

# 21 years dedicated to producing the definitive expression of Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon

The Le Riche family have, for 21 years, made it their business to produce the definitive expression of a Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon. Etienne Le Riche has made Cabernet Sauvignon his life's work and his signature Stellenbosch Cabernet developed a deserved and enviable cult following. "Focus on one thing and do it to the best of your ability" has always been Le Riche's winemaking mantra.

This steadfast pursuit and commitment have been passed down to the next generation, the future of Le Riche wines, his children Christo and Yvonne.



Christo, Etienne and Yvonne Le Riche

## Stellenbosch is Cabernet country

Staying true to Cabernet, Christo's unwavering belief is that "Stellenbosch is Cabernet country."

"It's the backbone upon which Stellenbosch was built. We focus on the production of top Cabernet Sauvignon from the Stellenbosch region."

Both Etienne (owner and cellar master) and Christo (winemaker since 2010) share a singular vision: to celebrate the nuances of Stellenbosch Cabernet. Preferring to be uninhibited by estate classifications, they select grapes from the best

possible terroirs Stellenbosch has to offer, small vineyard parcels specially selected for their unique expression of terroir.

“ *If you choose the right grapes, you don't have to interfere - the terroir speaks for itself...* ”

Etienne explains “We try to ensure that each vineyard is allowed to express itself fully, each making a particular contribution to the final blend, with the wines always reflecting the true nature of the vintage. Access to different vineyards does wonders for the complexity of a wine. The gravel soils on lower slopes produce grapes that ripen early, offer high sugars, low acidity, and some mint and cherry flavours, while grapes from decomposed granite soils on the upper slopes ripen later with good balanced acidity and tannin, which adds structure to the blend.”

“If you choose the right grapes, you don't have to interfere - the terroir speaks for itself,” says Etienne. “When it comes to my winemaking philosophy, we have a traditional yet innovative approach. I try to keep things simple, interfering as little as possible and let the grapes do the talking,” Christo continues. The resulting wines show great elegance and class, consistently proving to be of superb quality and maturation potential.

## The beginning of a trend

Often referred to as the ‘King of South African Cabernet Sauvignon’, Etienne has consistently been making some of South Africa's best Cabernet Sauvignon for over 35 years. After a glorious twenty-vintage winemaking era at Rustenberg Wines, during which time Etienne was heralded as John Platter's SA Wine Guide 1990 Wine Man of the Year, he decided to go it alone and pursue his dreams at a modest cellar at Leef op Hoop, appropriately meaning Live on Hope, in the beautiful Jonkershoek Valley in Stellenbosch. He refurbished the derelict old cellar which was built in 1911, epoxy-coated the old *kuipe* (wine fermentation tanks), installed good second-hand equipment and a small bottling line, and set about sourcing the best grapes for his wines.

The first wine produced at Leef op Hoop, with the help of assistant winemaker Mark Daniels who is still with Le Riche Wines today, was the Le Riche Reserve Cabernet 1997. It was an immediate success, earning five stars in the annual John Platter guide and a Veritas Double Gold, amongst other accolades. It was the beginning of a trend.

The Le Riche Reserve Cabernet went on to receive four more Platter's five-star awards, in amongst many other local and international accolades. Platter's 2010 Guide also named the 2005 Reserve Cabernet their Red Wine of the Year. The Le Riche standard Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Merlot blend also reaped rich rewards. A founder member of the Cape Winemakers Guild, with yet another five-star Platter's award - this time for his single vineyard selection CWG Auction Reserve Cabernet.

As a small family winery, Christo and Yvonne both spent many hours at their father's side, in the vineyards and in the cellar, so it was a natural step for them to follow in Etienne's footsteps. Christo studied winemaking and viticulture, and after a handful of years gaining international and local experience with the very best in the industry. He joined Le Riche as winemaker in 2010.



Image Supplied

A deep passion for all things wine and a love for travel took Yvonne to various wine regions of the world, and to the UK where she gained valuable experience working in the very competitive British wine market. A Cape Wine Master and graduate in politics and economics, Yvonne looks after marketing and sales, including exports, and is always ready with an opinion on wine style and direction.

With many years of winemaking experience at Le Riche and meticulous attention to detail, Mark Daniels, long-time assistant winemaker, is a vital part of the family business, bringing a relaxed stability to the winery. Etienne's wife Marcelle, a ballet teacher, has always played a supportive role in the cellar and assists with the logistics of the business.

Owner and cellarmaster, Etienne remains the driving force behind the winery, his humility and knowledge driving the style that is Le Riche. While Etienne brings perspective, experience and wisdom to the fold, Christo brings a fresh, modern view to the wines of Le Riche. He enjoys being at the cutting edge of research and integrating it into a traditional winemaking philosophy, with a gritty determination to ensure that the same golden thread runs through all their vintages: quality, consistency and elegance.

In 2013, after many years in the Jonkershoek Valley, the Le Riche family built a new winery on the lower slopes of the Helderberg Mountain, between Stellenbosch and Somerset West. The winery was designed to utilise the same winemaking practices as in Jonkershoek. With traditional open-top concrete fermentation tanks mixed with a modern minimum intervention winemaking approach, the winery provides a platform to create ultra-premium wines with Le Riche's trademark elegance and finesse.

## **Viticulture**

The Cabernet grapes are selected from top Stellenbosch growers in various different microclimates. A combination of soil, climate, clones and vine age determine the vineyard blocks selected. Through meticulous viticulture and a focus on canopy management and soil health, the various vineyards are assisted in developing their own unique expressions. Deciding when to harvest is done with the rigorous visual selection, tasting and analysis. Typical fruit flavours, tannin structure and uniform ripeness are some of the major parameters for selection. The fruit is harvested by hand and transported to the cellar in small lug-boxes. Stringent bunch selection takes place before de-stemming and crushing.

## **Winemaking**

The vineyard blocks are vinified separately up until final blending takes place. The basic vinification involves the use of open-top concrete fermenters and manual punch-downs under controlled fermentation temperatures. The berries are sorted after de-stemming and then go into the fermenters where yeast inoculation takes place.

Fermentation on the skins follows with regular manual punch-downs to ensure maximum colour, tannin and flavour extraction. After fermentation, the wine is pressed, and both free-run and selected press juice go to French oak barrels for the secondary, malolactic fermentation. After barrel maturation for 18 to 22 months, the wine is blended, bottled and hand-labelled. Throughout the process, there is no compromise on quality.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>