

Ep 80: The differences and personalities of Cabernet Sauvignon from Stellenbosch, Bordeaux and Napa Valley and the Vintners Surf Classic with Winemaker Christo Le Riche from Le Riche Winery



Janina Doyle 00:00:07 Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me, just can not get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So, stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving, wonderful world of wine and wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you!

Wonderful wine lovers of the world. Welcome back to another episode. I've so been looking forward to releasing this one as I've recorded it back in November, and oh my gosh, you were going to learn so much. I'm chatting with Christo Le Riche, winemaker at wait for it, Le Riche. It's a Stellenbosch winery making absolutely cracking Cabernet Sauvignons. Christo is not only a knowledgeable and talented winemaker, but he's really entertaining and has an innate ability to tell captivating stories. So you are in for a treat. We are talking about how he got into winemaking and what top winery he grew up on. There'll be loads of name dropping of incredible South African wineries and winemakers. So do go to my show notes where you can download the transcripts. Christo has worked at some of the most iconic wineries in the world. And when I say iconic, I mean, iconic. And as his travels have taken him to Bordeaux and Napa valley, we're gonna be talking about how Cabernet Sauvignon differs across these two regions and Stellenbosch, their styles and their different personalities. And of course, no wine making episode is complete without hearing Christo explain how he gets the most out of Cabernet Sauvignon and his wine making techniques. So before we go to that chat, let's just touch base on Cabernet Sauvignon, the grape variety quickly.

Janina Doyle 00:02:06 Firstly, it's actually a crossing between Cabernet Franc and Sauvignon Blanc, hence the name and it's now one of the most internationally planted varieties. If you are doing a blind tasting, you would want to look out for aromas and flavors such as black fruits, cassis, and cedar. It can often have a real mintiness, eucalyptus note, maybe some tomato leaf or that green bell pepper. So something, a little herbaceous and also graphite, pencil shavings, tobacco. It has a deep color when you're looking at it in a glass. It's full bodied with medium to medium plus acidity, typically high alcohol. So 13.5% and upwards and medium plus tannins. Right, well, now we are all on the same page with Cab Sav. I'm happy to share with you my chat with Christo.

Janina Doyle 00:03:08 Christo. I am very, very keen to absorb all of your knowledge about Cabernet Sauvignon and Stellenbosch. So are you ready to give me all of your life stories?

Christo Le Riche 00:03:20 Uh, I don't think we've got enough time for that to be honest with you.

Janina Doyle 00:03:23 Oh, well that makes me feel positive that you have enough stories, so great. Let's see how we can fill this next hour up, right?

Christo Le Riche 00:03:30 Yeah, definitely. There's a lot. Stellenbosch is so exciting. There's so much down here so we can dig, definitely. There's a, I hopefully I've got a little bit of a, couple of good stories. Lets see what comes out.

Janina Doyle 00:03:39 We can do a, yeah, exactly. We can do a, a few small digs can't we? So let's start with you. I wanna talk about you. I wanna talk about your story, getting into wine, your father, so yeah, go for it.

Christo Le Riche 00:03:55 Oh, okay. Well, um, I think let's kick off. Let's kick off with my dad because he was here before I was here.

Janina Doyle 00:04:01 Yeah, that makes sense.

Christo Le Riche 00:04:04 Yeah, so he, uh, actually went to Stellenbosch and he was planning on doing medicine in, that was in 69, 1969. And then he didn't get into the medical, into the Medi Medicine of Stellenbosch. Um, so he was like, well, okay, what should I do now? So he did a BSC, um, a bachelor of science and then in the second year they still didn't want him for medicine, so my dad, my dad was big into diving and a whole bunch of other stuff that, I don't know how much of a studious student he was. Um, but in the end he actually then decided to, to go into wine making. And then at that stage were only eight people in their class. Um, my class graduated with 80, um, winemakers.

Janina Doyle 00:04:46 Changed a little bit.

