

MULLINEUX & LEEU

US publication *Wine Enthusiast* named Andrea Mullineux 2016 Winemaker of the Year. **Eugene Yiga** spoke to her about her remarkable journey in her rise to the top.

Location, location, location. It's not just important for real estate; it's also important for wine, as Andrea Mullineux discovered early in her life. "I grew up near San Francisco," she says. "The high school I went to primed me for a lifelong love of science and art, which were my family's backgrounds, so I knew that I wanted to further my education at The University of California, Davis, a top university for studying wine."

After graduation, Andrea worked in the Napa Valley for a few years, before heading to South Africa for an internship at Waterford Estate in Stellenbosch. She fell in love with the country, the opportunities, and the wines. She also fell in love with Chris, who later became her husband. The couple started Mullineux Family Wines in 2007. Six years later, when one of their partners sold shares to a new partner, they changed the name to Mullineux & Leeu Family Wines.

"Starting a winery from scratch is a huge task and there was a quick learning curve," she admits. "We knew exactly what types of wine we liked, and then we needed to find vineyards that would give us what we were looking for," says Andrea. The wine brand (also called Mullineux) is based in the Swartland and is all about terroir-driven wines made mostly from Syrah or Chenin Blanc. "The Mullineux Schist Syrah is the wine that is nearest and dearest to my heart," explains Andrea. "It is one of the vineyards that we own on the farm where we live. It expresses the grip, structure, and fragrance of its site fantastically."

Andrea also loves the Rhône Valley, she says, and draws inspiration from the Northern Rhône where, even in a small region, different terroirs give different results. "Every wine I make for Mullineux tells its own story about the Swartland," she says. "I am known for making Syrahs and Chenins, which I love. But the reason I love them is because they are

the right varieties planted in the right places. It is all about the site, and South Africa lends itself towards those two varieties."

THE REAL DEAL

One challenge in her wine journey has been marketing wines, which Andrea admits she knew little about when they began. But, she believes that the authenticity is the most important aspect of spreading their message about the wines. "The Mullineux wines are honest wines made with lots of attention to detail, yet in a hands-off way. All the yeast is indigenous and that expresses the wine's site to its fullest. In regards to other winemakers who do not add any commercial yeast, I don't think the technique varies much internationally. It is more about interpretation and expression of the vineyards."

Indeed, her approach is working well, considering the prestigious accolade. She describes this as a highlight of her winemaking career. "It's not just good for me or the company, but for the South African wine business, as it puts all the great wines of this country in the spotlight." Looking ahead, Mullineux & Leeu plans to launch a new brand this year. It will be based at the Leeu Estate in Franschhoek and be "more of a winemaker wine", reveals Andrea. "Every year there are new challenges," she says. "It's important to realise that we are always still learning. If we stop learning, we stop growing."

Why do you love your job?

It allows me to express art and science in a bottle.

Where did you get the passion to become a winemaker?

My family. They are all either artists or scientists, but all have a love for wine.

What is your favourite non-Mullineux wine?

Château Rayas from Châteauneuf-du-Pape.

Where and with whom would you drink this wine?

With my husband, at the top of the farm, discussing the day and our future.

What is your favourite Mullineux vintage?

The 2012 vintage was cool, but structured.

What would others be surprised to know about you?

Before I wanted to be a winemaker I wanted to be an astronaut.

What one thing do you hope to accomplish in your life?

I want to raise my two children to be respectful and intelligent.

