatural substances. Also encouraging natural plant growth and the restoration of native fauna, to

balance the environment, literally from the sky down to the smallest microbes in the soil.”

The single vineyard Solara Organic Sauvignon Blanc 2014 is available in limited quantities, with the lowest possible sulphur content and an alcohol level of only 12.5%.

Light straw colour; ripe fruit on nose with floral notes; fresh and friendly on taste (12.5% alcohol). Creamy mouthfeel and grassiness integrated with flavours of asparagus, gooseberry and ripe fig; mineral tones, touch of spiciness on lingering aftertaste. Ideal for sundowners. Should mature well for some three years.

Retail about R70, from:

Hout Baai Farm – McGregor

Wine Concepts – Newlands, Cape Town

TOPs (SPAR) – Robertson

La Verne – Robertson

Rooiberg Winery –Robertson

Temenos Restaurant – McGregor



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