Christo Le Riche 00:04:48 It's changed a little bit in the industries. Um, and yeah. So then from there he, yeah, qualified as a winemaker, did work for two years at our national research facility, we made all the experimental wines. And then at that stage he was a big, uh, big diver. So, and he knew how to work with an aqualung. So he actually, at Rustenberg, he had a friend who was, was working at Rustenberg and, um, they had an irrigation dam and this irrigation dam kept getting clogged up with frogs. So at the bottom of the pipe where the, where the irrigation pipe comes up, there's a sieve and the frogs used to slime this up and clog up the sieve every time they started pumping. Yeah, exactly. So after, after actually a long chat, the guy found out my dad has an aqualung. My Dad was invited over to come and clear the frogs from the dams outlet. He dived down, ended up meeting, um, meeting the, the owner, uh, Peter Barlow at that stage still. And they offered him the assistant winemaker job, um, as he came out of the dam.

Janina Doyle 00:05:49 Oh, that's amazing. Frog diving. Winemaking.

Christo Le Riche 00:05:53 Exactly. So that, that was a great way for him to walk into probably one of the most prestigious South African wineries. Um, I mean Rustenberg is really a, it's one of the oldest and most beautiful farms in, in South Africa. And yeah, he walked in became assistant winemaker. I think he took over full winemaking duties in '79. Um, and then from there, yeah, he was there for 20 years and was one of the founders of the Cape Winemakers Guild in '81. Um, and yeah, bought his career off that farm.

Janina Doyle 00:06:23 And then you came along.

Christo Le Riche 00:06:27 Yeah so the two, two of my dad's best vintages he ever made was '82 and '84. Um, and that was the birth year of my sister Ivon and then in 82 and then mine in 84, so.

Janina Doyle 00:06:38 That's quite perfect. So was that anything to do with the climate and the actual vintage, or do you think that he was just feeling rather inspired by having children?

Christo Le Riche 00:06:45 I've no idea because we would probably have been made considering our birth. We would probably have been made in '81 '83, which were terrible vintages. Um, so it's, um, yeah, it's a, it's interesting to debate as to where that came along, but yeah, I do think my dad felt inspired with his, with his, um, with his first kids on the way and during the harvest time and a little bit of extra hard work and the weather played along, luckily.

Janina Doyle 00:07:09 Yes. So I love that. So you came along and obviously a very, very good harvest and you were obviously growing up around Rustenberg right, around the vines. How was that growing up with vines and wineries all around you?

Christo Le Riche 00:07:24 Oh that's absolutely amazing. I don't think any little boy can, can hope or dream of a better of a better place or kind of, um, way to be raised. So we used to live in the Manor house right next to the winery.

Janina Doyle 00:07:37 Did you? Okay, now I am so jealous.

Christo Le Riche 00:07:39 And it's this beautiful old Cape Dutch building. Um, actually after we moved out, they, nobody else lived in the house because they said they had ghosts because the old yellowwood floorboards would creek and crack, um, while you sleep at night. But I mean, it was, it was just this beautiful, beautiful Manor house in the typical Cape Dutch homestead style. And then we used to run around barefoot, everywhere, where they still had Jersey Cows in the farm. So we used to play play with the Jersey Cows, um, chase the stable cats around trying to catch them but to no avail. Um, and then just, I also clearly remember going up into the vineyards with my dad on the back of the motorbike. Um, and him just like, just going through the vineyards or being involved during harvest. Uh, we always used to do open top fermenters, so be involved in the punch downs, um, watch the process happening, um, climb on the roof and get a massive hiding at that stage. We'd get hidings, I deserved it. Um, so yeah, go scurrying over the, the roof of the cellar, et cetera. So, no, it was a, it was an amazing space to be raised. Oh, um, amazing group of people as well. So just the whole team at that stage, there was sort of sheep flock and Derick, The Motleys are still good family friends of ours. We, uh, we travel and visit them on a yearly basis for the winemaker surfing competition up in, uh, in Mossel Bay area.

Janina Doyle 00:08:57 The winemakers, the winemakers surfing competition?

Christo Le Riche 00:09:01 Yeah. So it's called it's, it's called the Vintners Surf Classic. We, I mean, if you just take the who's who of South Africa, so there's Eben Sadie, Jeremy Walker, Miles Mossop, Duncan Savage. Um, the Newton Johnson brothers, Sebastian Beaumont. Um, Pieter Walser from Blank Bottle. Um, and, uh, Callie from Porseleinberg, um, Alex Starey from Keermont. Um, and so we can keep going as to the guys that are actually taking part. So we're about 60, 50 to 60 winemakers and winemakers, marketers, viticulturalists that head up there every year. And we have one massive surfing competition and it's the biggest fun, and the most funny event of the year where it's not this stiff um,

black tie event, everybody hangs out in their shorts, flip flops, t-shirts and we just had an absolute blast for the day.

