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 McGregor woman, 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.

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.

CELLAR door price R74, 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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Member Bio- diversity and Wine Initiative (BWI)
SGS Certified Organic Farmer
IPW Certified

Sonnige Solara maak organiese stelling

Met die eerste oogopslag van die etiket besef jy dat Solara Organiese Sauvignon Blanc nie net nog ’n wyn is wat meeding vir ’n plek tussen die duisende bottels op die land se winkelrakke nie. Die prominente “organiese”-woord en die Landmark Stigting se plakker dui aan dat die produk oor veel meer as dít gaan.

Die storie agter hierdie nuweling is een van toewyding en volharding deur kranige vrou van McGregor, wie se onvoorwaardelike beskerming van die omgewing en alle lewe daarin, vasgevang word in elke bottel van haar debuut 2014 oesjaar Solara Organiese Sauvignon Blanc. Dit is in werklikheid die hoogtepunt van Pat von Elgg se volgehoue pogings sedert sy die verwaarloosde Hout Baai-plaas net buite McGregor 12 jaar gelede aangekoop het – so genoem na die riviertjie wat die grens vorm.

Die resultaat is dat daar vandag ’n magdom lewende wesens en natuurlike fynbos-plantegroei floreer as ’n vervlegde eenheid om haar 10.52 hektaar wingerd van Sauvignon Blanc, Colombar en Pinotage – met verskeie dierespesies wat ’n ‘belang’ in die wyn het. Dít insluitend die luiperds wat op die bottelplakker verteenwoordig word. In der waarheid word ’n R3 donasie aan die Landmark Stigting vir sy luiperd-navorsing en reddingsprojekte gemaak met elke bottel van hierdie wyn wat verkoop word.

Ja, die vrou met die formidabele naam Patricia J L Werdmuller von Elgg is groot in mededeelsaamheid van haar entrepreneurs-sukses met die natuurlike omgewing, gesondheidsbewuste wynverbruikers en haar plaasbevolking. Die laasgenoemde sluit in verlore en mishandelde diere van die omgewing wat gehuisves word in hokke en kampe wat deel vorm van die Hout Baai-kompleks van gerestoureerde geboue en hervestigde wingerde.

Hier word geen steen onaangeroer gelaat in toewyding tot omgewingsbewaring en voldoening aan internasionale standaarde van organiese wynproduksie ingevolge die oudits van SGS Organic (Lacon-sertifikaat) nie.

Me Von Elgg verduidelik dat sy ná ’n tydperk in Prins Albert, Hout Baai in 2003 aangekoop het met die doel om blyplek vir behoeftige huishoudelike en wilde diere gered deur haar pogings, te verskaf. Sy voorsien vandag ’n diens van nooddierebeskerming aan die plaaslike gemeenskap, gratis aan behoeftiges. Dit sluit in die dienste van ’n gekwalifiseerde veeartsenykundige paramediese praktisyn, Ms Delyth Jones, wat ook haar plaasbestuurder is.

Sy was ook instrumenteel in die plasing van 15 donkies vir ‘aftrede’ by Eseltjiesrus Mcgregor Donkie Oord en ondersteun die projek met arbeid en fondsinsameling. Hout Baai is self ook die tuiste van twee donkies, twee beeste, ses honde en verskeie katte.

Op die plaas was sy onmiddellik genoodsaak om haarself op ’n gevorderde ouderdom op te lei – ná vorige ondervinding in gemengde boerdery by Mooirivier, KwaZulu Natal, asook sake en ontwerp op drie kontinente insluitend Indië waar sy gebore is.

Die behoefte het gou ontstaan om haar oes te laat verwerk en Rooiberg Wynmakery naby Robertson het in 2004 die druiwe vir sy eie produksie begin inkoop. Dit het in 2008 gelei tot ’n reëling waardeur Rooiberg Hout Baai se druiwe as organies verwerk, met volle sertifisering van die kelder – waarna Woolworths haar vonkelwyn tot sy eie reeks gevoeg het.

Hierdie vriendelike en vrugtevolle vennootskap het daartoe gelei dat Rooiberg die Solara Organiese Sauvignon Blanc 2014 in ’n samewerkingsvennootskap geproduseer het – met gespesialiseerde insette deur die wynmakery se bestuuren tegniese spanne.

Von Elgg sê dat dit ’n natuurlike progressie was om die sterk protokol van gesertifiseerde organiese landbou te aanvaar ná haar aktiewe betrokkenheid by die World Wildlife Foundation sedert 1975. Die plaas was oorspronklik verinneweer, vol siektes, peste en gemors, feitlik sonder natuurlewe. ’n Moeisame proses van rehabilitasie met aansienlike geduld en sielskrag het daarop gevolg.

“Na die eerste vier jaar het ’n merkbare transformasie ingetree. Die natuurlike balans is herstel, met organiese boerdery en die bewaring van groot stukke natuurlike veld, waar fauna insluitend rooikat, bakoorjakkals, erdvark, rooikat, muishond, vier boksoorte, hase, honderde tarentale, en al die plaaslike voëlsoorte baljaar. Hierdie diere leef en teel aan op die plaas en aanvaar die menslike teenwoordigheid vreesloos.

Haar visie vir die pragtige plasie en sy produkte is om verkope en winsvlakke te realiseer wat langtermyn volhoubaarheid verseker as ’n model van sukses en in organiese produksie, wat hopelik deur ander produsente nagevolg sal word tot voordeel van die ekologiese stelsel as geheel.

“Kardinale elemente is om die grond te herstel deur die wegdoen van kunsmatige voedingstowwe, insekdoders en alle onnatuurlike bestanddele. Ook bovordering van natuurlike plantegroei en herstel van die natuurlike fauna vir balans van die omgewing – letterlik reg vanuit die hemelruim tot die kleinste mikrobes in die grond.”

Die enkelwingerd Solara Organiese Sauvignon Blanc 2014 is beskikbaar in beperkte hoeveelhede, met die laagste moontlike swawelinhoud en ’n alkoholvlak van slegs 12.5%. Ligte strooikleur, ryp vrug op neus met blomagtigheid; vars en vriendelik op smaak (12.5% A/V). Gladde mondevoel en grasagtigheid, met wenke van aspersie, appelliefie en ryp vye; mineraliteit en speseryagtigheid op die talmende nasmaak. Ideaal vir of sononder-genieting en ligte geregte. Belowe om drie jaar lank goed te verouder.

Kelderprys R74; beskikbaar van:
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