DE WETSHOF ESTATE
SOUTH AFRICA

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A Celebration of Chardonnay

In the final throes of 2012, De Wetshof hosted its bi-annual Celebration of Chardonnay as an ode to this noble variety that lies at the core of our production values and wine passion. The first Celebration of Chardonnay took place in 2006 in the form of a tasting of 10 South African wines selected by wine impresario Dave Hughes and a panel of experts. The tasting was followed by a Chardonnay-themed lunch prepared by Garth Stroebel and his superbly skilled SA Chefs Academy.

Although the mission of the Celebration of Chardonnay remains that of showcasing the grape's ability to reflect diverse soil types, geographical regions and specific terrains like no other variety, the event has grown into a highlight on the general South African wine calendar.

Since the previous Celebration began incorporating wines from outside South Africa allowing the 140 attendees to experience a more inclusive spectrum of Chardonnays, the event has contributed to a much stronger South African-based narrative. In order to strengthen the narrative and allow attendees to participate in the presentation, this year's event was held in a spacious open tent on the lawns outside the De Wetshof winery instead of the confinements of the barrel cellar. Besides the 15 wines, a few Chardonnay experts were set-up in a panel position, allowing those present to not only experience the wines on a sensorial basis, but also to be enlightened by the speakers.

The line-up of wines for The Celebration of Chardonnay

Jan Boland Coetzee

This year's event was once again hosted by Dave Hughes, competently assisted by a panel comprising South African Chardonnay pioneer Jan Boland Coetzee, American viticulturalist Dr Phil Freese and Miguel Chan, head sommelier of the Tsogo Sun hotel group.

With the list of 15 presentation wines originating from Australia's Margaret River to local Robertson, from Burgundy to Stellenbosch, the general consensus was that Chardonnay's appeal lies in reflecting terroir – especially the soil aspect – whilst remaining true to certain flavour and structural traits that have made this the world's most noble of all white varieties.

The local wines put forward for the presentation were:

- Jordan 9 Yards 2011
- Hartenberg Eleanor 2009
- De Wetshof The Site 2009
- Hamilton Russell 2011
- Paul Cluver 2011
- Ataraxia Chardonnay 2010
- Glen Carlou Quartz Stone Chardonnay 2010
- Uva Mira Single Vineyard Chardonnay 2010
- De Wetshof Bateleur 2009
- Fleur du Cap Unfiltered Chardonnay 2011
- Springfield Estate Méthode Ancienne Chardonnay 2009

To compare the South African wines with some of the great Chardonnays from the world, Jan Boland Coetzee from Vriesenhof who has an extensive knowledge of international Chardonnays, selected four wines from three continents:

- Domaine de Montille Puligny Montrachet Les Cailleret 2007 (Burgundy)
- Joseph Drouhin Beaune Clos des Mouches 2009 (Burgundy)
- Cullen Kevin John Chardonnay 2010 (Margaret River, Australia)
- Hanzell Chardonnay 2009 (Sonoma, USA)

Although the Celebration is not a competition but rather about looking for the features and unique characters of each wine, there were wines which created a stir.

With its racy acidity, the Cullen Kevin John Chardonnay brought a remarkable degree of unique vibrant freshness to the line-up. Domaine de Montille Les Cailleret's superbly played the role of a reference point for a great wine from Chardonnay's ancestral home.

Jacqueline Harris, Anthony Hamilton Russell and Danie de Wet

Peter Veldsman, left, receives the Golden Vine Award from Lesca and Danie de Wet

And observing the similarity between the De Wetshof Bateleur and the Joseph Drouhin Clos des Mouches was an extremely interesting feature of the tasting. The Bateleur is made from the same plant material found in the Clos des Mouches, and although both wines are separated by the equator, their flavour-profiles had some striking common ground.

In terms of a general observation, the assembled audience was unanimous in praising the work of South African winemakers in producing world-class Chardonnays. With the variety only having been around in South Africa for a tad over 30 years, the winemakers have managed to bring terrain and site expression into wines which are well-made, ageworthy and exude the degree of excellence demanded by those who love this wine made from the King of all White Grapes.

The presentation was followed by a lavish lunch, each dish paired with South African wines also selected by Dave and his panel.

As per usual, the De Wetshof Golden Vine was awarded to a personality selected for his or her contribution to South Africa's culinary heritage, with the award going to food writer and restaurateur Peter Veldsman.