Janina Doyle 00:09:59 Well, most importantly, who's the best surfer? Who wins?

Christo Le Riche 00:10:03 Oh, that's that, that differs. So, so one guy stands out, that's Gunter Schultz, um, from the Schultz family. Now you'll know the Schultz' through Carl Schultz from Hartenberg. Rudi Schultz, the winemaker, Thelema, and then Gunter is the naughty youngest brother. So he was at Kleinood..He was at Kleinood for a very long time under the label Tamboerskloof. Uh, he also made Delaire wines through the early 2000s. And he's now at Baleia Bay, which is a kind of a unique little project out towards, um, actually very close to Stillbay. He moved out there for the surf, but yeah, he was a, he's an ex South African kind of surfer. He's extremely good. So he takes it every year, but the rest all mulls around, who's, who's surfing on the day. Um, and various other reasons why people win and don't win, which I'm not gonna go into on public discussions, but, yeah. It's, it's, it's great fun, it's really one of the, one of the highlights of the surf, of the, of the wine making calendar for us.

Janina Doyle 00:11:01 Oh I love that. Yeah, absolutely not just making wine, but having a little bit of fun. And also I love the comradery I imagine that it brings for all of you guys together, right?

Christo Le Riche 00:11:09 Oh, it's absolutely amazing. It's it's really become like a family of, of guys who, who get together. We spend the weekend up there together and no, it's, it's great fun and it's much better than golfing. So, it's great fun.

Janina Doyle 00:11:19 Yeah but Christo, what about the women? What about the girls? Are they allowed in?

Christo Le Riche 00:11:23 Of course. So you'll know Trizanne Barnard from Trizanne Signature Wines. Um, she, she wins the women's category every single year. And then Nadia Barnard from Waterkloof, she also takes part. Um, so you should know the Waterkloof wines. Um, they do the False Bay range as well, which is also coming in through Boutinot into the UK. Um, and then Lucinda Heyns, who actually does a brand called Ilimis, uh, which is her own private label, but she's actually a viticultural consultant, uh, in the area as well. So those are the three girls who, who take part every year. Uh, but those aren't fortunately the only girls taking part every year.

Janina Doyle 00:12:02 Well, you know, as long as there are girls involved, you know, if the rest are too busy doing other things, then that's their own problem, isn't it?

Christo Le Riche 00:12:09 Yeah exactly. But I mean, I've been surfing the juniors now for 14 years. So at, at the, at the young age of 37, I'm still classified as a junior in the event, so I don't know when I will upgrade to seniors. Uh, but in any case...

Janina Doyle 00:12:20 Take it. Be a junior.

Christo Le Riche 00:12:21 It seems there's no young winemaker surfing.

Janina Doyle 00:12:25 So tell me, so surfing aside, when did you decide: right, I'm gonna make my own wine? Or I want to be a winemaker?

Christo Le Riche 00:12:35 That was probably in and around the age of about between 16 and 18, probably. I mean, initially I wanted to be a game ranger. And then I realized that there's, there's no

money in this. Um, and it's just a totally impractical career. It's, it's absolutely amazing, but it's just the impractical career. Um, and then I toyed with the idea of landscapes architecture, which I'm very glad I didn't go into. And then I just realized that look, I love, I love science. I love biology. Um, I love business. And at that stage, I mean, obviously we had our family business that I needed to take over. So as, as you do as much business marketing winemaking, viticulture, the entire process. And I think just going through my options at that stage, uh, I was really intrigued by the whole wine industry and just the, the depth and width of, of skill sets that you need to be in the wine trade. Um, and that to me was just really intriguing. Um, and, and then obviously with, with my Dad and his reputation, and the business, I would've been just, just, I would've been an imbecile to not, not get involved in the wine trade. And I'm very glad that I did. Um, I absolutely love it.

Janina Doyle 00:13:44 Yeah. He'd laid the foundations, right.

