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MAY 2006

South Africa Arrives in Style

Trends Continue, and So Will Savvy Operators' Sales

The rest of the wine-consuming world knew only too well that South Africa had a wine producing heritage with more than 300 years of history, but due to the lack of global wine knowledge of most American wine consumers and the effects of apartheid on restricting the importation of South African wines into the U.S. market, this rich wine tradition with some of the best variety of wine styles was virtually a secret in America until very recently. At long last, South Africa has arrived in style with plenty of great wine values across a wide spectrum of styles. South African wines are gaining popularity worldwide on an ever-accelerating basis, as evidenced by the just concluded Cape Wines 2006 Symposium and Trade Exhibition at Cape Town, South Africa, which I attended. Wine buyers and enthusiasts from all parts of the world, including significant delegations from the United States and Canada, were very active at the show.

A Bevy of Brands

Shiraz, newer styles of Pinotage, Bordeaux and Cape Blends, Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc and of course Sauvignon Blanc dominate with both the big houses as well as the boutiques finding welcome markets for their wines from Beijing to New York and everywhere in between. Some of the top appellations from the Cape of Good Hope, as the Cape Town region often is described, are Stellenbosch, Paarl, Constantia, Robertson, Franschhoek and Darling, to name but a few.

I spoke with Peter Morales, president and CEO of 57 Main Street Imports, one of the first serious American importers of South African

□The emphasis is on quality and innovation, from the vineyard to the bottle.□

— Peter Morales, president/CEO of 57 Main Street Imports

wines. I asked him about the prospects for the next vintage and why he feels South Africa finally has arrived as a serious competitor on the American wine scene. Morales cited four reasons for the increased interest here.

“For the first time in history, a South African winery, Vergelegen (part of the Anglo-American/DeBeers Luxury Portfolio) is being named ‘New World Winery of the Year’ by *Wine Enthusiast*,” Morales said. “Second, there is a huge increase in tourism in South Africa from the United States. Third, South Africa has some of the most diverse soil types of any region in the world, which means that a wider variety of important varietals can find unique expression via the wider variety of terroir that constitutes South Africa, and fourth, 57 Main Street, Cape Classics, Distell, Southern Starz and several others have been working day and night over many years to build value perception awareness as well as distribution for South African wines in the United States. So, it doesn’t surprise me at all.”

Morales said examples would be the KWV “Steen” or Chenin Blanc, KWV Roodeberg, Boschendal Sauvignon Blanc, Bellevue Estate Tumara Pinotage, Groot Constantia Pinotage, Seidelberg Roland’s Reserve Shiraz and now South Africa’s first icon-cult wine, ‘V’ from Vergelegen.

Profitable Pinotage

“Probably one of the most misunderstood varietals of South Africa is Pinotage, considered by many the ‘red wine grape’ of South Africa,” Morales said. The majority of Pinotage plantings are all in South Africa. A cross of Pinot Noir and Cinsault (then commonly referred to as “Hermitage” in South Africa) created the new hybrid species.

“It’s a new day for South African wines and for Pinotage, the unique varietal from the Cape of Good Hope,” Morales said. “The emphasis is on quality and innovation from the vineyard to the bottle. Today, the Pinotage coming out of South Africa ranges from light and fruity as a delicate Beaujolais that pairs well with fish dishes to the complex reserve styles that complement game and venison ... with rich sauces.” **NCB**



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