

“WHERE THERE IS QUALITY, THERE IS NO COMPROMISE”

MORGENSTER, ONE OF THE GEMS OF THE WESTERN CAPE

ph Alain Proust



Wetland area in front of the tasting room and the holderberg mountains



Panorama



Watch the birdlife in the wetland area in front of the tasting room

G iulio Bertrand, originally from the north of Italy, now in South Africa, has invested a lot of passion in his farm Morgenster in Somerset West just outside Cape Town and has become one of the important wine producers of the Cape and the leading olive oil producer in South Africa. As he speaks to me, his calm voice reflects the surroundings and the time that slowly flows between the ancient oak trees. When he arrived in the country in 1975 it had a closed economy. Much has changed since then, and in his opinion South Africa is one of the most interesting countries in the worldwide economic panorama. Being a textile entrepreneur in Italy, Bertrand opened two textile factories in the Eastern Cape which resulted in his travelling to South Africa four times a year. Fascinated by the beauty of the country, he decided in 1990 to look for a property in the Western Cape to escape the Italian winter - "those cold months where on the auto route between Milan and Biella, you always find the fog".


16th century refractory table (fruit wood) from a monastery in south of France


The scallop design and 'morning star' from the front gable



Giulio Bertrand and Pierre Lurton

After a few years of research Bertrand came across Morgenster, a farm dating back to 1711 and featuring a Cape Dutch house in the original H-shaped structure, described in many architectural books as being one of the most beautiful and best conserved of that period.

Morgenster means "Morning Star" in Dutch. It was originally part of Vergelegen, a farm owned by Willem Adriaan van der Stel during his period as governor (1700-1708). He was one of the series of governors appointed by the Dutch East India Company to manage the Cape of Good Hope colony as a refreshment station for its ships to and from India in the rich spice trade.

Bertrand's first step on buying Morgenster was to preserve the beautiful historic buildings and restore the manor house. One project was the careful uncovering in the entrance hall of layers of wall painting to display five different decorative periods.

Then he found that the farm's terroir had the potential to produce wine and olives of extraordinary quality. He started planning from scratch and invited Pierre Lurton, MD of Château Cheval Blanc, a name synonymous with Bordeaux wines, to come to Morgenster and help establish vineyards and build a cellar. Lurton is still the consultant to the local winemaking team. "The idea was to produce a French-style wine that was elegant and could age nicely", says Bertrand. "South Africa has always been a producer of good wines but there was no culture of enhancing their value through the aging process".



Nets used to gather the olives



Hand harvesting of table olives

But the real feather in the cap of Morgenster is the production of extra virgin olive oil. Bertrand explains: "When I first arrived in South Africa good quality extra virgin olive oil was not being produced locally, consumers were not used to it at all. We imported 17 different types of olive trees from Italy and started production; then we had to stimulate consumer awareness and demand".

The Flos Olei Guides to the World's best olive oils over years 2010-2013 awarded Morgenster's oil 97/100 points, one of only seven olive oils in the world to achieve this score for four consecutive years.

The morning star, symbol of the property, is on the front gable of the manor house and on the packaging of all the wines and olive products that are produced on the farm.

"Whatever you want to do" maintains Bertrand, "oil, wine or something else, you can do it. You must have a professional approach though. And if your hobbies become your passions, then success is guaranteed." Words of advice from a man who won the prestigious Giraglia Race and the Mediterranean Championship in 1961 on his yacht Arianna under Yacht Club Italiano burgees, and who sailed on the Cape to Rio race in 1996 with Bertie Reed ♦



Olives being crated for transportation to the olive cellar



Oil olives in the hopper



Fresh olive oil



Barrel maturation cellar