Christo Le Riche 00:13:47 Yeah. Through, through and through.

Janina Doyle 00:13:48 So you've been traveling though, haven't you? So you, is it just Bordeaux and Napa that you went to? Have you been to other regions?

Christo Le Riche 00:13:56 Uh, so no. So I focused after varsity, I, I did three years of, of traveling and, and wine making, um locally I worked at Bouchard Finlayson to get some Pinot Noir under my belt.

Janina Doyle 00:14:08 Oh, lovely fresh wines.

Christo Le Riche 00:14:09 Um, Pinot Noir and Chardonnays.

Janina Doyle 00:14:12 Yeah, love their Chards.

Christo Le Riche 00:14:13 Yeah. I love, beautiful, beautiful wines. And then, and then from there, my international travels, I focused on the great Cabernet regions of the world. And you've you've so obviously Australia, New Zealand were, were on my, um, kind of radar, but their season clashes with the south African season. And I wanted to learn, to know the South African industry, South African conditions. So I worked at Thelema, Hartenberg, Glen Carlou as well. Um, so it was just good training under those winemakers, um, in local south African conditions as well. And just getting a little bit of more understanding of Stellenbosch and our region. Um, and then traveling internationally, I wanted to see, uh, Napa and, and Bordeaux. So yeah, I did, I did my first stint in Napa was with, uh, Stags Leap winery.

Janina Doyle 00:15:03 Oh, that's not, that is not bad.

Christo Le Riche 00:15:05 Yeah. So that, that was great. So they, they obviously a bigger producer, they ran through quite a few tonnes. Um, so that was nice introduction into Napa. Uh, then second vintage, I actually didn't want to go back to Napa after my first experience. I was probably still a little bit green and inexperienced and didn't meet the right people. Um, great team that I worked for so it wasn't around that. Um, and I was just like, oh, I want to, I wanna learn something else. And then I ended up trying to get into, get into Bordeaux and those doors closed. I tried to look into Burgundy and those doors closed and, uh, trying to get into Sociando-Mallet and I needed a, a visa and I didn't have a UK passport, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And I was sitting a month before harvest and I was like, geez, I don't have a job. Harvest is coming along. And I get a random phone call from a lady who I did a tasting

for the previous week. And she says, her niece has got a boyfriend who's working at the small little winery in Napa. And I think, I think it's called Screaming Eagle, she said.

Janina Doyle 00:16:05 Oh, a tiny little winery?

Christo Le Riche 00:16:08 Yeah. And she says, do you wanna go work there for the harvest? They need somebody. And I end up being like, put the phone down. And I looked at my dad and I just smiled. I'm like, I'm like, can I do this because you can't get a visa either. And I ended up doing like a short course for three day business course at Stellenbosch that classified me as a student, according to the US government for a year as a full-time student. Um, and I got my visa, got back in, I was on the plane within three weeks and I walked into, into Screaming Eagle and the assistant winemaker had broken up with his girlfriend and he had been fired the day that I arrived. So my entire link into the winery had disappeared. And now I was standing in front of Andy Erickson and I was like: Hey, what's up, let's make some wines. And, um, it was an amazing experience. I worked with a, with a guy from, um, from Spain, um, who had his doctorate in, in wines and Adam Mason actually ex Klein Constantia and now working for Mulderbosch. He joined us for three weeks as well. Um, and I just met a amazing team of people, um, working there as well. We had a great team of interns. Andy is probably the highlight of the whole trip, working under Andy Erickson. Um, he's an absolutely brilliant winemaker. And his ability to, to, to delegate responsibility was amazing. He just kind of gave us free reigns. He just checked that we didn't mess anything up. But we were able to work with this beautiful fruit. You just take it, you put it into tanks, you let it ferment, you don't mess around with it. It comes out big and powerful. That is what Napa is. But, um, it was really unmanipulated wines that we were making. Um, and then from there I met an amazing girl. A girl called Aude Perch and she connected me to Château Angélu and I walk out of, out of, uh, Screaming Eagle and the following harvest, I walked into a job at Angélu. Um, so it was just this, this flow of things that just kind of, it, the, you call it luck, fate, I don't know. Um, but it's, it, it was just these two amazing properties that I worked at. And then at, um, Château Angélu I worked with Chris Alheit as well. He was there, my vintage, and we worked with a guy Duncan Shouler from, from New Zealand. So just these really, really nice people that I ended up working with, um, winemakers who I am still friends with today. Um, and he, yeah, it was just great experiences, great learning schools of just seeing and tasting tannin and, and just evolution of fruit through harvest. Um, and obviously great wines. Um, once they go to bottle.

