

Nederburg appoints Samuel Viljoen as cellar master

Seasoned winemaker, Samuel Viljoen has taken over the reins at Nederburg Wine Estate. As part of the winery team since 2007, first as an assistant, and from 2014 as its fully-fledged winemaker of Nederburg's reds, Viljoen succeeds Lizelle Gerber, who has left to pursue other interests.

In his new role, Viljoen oversees the production of the Paarl cellar's multi-tiered range, distributed across more than 80 countries worldwide.

Before joining Nederburg 14 years ago, the Stellenbosch University viticulture and oenology graduate worked in both boutique and large-scale wineries. These included the highly acclaimed American cellar Domaine Serene in Willamette Valley, dubbed the 'Chateau Lafite of Oregon', as well as the large-volume Goudini Winery in Rawsonville with its accent on mainstream markets.

In the US in 2003, Viljoen was one of just a handful of South African winemakers at the time to be given the opportunity to work in Oregon, now regarded as a source of some of the top US wines. Domaine Serene has been ranked amongst the world's best by Wine Spectator and also attracts high scores from Wine Advocate.

"My obsession with detail probably springs from those days in Oregon, where every tiny barrel of wine was treated as something truly precious, but then so was every larger tank," explains Viljoen. "Big or small, everything was regarded as important and that emphasis has never left me."



Samuel Viljoen

His previous South African experience also included stints with Klein Constantia, Fairview and Longridge.

Natural born leader, team player

Nederburg's managing director, Niël Groenewald, says Viljoen's talents are integral to the winery's success. "Samuel's winemaking prowess is well recognised, enhanced by an extraordinary discipline, strong analytical and intuitive skills, and matched by his ability to focus both on detail and the bigger picture. That is why he is equally at home making exclusive, specialist micro-edition wines and those for more popular enjoyment. A leader and a team player, he is a great asset to our recently upgraded and expanded cellar."

Viljoen, who comes from Bredasdorp, gives everything to his career in wine and is very in tune with the team at Nederburg. "We are like a band of brothers who often spend more time with each other than with our families," he says. "But he never loses his sense of balance, something he reckons is crucial to living a good life."

His philosophy

"Don't take life too seriously otherwise you won't get out alive. Keep yourself rooted and make your colleagues part of the journey, not the wheel of the vehicle to get to where you are going."

What he loves most is that he is contributing to some of the most meaningful moments in other people's lives.

"It gives me such a great feeling when wine lovers tell me about the Nederburg wine they served to announce an engagement, to toast a birthday, to honour old friends or new ones, to celebrate a new job or a rite of passage. I feel proud and humbled at the same time."

He also enjoys the countervailing forces of working in wine, now as a cellar master.

"You have to be very analytical but also learn to trust your intuition and your taste buds. You need structure but the flexibility to work with as many as 23 different varieties at any given time. You must be able to enjoy making minute quantities of special collectable wines and on the same day, switch to making popular wines for global markets, and you must feel at home creating classical but also original, very different wines."

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