

THE RED TAPE OF RED WINE



WELLINGTON IS CONSIDERED THE “CRADLE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WINE INDUSTRY”. WHY? BECAUSE MORE THAN 85% OF THE COUNTRY’S VINEYARDS ARE PLANTED WITH VINES THAT WERE GRAFTED IN THE TINY WESTERN CAPE TOWN.

by: **EUGENE YIGA**

This is one of the interesting facts I stumbled upon at the annual release celebration for Bosman Family Vineyards, an eighth-generation estate still going strong. But other than the live music and artisanal food, one of the most fascinating aspects of the afternoon was a tasting journey offering over a dozen varieties. And other than seeing a vine grafting demonstration up close for the first time, one of the most interesting discoveries was the story of Nero d’Avola.



In October, Bosman Family Vineyards announced that naming the wine as Nero d'Avola is finally allowed!

From Zero to Nero
 (text direct from Wikipedia)
 According to website winecountry.it, Nero d'Avola is "the most important red wine grape in Sicily" and is one of Italy's most important indigenous varieties. Its wines are compared to New World Shirazes, with sweet tannins and plum or peppery flavours.

During his first year working on the farm, managing director Petrus Bosman (the eldest of the four sons) had the opportunity to listen to a talk on pH by Kobus Hunter, a professor at Stellenbosch University.

"PH, to a large extent, indicates the longevity of a wine and it is not something you can just correct in the cellar," Bosman says. "It's something that is already established in the vineyard."

After the session, the two started talking about varieties from southern parts of Italy that might suit the South African climate better and provide a natural acidity and pH balance from the vineyard. And so began the hunt for Nero d'Avola.

"Nero d'Avola (Black of Avola in Italian) is the native red wine variety grape in Sicily and is one of Italy's most important indigenous varieties," Bosman says. "It is named after Avola in the far south of Sicily and its wines are compared to New World Shirazes,

with sweet tannins and plum or peppery flavours."

Bosman later met a professor of viticulture from the University of Palermo who taught him that Sicily is not merely about stopping for quick espressos, secretive mafia meetings, or newly launched Dolce & Gabbana perfume. The warmer Mediterranean climate has similar conditions to the Cape wine-growing regions. More than that, Sicily is a viticultural hub with many students studying and experimenting with various wine-growing techniques.

"I had an import permit from the South African Quarantine Department to send the Nero d'Avola to Stellenbosch Quarantine where the vines would be evaluated for two years," Bosman says. "Only two vines survived from which we could start propagating the new cultivar in South Africa."

Once they had enough buds, they field-grafted them on older Cabernet Sauvignon vines. Subsequently, the Nero

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d'Avola vineyard was planted on one of their estates. And as part of a new family tradition, Bosman now harvests the vineyard every year with his wife Carla and their two young sons.

"The wine was made in our Lelienfontein cellar under, quite appropriately, the watchful eye of Valerio Alagna, one of the professor's students," he says. "Valerio was very keen for this native grape from his home country to fare well under the South African sun."

But bringing the plant material to South Africa wasn't the difficult part. A new challenge in his quest came when Bosman got stuck in the red tape of winemaking.

"The bottled wine was approved by the Wine and Spirits Board in February 2014, which means that Nero d'Avola is now approved as a wine grape of South Africa," he says. "But this fact still has to be published in the government gazette. Until that time, labelling this bottle as such is not permitted. We lovingly refer to it as the red tape grape in our cellar because of this."

Well, not anymore. In October, Bosman Family Vineyards announced that naming the wine as Nero d'Avola is finally allowed! And even though the estate only produced around 900 bottles (exclusively for the active members of its wine club), wine lovers of the public were lucky enough to enjoy a taste during the annual release celebration.

"Isn't it amazing?" my friend asked as we enjoyed our first sips. "Wine-making is a slow process that you can't rush the way you rush everything else in our fast-paced world." Amazing indeed. And a

good reminder that the best things in life are worth the wait.

To join the Bosman Family Wine Club, call 021 873 3170, email taste@bosmanwines.com or go to www.bosmanwines.co.za.

History
 (text direct from Wikipedia)
 The Black Grape of Avola appears to have been selected by growers near Avola (a small town in south east Sicily) several hundred years ago. Initially, it was confined to the southern tip of the island but more recently has spread throughout the island.

Viticulture
 (text direct from Wikipedia)
 The vine likes hot and arid climates. The districts around Noto (above all Buonivini) and Pachino in the south of the province of Siracusa are reputed for the quality of their Nero d'Avola wines. The first American producer of Nero d'Avola is Chiarito Vineyards in Ukiah, California (Mendocino County). Nero d'Avola is also cultivated in Australia and Turkey.

Sensory properties
 (text direct from Wikipedia)
Colour: cherry or ruby red.
Perfume: strongly reminiscent of blackberries.
Flavour: dry, slightly acid, rounded, warm, and full-bodied.
 Serving temperature: ambient.