Janina Doyle 00:18:41 I just, I mean, it's amazing. You're like, oh no, I wanted to go and work at, uh, Château Sociando-Mallet, and then you're like, oh Angélu, um, yeah. I mean, you don't get better than that. So that's, that's stunning. So obviously Angélu is more Merlot based, but of course they, they have some Cabernet Sauvignon as well. And I certainly wanted to kind of focus this conversation on Cabernet Sauvignon, because that's what you're doing in Stellenbosch. That's obviously the grape variety of Napa and certainly Screaming Eagle. I'd love you to, I kind of, talk about how, I assume you were spending time across Bordeaux whilst you were more, um, in Saint-Émilion, but you know, how, how does Bordeaux compare to Napa? How does Napa compare to Stellenbosch? Like that's a such an open question, but just, just your thoughts on these three winemaking regions.

Christo Le Riche 00:19:30 I think one of the biggest things that I had walking, having, kind of walked away from working at, at these different spaces is. People, if you meet a Frenchman, you know, he's French. If you meet a German, you know, he's German. If you meet a Englishman, you know, his Englishman, there's just a couple of things about people from an area that kind of make them, you kind

of want to put them into a little box. Now, obviously you can't put everybody into boxes. That will be a terrible thing to do, but there's, there's, there's a reason why they're standing jokes about certain people from certain countries and funnily enough, you find that in, in the wines and the way they go about wine, they may go about drinking wine, the foods that they do with it, they, it all plays a role. Like if you go to Napa, it's big, it's bold, it's flavorsome, it's intense. And I found that in the people, you find that in the cuisine, you find that in the entire kind of structure of the American personality. And I say that being married to an American, uh, I love them to bits, I'm allowed to, but they, they, they're big, bold, um, characters and it's, it's part of what they are. Where the French can be a little bit more austere and a little bit more uptight um, once you get to know them around a table at five hours later, and seven bottles of wine, they're the friendliest, happiest bunch you can get. But they, they obviously, they arrive there in their suits and everything is business, especially out of Bordeaux. And, and I find you, you can draw that synonym almost through, through, through to the wines and the way they go about wine and they talk about wine and they produce wine. And then it just also happens. So that, I mean, climatically, Napa is significantly warmer than, than Bordeaux. Um, Bordeaux's got this oceanic influence between, between the, um, the Garonne and, and the ocean moving, moving across. It's flat. Um, there's hardly a bump in the area. Where Napa you've got this valley influence. Um, you've obviously got the fog moving up the valley. But it was just for me, amazing how we had a fig tree outside the winery at screaming Eagle and these figs naturally dried on the tree. So we were eating dried figs for the whole harvest. It's one of the things that stuck in my mind. Where if you're in Stellenbosch figs rot off the tree, they don't dry out. So either the birds will eat them or they'll just fall off the tree rotten. Where in Napa, they completely dried out, which just shows you where the humidity is sitting through harvest. So in Stellenbosch you've got this oceanic influence and the sea breeze coming through every afternoon. So from like one, two, o'clock you get this humid air that pushes into the region, which is more similar to Bordeaux as well. Where Napa you've got this lot more dryness, once the fog bank lifts, it's a much drier environment and it's, this showcases in the wines. It showcases Napa obviously' s got a little bit more higher latitude than, than, than what we all have in Stellenbosch. Um, they're a little bit closer to where Bordeaux is sitting. So they've got a little bit lower UV degree, but maybe a bit more temperature. We've got a little bit more intense UV. So we, we find spots that, that kind of hide a little bit from that intensity of the sun. Um, but we get that cooling influence coming through again. And I think the biggest thing that you find up between these wines is how the tannin interacts with the fruit. Um, and that showcases in the wine, in the length, the structure, the mid palates, all of that kind of plays around with the regions. And it's it's for me, just, it's amazing. You can't, you can't say this one is better than that because they are so vastly different. Each one has got its unique characters and you've gotta just sit down and taste and spend a night with each bottle and spend years with a bottle and see how it ages to really get a feel for, for what that region does. And best of all travel there, eat there, taste there and then you'll get a know of why do wine tastes the way they do.

