

# Wining and shining

Four young South Africans are showcasing a new generation in the world of local wine, writes Eugene Yiga

## PEMLA MAKANDA WINE STEWARD ONE&ONLY CAPE TOWN

AFTER completing an electrical engineering certificate at Port Elizabeth College, Makanda moved to Cape Town in 2007. She worked in administration for an estate agency and then applied for a hostess job at One&Only.

"Unfortunately, the job was already taken," said the mother of two. "But they offered me a waitressing job on the spot, which I gladly accepted."

The hotel then offered her external wine training facilitated by the industry association Wines of SA and sponsored by Glenelly, a Stellenbosch winery that also sponsored further courses for her. And as time passed, her love for wine began to grow.

"I love cabernet sauvignon," she said. "But the more I taste wine, the more it keeps changing."

Makanda's goal is to work in wine sales. Because she likes the variety of wines from different farms, she'd like to "be out there talking about wines" and perhaps making sales as a rep.

"I didn't know how beautiful wine is," she said. "There are so many ways of enjoying it."

## PHELISA MONI WINE ADVISOR SPICE ROUTE WINERY

AFTER matriculating, Moni worked in one of Shoprite's retail warehouses for about two years. But money was tight. So a colleague suggested she apply at the Pinotage Youth Development Academy, which prepares young and previously disadvantaged South Africans for employment in the wine industry or related hospitality and tourism sectors.

"I used to work on table grape farms during the school holidays as a teenager and once worked with grapevines for three weeks during harvest," she said. Moni left her job to study at the Stellenbosch-based academy for a year. "We learnt about sales, marketing, hospitality, winemaking, and wine tourism," she said of the practical and technical skills she acquired during the course.

After working at KWV (winemaking), Spier (hospitality), Simonsig (sales and marketing) and Nootgedacht (vine production), Moni applied for an exchange programme that was facilitated by Elsenburg College. She was then accepted for a trip to France, which allowed her spend six weeks in Burgundy, two weeks at a French college, and time with a winery family at Domain Dubois in Côte du Nuits.

"It was lovely," she said. "I worked in the vineyards and winery during the French harvest. It was difficult to overcome the language, but I learnt more about the traditional way of winemaking by hand."

Now, Moni works at Spice Route Winery. She hosts tastings and explains the stories behind the wines. "I deal with local and international guests.



Phelisa Moni.



Heinrich Kulsen.



Praisyl Dlamini.



Pemla Makanda.

"The internationals are my favourite because they enjoy the sessions more, although they only buy three or four bottles. Locals aren't always as much fun but they buy more wine."

Teaching people about wine is only the start of Moni's career plans. "I know how to market and sell wine," she said. "I still want to grow within this industry; not spend the rest of my life in the wine tasting room."

## PRAISYL DLAMINI ASSISTANT WINEMAKER ZONNEBLOEM

DLAMINI grew up in Empangeni and, in a pilot programme for top schools in the area, was accepted to study on a Department of Agriculture bursary.

"I worked in the cellar during the last year," she said of her bachelor of agriculture (viticulture and oenology) degree at Elsenburg College. Once she completed her studies, she was the Cape Winemakers Guild's first female protege to receive a three-year internship.

One of her mentors was Glen Carlou's David Finlayson, who had just moved to his own farm in Edgebaston. "From David I took perseverance," she said. "When you start a wine farm, it's frustrating. He had only a few barrels and five tanks."

Another mentor was Pieter Ferreira of Graham Beck Wines. He taught her the importance of training and working in a team. "Spending a year with him was the best of everything," she said of the man she describes as a good teacher. "That year I got to make my own barrel: a cabernet from one of his blocks."

In 2011, Dlamini received a fulltime job as assistant winemaker for Fleur du Cap.

She then moved to Zonnebloem in 2013.

And while she admitted she's more of a "cabernet sauvignon girl", she doesn't want to limit herself to just making red wine. "I feel I've got white wine experience and now I'm busy with red," she said.

## HEINRICH KULSEN ASSISTANT WINEMAKER NEDERBURG

PERHAPS it's not surprising that Kulsen ended up working at Nederburg. After all, he grew up with a view from the Paarl estate's

vines and still lives two minutes from the cellar. Kulsen studied agriculture at Elsenburg College on a fulltime bursary. He then applied for the Cape Winemakers Guild Protege Programme, a mentorship initiative for winemaking graduates who show exceptional talent.

"It was a rigorous process to be accepted," he said. "But you get exposure to so many types of wine and exposure to so many big

names in the industry. And you get to work with and learn from these people who make South Africa's premium wines. That's why I applied for the programme and spent three years working as a protege."

Kulsen spent time in a cellar focused on red wines and got experience with bubbly at Villiera Wines. He then spent his last mentorship at Hermanuspietersfontein, which

gave him experience making white wines. This proved useful when he joined Nederburg in October 2014 as assistant white winemaker, after which he moved to making red wines in August.

Although it's challenging to work with both established and lesser-known varieties, Kulsen enjoys learning about making a range of different wines. Indeed, one of the "life-changing" highlights of his three-year protege programme was the time he spent working at a cellar in France.

As a winemaking intern in Burgundy he worked with chardonnay and pinot noir.

"I have to up my game every day. I'm having a huge adventure and so grateful to be learning about winemaking, cellar management, people, and marketing.

"It's important to keep abreast of new developments in wine in South Africa and other parts of the world. The more we learn, the more we know what there is still to learn."

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