



Taking SA wine into the future

Pioneering winemaker endorses an open-minded approach

choosing a career is no easy matter. Some spend months and even years planning for the job of their dreams. Others find themselves in a field they never imagined before.

“I had no idea of wine,” admits Ntsiki Biyela, who grew up in Mahlabathini in Zululand and excelled in high school science. “I had never tasted it before and didn’t know that it existed. So when I got a scholarship from South African Airways, I took the opportunity.”

It wasn’t easy studying a Bachelor of Science (Oenology) at Stellenbosch University. With her lectures mostly given in Afrikaans, a language Biyela didn’t

speak or understand, she had to learn the majority of the material using notes in English.

But she continued working hard, something she was used to doing from her childhood. She later got a part-time job at Delheim. From there, it wasn’t long before she fell in love with wine and decided that this was the career for her.

Balancing old and new

In January 2004, Biyela joined Stellegaya, a privately-owned boutique wine producer situated in Stellenbosch. Owner Dave Lello and his wife Jane both have a passion for red wines, especially classic red blends, and Biyela’s



Stars of the show



Stellekaya is located in an old brandy cellar within walking distance of the Stellenbosch town centre. The cellar had been completely renovated and has a capacity of about 20,000 cases of premium wine.

“From the outset we have focused on producing wines from noble red varieties,” owners Dave and Jane Lello say. “Today we are proud to produce a collection of red wines that typify the Stellenbosch terroir and meet international super-premium quality standards.”

The estate's wines are named after stars and constellations:

- **Orion:** This elegant French-style Bordeaux blend is inspired by the constellation Orion, whose brightest star is the red giant Betelgeuse, a thousand times larger than our sun.
- **Hercules:** This medium-bodied red blend is inspired by the constellation Hercules, whose red giant is Rasalgethi.
- **Cape Cross:** This wine is a red blend of Merlot, Pinotage and Cabernet Sauvignon. Its name is inspired by the brightest star in the constellation Crux, whose red giant Gamma Crucis has guided many an explorer around the Cape of Storms.
- **Cabernet Sauvignon:** Inspired by Antares, a red giant that is the brightest star in the constellation Scorpius and the fifth brightest star in the sky.
- **Merlot:** Inspired by Aldebaran, a red giant that is the brightest star in the constellation Taurus, and also known as ‘the eye of the bull’.
- **Shiraz:** Inspired by the ancient Persian constellation Capricorn, Deneb Algedi is the brightest star – ‘the tail of the goat’.
- **Boschetto:** Translated as ‘small wood or forest’ in Italian, this wine links the South African estate with its Italian roots.

Stellekaya: 11 Distillery Road, Bosmans Crossing, Stellenbosch. Call 021 883 3873, email info@stellekaya.co.za or go to www.stellekaya.co.za.

sticking to the traditional cabernets and merlots.

“Blends were previously perceived as lower-end,” Biyela says. “But now we focus on saying that blended wines are the premium wines. Also, consumers are getting excited about trying new wine, giving us room to experiment.”

An open mind

As someone who likes trying new things, Biyela encourages others to do the same. Whether it's travelling or wine, it's important to be flexible, expect the unexpected and have an open mind. “When you have preconceived ideas, you're not going to enjoy the fun,” she says. “People only go to the tourist areas and say that they understand Africa. You need to mingle with the locals; then you'll know what Africa is.”



Ntsiki Biyela, the first ever black female winemaker in South Africa, is making her mark in the world of wine

first red wine won a gold medal at the prestigious Michelangelo Awards.

“I think the wine industry in South Africa is in the middle of two worlds,” says Biyela, who was named *Landbouweekblad* Woman Winemaker of the year in 2009. “There's a new world wine style and an old world wine style. The combination brings the best into the vines.”

As someone who's worked locally and abroad, Biyela has seen a lot of changes in the wine industry. Post-1994, winemakers went outside the country and brought back new ideas from around the world. Young winemakers were also excited to try unknown cultivars rather than