Janina Doyle 00:23:15 Okay thank you. I appreciate that advice. I think, yeah. I can probably travel to wine regions and drink lots of wine. That seems like something I'll do, because I'm gonna take this seriously. I'm taking this wine education thing. Seriously.

Christo Le Riche 00:23:30 Yeah there's there's just one other thing for me, the great Cabernet regions of the world all have great surfing breaks, very nearby as well. So that's, I mean, that's another major thing for me. I mean, obviously with Napa, you've got that whole Californian coastline. Bordeaux has got Lacanau, Stellenbosch, obviously the whole of Cape town. Margaret river, I mean, it's, it's surfing

sells for itself. So I think if you're a Cabernet growing area and you don't have good surf, then you've gotta ask some serious questions about yourself.

Janina Doyle 00:23:59 Good to know. So we're talking Cabernet Sauvignon, quite clearly, the fact that you are working with Cabernet Sauvignon so closely, and you've got to know the grape variety across different countries. What is Cabernet Sauvignon to you? Like if somebody said, oh, I love red wine. What's cab sav? You know, what would you say to them? What is Cabernet Sauvignon?

Christo Le Riche 00:24:20 First thing is ageability and I know this is not fashionable and it's not trendy, but for me, the big thing is like, there's this, at the moment, there's this big drive towards lighter wines in South Africa, everybody's mad about Cinsaults and freshness and so forth. But once you sit down with a 15, 20 year old Cabernet, that's been well aged. You really truly understand what these wines are about. That's when that delicacy and the elegance comes in and the word Claret comes to mind. And that for me is what Cabernet is all about. And tasting young Cab, you've gotta understand these wines are about constructing a wine, well, today we need to construct a wine that is, um, approachable, younger, but if it doesn't have that age ability to it, then that's really the signature on Cabernet and that's in its genetics, which it, and for me as a winemaker, that's really, my responsibility is to, to get a wine in the market that that is, that showcases its vineyard and showcases this genetic potential of the grape to be able to age. And in the end of the day, if you don't respect your fruit, if you over ripen it, if you manipulate it, if you add too much acid or just too many other stuff, you end up, I think you end up reducing the ageability of this wine. And you end up not having the, that the, the legs for it to just keep going. And I think there, there in lies the beauty of, of Cab for me.

Janina Doyle 00:25:45 Mm. I love that. And what have you learned about this variety over the years? Obviously you've just said, don't over manipulate it and make sure that you are producing a Cabernet Sauvignon that can age, but has there been things like working with Screaming Eagle, there must have been a lesson or two to be had there?

Christo Le Riche 00:26:03 The, the big thing with Screaming, um, was that don't mess around with good fruit. Mm. And I think that that rings true in any with, with any cultivar that you're working with. Um, is, is that Screaming had absolutely perfect viticulture. I mean, every single cane was tied with a freezer bag tie to the wire so that the light penetration through the canopy was absolutely spot on. And I think this is one of the major kind of things working with Cabernet is, in the vineyard, the more precise and the more homogenous you can be with a canopy and the way you let light come in onto that onto the bunches, onto the leaves, the better you can work and actually showcase what that vineyard does. Cabernet doesn't like variation in it. Um, where, and, and I think that's one of the great things that I enjoy working with Cabernet as well is if you get those things right, and you get your viticulture, right. Um, and most importantly, if you get your site, right, the balance is there in the vine, you don't need to go and do a lot of suckering and breaking of leaves and a whole lot of other manipulation, the vine grows into its own balance, and it gets the light going through and the canopies are in balance. And you can just get this perfect ripeness that you're looking for. And you can then as a wine maker, come in and say, okay, I wanna pick a bit earlier. I wanna pick a bit later. Um, depending on the block, depending on the site, but you can, you can really express the site once that, you know, that viticulture quality is there that you need to, so you really need to place attention to detail in the vineyards, um, how you're working with your fruit, um, the growth, not too much vigor, Cabernet, hates vigor. Um, and then for, from there, you can, you can, then you, as a wine maker, basically don't mess it up. Um which, which

