

# BACK TO THE FUTURE

Charles Back, the legendary owner of Fairview Wine and Cheese, received the 1659 Honorary Award (the most prestigious accolade in the wine industry). Eugene Yiga spoke to him about his journey to this remarkable achievement.



## SHAPING WINE TOURISM

Over the years Back has been recognised for his work in introducing Mediterranean grapes such as Viognier, Tempranillo, Tannat, Sangiovese, and Petite Sirah to South Africa. He also pioneered the “Swartland Revolution” and has been instrumental in shaping the future of wine tourism in the country through the introduction of artisanal cheese and the establishment of the Spice Route Destination in Paarl.

Back also strives to ensure that Fairview, visited by over 300,000 people every year, is driven by its three key values: honesty, heritage, and ensuring that ingenuity perpetually flows from the soil to the cellar. But his integrity goes far beyond his enduring relationships with the 500 people he works with. Indeed, half of the board members of Fairview are farm workers.

## LIVING UP TO EXPECTATIONS

In February he was the recipient of the 1659 Honorary Award. The award (named after the year when the first grapes were pressed in the country) is chosen by a panel of wine industry stalwarts and presented to an individual who has played a profound role in the wine industry. “It was an honour of course, but being recognised by my peers has just heaped more responsibility on my shoulders to live up to their expectations!” he says.

**S**ome people struggle over their career decisions. For others, the choice of what to do couldn’t be easier. “I was born and raised on the farm and often joke that Shiraz flows through my veins,” says Charles Back, owner of Fairview Wine and Cheese. “I always knew I wanted to join my father Cyril on the family farm. “It was a natural step for Back to study winemaking at Elsenburg Agricultural College in Stellenbosch. As soon as he was done in 1978, he joined his dad. He admits that it was a challenge to manage the

father/son relationship, but they achieved great things.

“Fairview is located on the slopes of the Paarl Mountain – no doubt one of the regions more suited for growing Rhône-style varieties and old stalwarts such as Chenin and Pinotage,” Back explains. “Our winemaking starts with the vineyard and the people as we are one of the few producers who own all our own vineyards. I’ve drawn inspiration from so many different sources and different wine regions. This amalgam, blended with some African flair has shaped my winemaking.”

### WHY DO YOU LOVE YOUR JOB?

Because no day is the same.

### WHAT DRIVES YOUR PASSION TO MAKE WINE?

Wanting to please people.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE NON-FAIRVIEW WINE?

One that’s made honestly by a hands-on winemaker that reflects his or her terroir accurately.

### WHERE AND WITH WHOM WOULD YOU DRINK THIS WINE?

I’d drink it with my wife, Diane, on my stoep from my home at Fairview, which has a stunning view of the vineyards, or on my stoep at Onrus overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. That’s where I find some peace.

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE FAIRVIEW VINTAGE?

1974 was the first year that my father bottled

his wine, and I think the Shiraz 1974 is still a South African icon.

### WHAT DON’T PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I can work with a spade.

### WHAT DO YOU STILL WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

To utilise the fruits of the vine in a constructive manner to facilitate change in the South African industry.