

# Lazy days in the winelands

With the Christmas holidays fast approaching, here's my pick of some of my favourite winelands destinations to while away a lazy day:

**Journey's End:** Located just at the start of Sir Lowry's Pass in the Helderberg Basin, Journey's End's wine tasting venue has to have one of the most spectacular views, stretching from the vineyards all the way to Strand and beyond.

Winemaker Leon Esterhuizen makes some of the best wines I have sampled all year, meticulously crafted from vineyards located on a spread of diverse terroir on the 30 hectare farm.

To date, many have garnered well-deserved awards from Veritas to Michelangelo to star-studded ratings in the Platter's guide. From the more accessible Haystack range all the way to the super-premium range there are some gems; The Cape Doctor Shiraz and the Journey's End Chardonnay are just two that stand out.

The farm is owned by the Gabb family who have recently introduced gourmet picnics to match the lovely wines, and at the other end of the farm are stables from where visitors can take horse rides around the area.

Plans are also in the pipeline for luxury self-catering in a charming cottage close to the original buildings of the winery. Tel. 021 858 1929.

**Hartenberg Estate:** Located in the Bottelary Hills, Hartenberg is one of the most well-loved veteran wineries on the Stellenbosch map – due to its picturesque location, lush gardens and somewhat old fashioned feel. Venerated winemaker Carl Schultz crafts some of the country's more respected wines, which can be sampled in the friendly tasting room. The tasting room is also where meals are served or you



can eat on the gracious lawns and terrace outside.

Delicious picnic baskets include charcuterie, great cheeses and salads and can be eaten anywhere on the lawns, where there is plenty of place for the kids to play, with a fully equipped playground. In addition there is a 2km wetland trail and a picnic backpack can be ordered to take along. The cherry on the top is the magnificent underground cellar which showcases one of the most formidable wine collections in the country – tours can be arranged by appointment. Tel. 021 865 2541.

**Simonsig Estate:** one of the most popular and well-visited estates just outside Stellenbosch on the Kromme Rhee Road, Simonsig continues year after year to draw in the crowds for its wines, its picnics and its cutting edge cuisine served at Cuvee restaurant.

The wide range of wines caters for many pockets and the estate offers a great range of bubbly from the more accessible gently sweet Encore to the top of the range Cuvee Royale. Crowd pleasers in the wine range include the well-loved Chenin Blanc and the Sunbird Sauvignon Blanc while the well-decorated reds such as Tiara and Frans Malan Cape Blend continue to please year in and year out. Cheese platters are available at the tasting room and the restaurant offers lovely al fresco eating or you can sit in the beautifully appointed inside dining room. There's a play area for the kids and a walking trail as well. Tel. 021 888 4900.



■ Journey's End winemaker Leon Esterhuizen.

**Laborie Cellar:** Located just off the Main Road of Paarl, this gracious wine farm is one of the oldest in the region, originally established in 1691 and named after the La Bri region in France. The name was given by the first French Huguenot family, the Tailleferts, who settled on the farm in 1685.

According to the famous French explorer, François Leguat, who visited the Cape in 1698, Laborie's wine was "the best in the colony and similar to our small wines of Champagne". More than three centuries down the line, the wines are still worth writing home about. Notably the bubbly are most elegant and an MCC Brut Rosé has now been added to the range that features a Blanc de Blancs Brut and the beautiful Jean Taillefert.

Close to the tasting room that looks out onto the vineyards and the imposing Paarl Mountain, is the Manor House with a wonderful art collection which includes Cecil Skotnes' famous tryptich as well as the planning drawings for this impressive work.

When you have tired of wandering around, find your way to the restaurant, a short walk across the lawns. There can be few better ways to while away a balmy summer day than sitting on the stoep under the wide-spread oak trees right outside this gracious but friendly eatery. Alicia Giliomee is the skilled chef and a relatively new face at Laborie. A recent meal there attested to her skill in turning out some great food. She has a light touch and her dishes are simple yet beautifully presented – whether it's grilled linefish (silver fish on the day I was there) served with crisp fries and a salad – or homemade tagliatelle with a creamy porcini mushroom sauce.

A great venue where a good old fashioned air prevails along with subtly introduced modern touches. Tel. 021 807 3390.

**Kloovenberg Wine Estate:** A landmark on the outskirts of Riebeeck Kasteel, this winery, owned by the Du Toits, has also established a considerable name for itself for its olive oils and olive-related products made by Annelie du Toit, wife of winemaker Pieter du Toit.

On a hot day, the cool tasting room offers a welcome respite and it's here you can sample some of the delicious olive oils and flavoured oils, taste some of the cured olives and olive pastes and wash them down with one of the wines, which range from an excellent wooded Chardonnay to a classic Shiraz and the popular White from Red Shiraz, one of my favourite rosés. Recently opened is a luxury guesthouse located in what was once the historic homestead. Nearby, Riebeeck Kasteel and Riebeeck West are both a stone's throw away and between them, these two villages offer more than 20 restaurants to choose from – my pick, Auntie Pasti, in Short Street, is a quaint

little eatery that offers a great take on Mediterranean antipasta dishes with a local twist. Kloovenberg 022 448 1635; Auntie Pasti: 022 448 1331

**Groote Post Vineyards:** Now celebrating its 11th year since it changed from being a dairy to making wines, this winery continues to gather accolades for its wines made by Lukas Wentzel.

In more than a decade the range has grown to include a Cap Classique, The Old Man's Sparkle, named in honour of old man Peter Pentz, the patriarch, and a fantastically dry, elegant Weisser Riesling. But it is the Sauvignon Blanc that remains one of my favourites and it seems the more they age the better they get – the 2007 recently sampled is a superlative example of a Darling-bred and born Sauvignon which has gathered much complexity in the bottle – a nose of canned peas leads onto a lively and fruity palate.

The recently bottled 2010 is a crisper and more racy example, which is also highly attractive.

Make your way to Hilda's Kitchen after you have finished tasting the wines and find a table under the vines on the cool terrace, where you'll be treated to some of Debbie McCaughlin's fine comfort food country fare.

Game drives, which take you through the ruggedly beautiful farm, allow you to view bontebok, springbok, wildebees and more along with quaggas from the quagga breeding project.

The most is made of the spectacular viewpoints dotted along the farm, (on a clear day you can see all the way to Table Mountain and even Dassen Island) where a site is chosen to wind up the drive with snacks and a glass of wine or two, all included in the price. Game drives need to be pre-booked. Tel. 022 492 2825.