the, the bottom line for me on Cabernet winemaking is, you've gotta know what you're doing with tannin and with extract and how hard you're working that fruit, because if you, you do it too light, you're not gonna have that ageability and that tannin, which is so beautiful in Cabs. If you do it too heavy, it's dried out. It will never come into balance. And it's just not, it's just a very, very unpleasant wine. So being able to just really look after the tannins through harvest and the way that you extract them, that's really where, where the skill set comes into me with, with good Cabernet winemaking.

Janina Doyle 00:28:24 Well, now you talk about Cabernet winemaking. I have pre-poured a glass of your Le Riche Reserve 2018. So I'm gonna have a little taste of it. I know you don't have, uh, you don't have a glass, but, um, I hear that, you know, quite well, your own wine.

Christo Le Riche 00:28:40 Yeah. I kind of drank a bottle last night, so it's, uh, it's quite, quite fresh at the back of my mind

Janina Doyle 00:28:45 In preparation for this podcast, right?

Christo Le Riche 00:28:47 Yeah. That, that, and also in celebration of our Platter Five Star that we got. So we were one of, one of the, the cabs that, that got it.

Janina Doyle 00:28:54 Oh, congratulations. Wait, hang on. Let me put the glass down. There we go. Yay. So I'm very happy to be celebrating with you now with this glass. So I'm gonna have a little taste, but can you then talk to me about your winemaking with this wine? Like you said about extraction, I guess, maceration, being careful with the tannins. So with this specific wine, the reserve wine, which is the next level up, because there is the, the Le Riche Cabernet Sauvignon, which people can also get, you know, what are you doing with this wine?

Christo Le Riche 00:29:25 So for us, it's, we, we make two different styles of Stellenbosch Cab. Um, our, our Cabernet is our, what we can, let's call it for, for the sake, the standard Cab. Um, we, we try and extract a little bit less tannin. Um, so you get this wine that's a little bit softer and we don't give it as much time on the skin. So we'll press of at about between 70 to 10 days, which, which means you get a little bit more primary fruit. Um, and so it's a wine that you can access a little bit earlier. It's gonna go a little bit faster through its aging curve as well. Where with the reserve, this is really about expressing the very best of Stellenbosch that we can. Um, so it's a blend of vineyards. And, but what we do with this fruit is we'll go through extended maceration. So depending on a vineyard, we'll go anything from 14 to 24 days that the fruit will spend on its, on the skins. So go through your ferment and then we close it up and then just monitor how, how this fruit develops in tank. And that timing of when you press is extremely important, but what that time on skin does, is it, it changes, it, you obviously start to extract a little bit more seed tannin, which is something that I've, I saw them focus on a lot at, at Angélus was ripeness of seeds. And, and cause it, it gives you a little bit more the kind of a powdery chewy kind of tannin structure. Um, and then, uh, the longer time it spends on those seeds, obviously the more of that you get out, there's more alcohol, so forth. Um, but you also get more complexity. You get a little bit more deeper sense of, of fruit flavors coming through. Um, but you lose some of the primary fruit. So you lose a little bit of that cassis and just like fresh black currents and fresh blackberries and so forth coming through. So it's really just about just, just changing the focus of what I want in the wine and what I want the fruit to express in the end of the day. Um, so it's just too, it's too interpretations of Cabernet. So with the reserve, this is really for us, about age ability it's got the lovely big tannins, um, a long finish. 2018 specifically we find a little bit drier tannic finish, um, which is playing a role. This is the

last of the four years of the drought. So very small berries, very concentrated fruit, um, which is sitting kind of backed by that more black fruited, um, black fruited, little bit of red, but more black fruited kind of flavor profile, but still having a good acidity, which in, in South African context is absolutely key. If you go, if your acidity aren't there, especially natural acidity, you end up getting a wine that's just, it just falls away on the pallet. It gets sweet as well. And when it ages, it goes that sickly sweet, which you'd really don't want. So retaining that freshness is absolutely key, which I think we, with 2018, I'm really running it on that, on that nervous edge. But I think the wine is, is there now I'm very happy with the results on it.

