An Overgaauw Overview

A Van Velden wine history dating back to 1905

Overgaauw Wine Estate was founded in 1905 by Abraham van Velden on the farm that was originally part of a larger property, settled by his maternal ancestors in 1783.

Abraham’s grandfather, Dirk van Velden, married to Elizabeth Overgaauw was a pastor who had settled in KwaZulu/Natal in 1838.

Dirk’s son trekked down to Stellenbosch to study and married one of the Joubert daughters from Stellenbosch, who accompanied him back to the Midlands of KwaZulu/Natal. When both met a premature death, their orphaned son, Abraham Julius, returned to his Stellenbosch grandparents. They subdivided their By-Den-Weg farm into three properties, one of which he purchased from his grandfather for £150 in 1905, naming it Overgaauw, which was his grandmother’s family name.

He built a cellar in 1909 on this 130 ha Stellenbosch Valley farm to produce bulk wine, a practice that continued until 1970.

In 1945, Abraham’s son, David, took over the management of the farm. The decision to bottle wine under the Overgaauw label, lead him to France in 1969. He was accompanied by Frans Malan of Simonsig on a fact finding mission, visiting châteaux Lafite and Mouton Rothschild. Exposure to French classical winemaking techniques inspired them both to pioneer the ageing of red wine in small oak at the Cape, bringing back barriques acquired from Château Latour.

With the inception of the Wine and Spirit Institute in 1972, Overgaauw became one of the first farms to register as an Estate. This allowed all bottled wines, made from grapes grown on the farm to carry the words ‘Estate Wine’ on the label.

In 1973 David handed over the running of the estate to his son, Braam, the present owner, who, after graduating from Stellenbosch University with a B Com, spent a year at the Geisenheim Institute of Wine in Germany, where he studied viticulture, which became his passion and viniculture. “There is no secret to wine. In the end it comes down to the grapes and the skills of the winemaker, and scrupulous cellar hygiene. If there’s one thing I learned during my year of study at Geisenheim its punctilious attention to cleanliness. You can have the best equipment in the world and perfect fruit but if you leave your wines vulnerable to harmful fungi or bacteria, you are lost.”

At the time, 90% of the farm was planted to white varietals. By the late 1970s, Braam was mapping the soils on the farm to better match varietals with terroir and has been continually upgrading the vineyards, with the present replanting programme scheduled for completion in 2009. Today, about 60% of the vineyards are planted to red varietals. “But it never ends really, because we keep on learning more about new clones, and new vineyard management techniques, and we always like to experiment on a small scale with new varietals suited to our terroir.”
Innovation

An innovator from the start, Braam was an early champion of the Claret-style blend amongst local vintners, producing what was to be a forerunner of a Bordeaux-style blend. He launched a Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot/Cinsault blend, named Tria Corda, in 1979. In 1982 he adopted a more classic approach by replacing the Cinsaut with Cabernet Franc, creating a ‘true’ Bordeaux assemblage. These three components of the blend have remained unchanged in the 20 ensuing years, albeit in different percentages depending on the vintage.

Braam was the first South African winemaker to bottle a varietal Merlot in 1982 and, similarly, in 1992, was the first to make a local 100% Touriga Naçional Port. In the mid 80’s he was among the earliest local producers to plant Chardonnay. Braam continued to produce and bottle Sylvaner, introduced by his father in 1971, and remains the only winemaker in South Africa to still do so.

In 1991 Braam appointed Chris Joubert, a Viticulture Cellar Technology graduate from Elsenburg, so he (Braam) could devote more of his time to viticulture. Chris has contributed hugely to the success of Overgaauw’s wines in his role as winemaker over the past 16 years.

The fourth generation of Van Veldens at Overgaauw

Braams’ son David, took over the role as winemaker from Chris Joubert on 1 April 2007, also a University of Stellenbosch B Com graduate he is the fourth-generation Van Velden to make wine at Overgaauw. Before joining Overgaauw in 2004 as assistant winemaker, David worked at Clos de Jacobins in St Emilion for a harvest in 2003, where he was mentored by Hubert du Boüard de Laforest, co-owner of Château Angelus.

David’s eldest sister, Suzanne de Kock, is involved at the Cellar Door and the winery’s marketing and administration, while younger brother Niel is currently working in the UK. His second sister Janet du Bois, lives on the farm with her husband Charl and is involved in some of Overgaauws’ activities.

Reflecting on more than 30 years’ of winemaking

Looking back on more than three decades of winemaking, Braam observes that each decade has reflected the political development of the country;

• with the 1970s a time of innovation, when international contact was encouraged;
• the 1980s, a time of isolation, when there was little progress in South African winemaking;
• and then a renaissance occurring in the mid-1990s that continues to this day with a ready exchange of ideas and access to new technology and international research.

Varietals

There are just over 60 ha planted to vines on Overgaauw, including; Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc, Sylvaner, Semillon, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinotage, Shiraz, Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Touriga Naçional. These vines are
located on the hillsides west of the town of Stellenbosch, in the Stellenbosch Kloof area, with altitudes ranging from 100 to 220 metres above sea level. All vineyards are planted east/west and are south-facing, looking onto the Atlantic Ocean in False Bay, which is just 15 km away (as the crow flies). Cool afternoon maritime breezes during the summer months, brings down the average temperature, which allows for better and more intense development of fruit flavours. Due to the estate lying in the wake of the Helderberg mountains, it is protected from the prevailing summer Cape Doctor or South Easter, which often wreaks havoc in the Cape winelands. This enables the stomata of the leaves to continue their work undisturbed and contributed to the development of the intense flavours found in the grapes at Overgaauw. The trellised vines are established in mostly deep well drained Hutton and Clovelly weathered granite soils.

**Markets**

The estate has and will continue to focus the Overgaauw Classic range predominantly on the on-consumption market, both locally and internationally. The Off premise trade is done mainly through specialist retailers who account for some 45% of sales. The introduction of the Shepherd’s Cottage range will enable the brand to enjoy growth in target supermarket outlets. The domestic market takes up approximately 70% of Overgaauw’s wines with the balance exported to the UK, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, the USA and Canada.

After 30 years in an industry characterised by changing fashions and consumption trends, recurring cycles of shortages and oversupply, it will be quality that will secure not only Overgaauw’s but also South Africa’s position in the international market. We cannot compete on the volumes or the prices of the Australians. Quality is one area where we can comfortably hold our own, provided we do our homework, focusing relentlessly on optimal siting of vineyards, the selection of the right clones, the use of virus-free material and minimal intervention in the cellar. The consistent and uncompromised quality of the Overgaauw wines will be the main drivers for local and international growth. “We would rather skip a vintage than compromise on quality” Braam.

**Overgaauw’s protection of natural habitat**

With all suitable land already planted to vines, Overgaauw also farms with cattle. Braam and David junior have cleared a 3.5 ha tract of land of alien vegetation which is being restored to its natural habitat and plans are underway to rehabilitate a further 8 ha of wetlands on the farm.