The Year in Awards

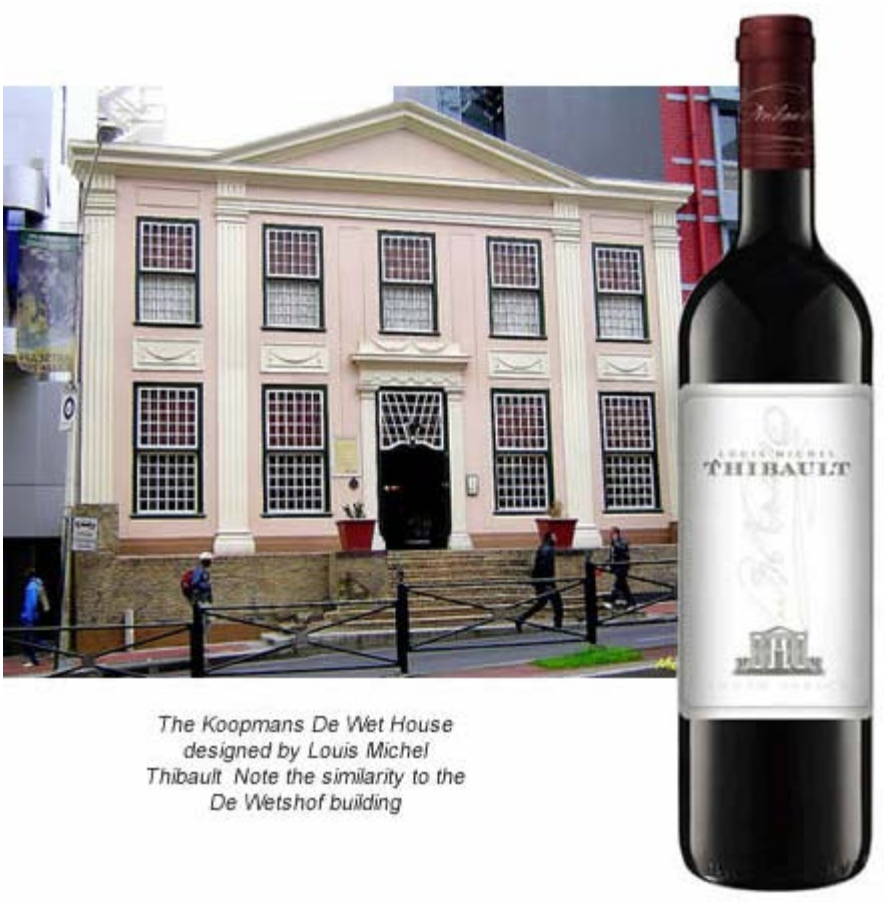
It has been rather a historic year in the sense that this year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the planting of De Wetshof's flagship Bateleur vineyard. The Bateleur is the oldest single-vineyard Chardonnay in South Africa, and although the yields might be a bit lower and the stumps old and gnarled, the vineyard is still producing excellent fruit capable of creating wines of character.

In fact, this year our **Bateleur 2009** was awarded a Gold Medal at the *Chardonnays du Monde*, which we think is a fitting tribute to a vineyard that has served us and Chardonnay-lovers around the world well. Although De Wetshof remains open to change in the sense of new products and updated packaging, our values are entrenched in the vineyard terrains that have created wines of unique quality and provenance. It is therefore an honour for us to see the Bateleur still being recognised by wine commentators and wine lovers as one of the true South African iconic wines. For a wine family, there is nothing better than looking back at that somewhat wanton decision made 25 years ago to create this specific vineyard and to look at the success thereof a quarter of a century later. This is the most satisfying aspect of the wine business.

But this does not mean we do not look ahead with new products. At the end of 2012 De Wetshof released a new premium wine into the market, this time a red Bordeaux-style blend.

This new wine is to appear under the De Wetshof label as the **Thibault**, a red wine consisting predominantly of Merlot. The wine is named after Jean Michel Thibault, a French architect whose beautifully designed buildings changed the face of Cape architecture during the 18th and 19th centuries. The De Wetshof building is a replica of the one of Thibault's most famous designs, the Koopmans De Wet House in Strand Street, Cape Town which was designed for the De Wet family. And now this famous architect, who left such an indelible part on Cape architecture has been honoured with a wine, too.

The wine is made by Peter, an ardent follower of all things Bordeaux – among others! – and we are proud to say the wine reflects the quality and values of De Wetshof in all aspects. Let us know what you think!



The Koopmans De Wet House designed by Louis Michel Thibault Note the similarity to the De Wetshof building

Festive Wishes

Our farms vineyards are currently resplendent in their cloak of summer green, so talk of holidays is in hushed tones as there is work to be done. The major job now is to manage the leafy canopies ensuring that once the grapes start growing, the bunches will receive the amount of sunlight required for optimal ripening. The plants are in extremely good health, and with the wonderful cold winter they appear ready to produce excellent fruit.

Lastly, we wish you and your family a joyous festive season and look forward to being in touch in the new year.

Yours sincerely!

The De Wet Family

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