

# Cheers to the Helderberg

Years of hard work have paid off with some handsome vintages and a swanky new cellar to showcase them



JOURNEY'S End it might be for its British-based owners, but this spanking new cellar presents a promising beginning for others on the winery team. Set in a sea of vines, it sprawls across the Schapenberg hills south-east of Somerset West, above the old main road which is, like many others, confusing motorists with detours and lane closures at present.

Last week I joined winemaker Leon Esterhuizen and publicist Posy Hazell on the deck of the stylish new tasting centre beside the barrel cellar. The weather was perfect for al fresco sampling, with clear views over the vines to False Bay and a distant Cape Point. Four-month-old Jamie – a Dachsie with attitude – padded back and forth with that slightly proprietorial air that winemakers' pooches develop around their cellars.

While Journey's End grows all the grapes used in its wines, in past years Esterhuizen had to transport his harvest to Welgevallen, the experimental cellar at the University of Stellenbosch, to produce his wines. His patience has been rewarded with a modern 250-ton cellar, now receiving its maiden harvest. He is also appreciative of the owner's generosity in forking out for pricey new French oak barrels and of the freedom he's afforded in the cellar.

The owner, Roger Gabb, is a Shropshire man, well known in local wine circles as founder and owner of Western Wines, which developed the Kumala brand into our largest export label. This has since become the property of Constellation, the world's largest wine company. The Gabb family has turned its attention from bulk wine production to small quantities of top-quality labels for the local market and those of the UK, Scandinavia and the Far East.

When Roger and Anne Gabb bought Journey's End in 1995, it was a rundown grape farm. Viticulturist Paul Fourie has spent 15 years covering the slopes with healthy vines of chardonnay, shiraz, cabernet and merlot.

Sauvignon blanc was recently added with the acquisition of neighbouring farm Mount Rozier, while new plantings of less common cultivars indicate plans for future production of red and white blends.

At present the cellar offers consumers limited quantities of white and red, arranged into three tiers. The latter starts with a well-priced blend of cab, merlot and a little shiraz for R55 – The Pastor's Blend 2007 will cheerfully team with pizza but could also complement many meats. A percentage of profits go to the local village choir whose songs drift up the valley to the cellar. "They need a new sound system," Leon remarks.

There's also a 2006 merlot sporting gold, an enjoyable cabernet with potential, while the 2006 shiraz is a fine example of the excellent balance Cape winemakers achieve between Old World restraint and New World fruit. The flagship wine, The



**FAMILY VALUES:** Journey's End viticulturist Paul Fourie, daughter Pippa and Milo.



**FINE VINES:** Take in the sights on horseback.



**NEW BEGINNINGS:** The Journeys End's cellar at sunset

Cape Doctor 2005, is a shiraz, fragrant and velvety smooth, a patrician selling at R160.

I found all three chardonnays hugely appealing. The lightly wooded Haystack 2009 is fresh with plenty of citrus and tropical fruit. For those who don't want a big chardonnay, this offers quality at R55 from the cellar door. More complex, with a lingering aftertaste, is the Journey's End chardonnay 2008 (R120). Serious fans of chardonnay will exclaim over the single vineyard 2006 Destination, a superb wine that combines freshness and subtropical fruit with depth from French oak. It costs R160.

Chardonnays sampled from other Helderberg cellars recently include two worth trying: the 2009 Kleine Zalze from the Cellar Selection offers great value at R38 and the Eikendal 2008 (R70) is a full-bodied classic with layers of flavour. It's a wine that will age gracefully.

A peek at the Helderberg wine map reveals a handful of diverse wine farms around Sir Lowry's Pass village – Journey's End and Waterkloof are both owned by British entrepreneurs and Ingwe is still

the property of French producer Alain Moueix, although the on-site cellar no longer makes wine. Italian stakes are represented by Alberto Bottega and family at Idiom Da Capo, while Onderkloof and Wedderwill keep the South African flag flying.

For those who fancy walking interspersed with wine-tasting, guided walks between fynbos and vineyard are offered on the second Saturday of each month.

On March 13 the route is likely to start at Journey's End, pause at Wedderwill's and drink in the views from Da Capo's high boma. All proceeds go to the restoration and rehabilitation of local fynbos. The cost is R100 for half day and R150 for full day. Phone Di Marais on 021 858 1532 or see [www.walksforwine.co.za](http://www.walksforwine.co.za).

● **Winners:** Sally Hetherington won the Warwick Estate picnic for six and Julie Leibbrant the picnic for two, while Jeff Peter won the Warwick wines.

Sarah Lambert won the tickets to the gourmet dinner at the Constantia Fresh festival and Roy Tyndall won the tickets to the sauvignon blanc food and wine pairing.