

SA's rising female winemaker making strides for the love of Pinot

Hot on the heels of the Wine Cellar 'Young Guns' event, during which Roland Peens and James Pietersen of Wine Cellar identified SA's hottest young winemaking talent, and just in time for Women's Month, we speak to rising female winemaking star and Young Gun Jessica Saurwein about the [Saurwein nom Pinot noir](#), her recent 92 point rating by renowned international wine critic Neal Martin and her love for the queen of grapes, Pinot noir.



Winemaker Jessica Saurwein

Each year, Wine Cellar identifies young winemakers who are pushing the boundaries of fine wine in South Africa and producing some of the most dynamic and exciting wines in the world. Wine Cellar aims to provide a platform to showcase young winemakers whose winemaking techniques are humble and traditional, often different to what was taught at University.

Congratulations on being selected as a 2017 Young Gun! So how do you see this recognition influencing your wine making career?

Wine Cellar is a highly respected and influential wine retailer in South Africa. Some of the country's most renowned winemakers have been identified as Young Guns over the past years and were given the opportunity to showcase their wines at this event. I am humbled to have made it into the lineup for 2017 and believe that this event has yielded great exposure for my small brand. I believe that expectations have been raised and it is my goal to fulfil and exceed these.

You must be proud of your achievements so far as a young winemaker? Selected as a Young Gun and receiving 92 points on your maiden vintage?

Yes, it's a truly humbling experience and an absolute honour to know that such incredible wine palates rate my wine so highly.

Can you give us some background on how you got into winemaking?

My love of nature, languages and travel encouraged me to set off on a gap year after school, working at first in South Africa on a wine farm during harvest time and then travelling Europe. There I secured a stint as harvest assistant in one of France's famous wine regions, *Châteauneuf-du-Pape*. After time spent in picturesque vineyards and late nights on rickety ladders, I knew that the winemaking would be my life's adventure and decided to do a degree in winemaking at Stellenbosch University. After university, the opportunity to work mainly in marketing and sales with yearly harvest exposure became attractive. Four years down the line, I felt an immense urge to introduce winemaking back into my life and with the encouragement of my loved ones, produced my first Pinot noir in 2015.

How would you describe the style of your wine?

The aim is to achieve energy and harmony in my wines. My approach is "hands-off", which means I allow the natural balance of the grapes to guide me through the winemaking. For this, grape quality is imperative. I am extremely fortunate to have an allocation of grapes from a very special vineyard site in the Elandsloof Valley for this purpose.

“ Pinot noir requires a gentle hand and a healthy dose of intuition during the winemaking process. It is a humorous grape, that can put one's sense of humour to the test by trying to make a fool of its maker along the way. ”

What makes your wine unique?

Painted by artist Isabella Kuijers, the beautiful label is very much a promise of what you will find in the bottle. The unique vineyard site, nestled in the Elandskloof Valley, behind Villiersdorp, yields Pinot noir grapes with deep aromatics and intriguing flavour. Only four winemakers in South Africa receive Pinot noir grapes from this special terroir on the Kaaimansgat farm. Most of the plants on the label are Proteas and Ericas, which grow in the mountains surrounding the vineyard and the roses are a symbol of promise.

Can you tell us where the name Saurwein comes from?

The wine brand has an unusual and humorous name. Saurwein is my surname. Steeped deep in the history of the 17th-century winemaking, my forefathers were making “sour” wine in Austria. Much later, there was a movement from Austria to Germany, where my father's family came from. I promised my mother to redeem our family's reputation in wine. Hence the name of my wine, the Saurwein nom Pinot noir.



Nom Pinot noir by winemaker Jessica Saurwein

What have been some of the highlights and challenges of winemaking in SA?

Highlights are the people one encounters from all walks of life in the vineyards and cellar. These are people from various cultural backgrounds. Winemaking and viticulture have become a platform where these cultures come to together, amalgamate and harmonize. There are often new slang terms that are made up in the cellar for certain equipment so that everyone can understand what is meant when referring for example to a tank spanner. Then the wine industry's red tape can be rather confusing because even the authorities can give one incongruent information. One learns that, like with most things, a mix of patience and determination is needed to achieve success.

What's your favourite style of wine?

The wine style that speaks to me most is a wine that beckons you back to the glass immediately after you have had your first sniff or taste. The style that is graceful enough not to need to shout, but rather nonchalantly seduces you with its harmony, energy and complexity.



What excites you about the local wine industry?

This is one industry in South Africa we can all be very proud of. South Africa has quickly positioned itself as one of the top producers of quality wine in the world today. Not only are we producing excellent wines, but these wines are still very competitively priced compared to other wine regions in the world. Then there is the diversity of the vineyard sites, the variety of grape cultivars and the camaraderie among fellow winemakers and industry players that are truly beguiling. All of this presents multiple opportunities for passionate, enthusiastic wine lovers to find their way into the wine industry, be it in hospitality, wine service, wine education, wine sales or winemaking.

What's next?

After the queen of grapes, Pinot noir? Definitely Riesling!

Most of the Young Gun winemakers produce small volumes by nature and, therefore, these are limited wines not freely available, except at Wine Cellar.

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