Janina Doyle 00:32:19 Well, it's interesting you say that because for me, it's full bodied, but it's not huge. It's got a real good concentration of fruits, but there's still some elegance there. And I think that the tannins, although they are high tannins, they're more, I think probably what you mentioned a second ago, they're, they're more chalky. If anything, they're not, they're not too grippy. Um, and I, what I like about it actually as a bit what you said, I think you've stepped away from cassis, so it's not really black current, if anything, there's a bit of blackberry and black cherry, but there's almost that nice earthiness, not, not overtaking the fruit, but like even, even like maybe a hint of tomato leaf or something like slightly herbacious, that just kind of adds a little bit of complexity, but a nice amount. You didn't mention oak aging and I'm getting that nice kind of oak spice and leather in there as well. Just it's, it's beautifully rounded. So what, what's your oak aging with this?

Christo Le Riche 00:33:12 Yeah so we, we do about 24 months standard on all, all our wines of, of aging in 225ml french oak barriques. So we use good quality french oak that works best with Cabs. Um, unfortunately it's also the most expensive oak that you get, but those go hand in hand.

Janina Doyle 00:33:29 Yeah. Well taste good.

Christo Le Riche 00:33:30 And, and then Cabernet, Cabernet needs oak, um, which the, the, the reason behind that is that Cabernet needs oxygen. And a new barrel gives you the most amount of oxygen slowly coming into the wine, because it's got so much tannin. You need to knit that tannin in. And so it's really about getting a balance of using the oak and that oxygen ingress that you're getting without drowning the wine in oaky flavors, because you don't want to be drinking a tree it's just like, that's not what wine is about. Um, the barrel is there to support the fruit. It's not there to showcase and overpower what, what you're working with. So it's, it's really just finding that balance. So our reserve will be anything from 60 to a 100 percent oak depending on the vintage. And we really do, we do our fine oak, so we blend after one year. So we keep every, every component separate for the first year, every vineyard that we work with. And then we, my sister, my dad, and I will sit down, um, for the blending process and my sister's a Cape winemaker, um, probably the best palate in, in the family as well. Um, and then my dad with his experience and I've got the young wine experience and then we'll argue for days about which way we want to go. Luckily we always, we three people, so at least it's always two against one. And if none of us agree, then we know we don't have the right wine. And if all of us agree, then, you know, we have the right wine. So we'll sit and blend after a year, then those wines go back into barrel, usually around 70%, uh, new oak. And then after two years of aging, we'll then reassess that wine and decide, okay, do we want to move this oak up to up to a hundred percent or are we actually rather going to take some of the new barrels out of the blend and bring that oak concentration down? Um, so it's, it's really just making sure on those two steps that we don't, that we

are respecting the fruit and that we, once again showcasing Stellenbosch in our best interpretation of that season. Um, and, and in what we can do with Cabernet.

Janina Doyle 00:35:32 I love it. It's super beautiful. There's this real warmth. I feel like I can taste like the warmth of the, the earth, warmth of soil, you know, like maybe after it's rained and then it's heated up. Anyway, but it's got beautiful fruit. The length is delicious. Cause as you, the whole time you've been talking the last bit you've been talking, I've stopped drinking. Um, and I can still taste it now with really concentrated black cherry fruit that's maintained along with this lovely kind of liquorish spice. So that kind of sweeter baking spices. Delicious. Um, would I be right in saying Le Riche as a winery, you are really focused on Cabernet Sauvignon. That is your main focus, right?

Christo Le Riche 00:36:15 That's through and through everything we do. So we do, we do three wines. Um, the, the two major focus wines are obviously our Reserve and our Cabernet. Both are a hundred percent Cabernet, but we like to call them blends because we use the different areas of Stellenbosch to showcase and use as blending components. So you mentioned earlier that little bit more of a herbaceous undertone that you're also getting on the wine. That's typically what we get out of Jonkershoek or on the Simonsberg mountain. Um, where, if you're going onto the Helderberg, you get more of a garrigue character coming through with a lot of black olive tapenade. Um, so really using the different areas of Stellenbosch to give us blending opponents to work with. Um, and then we do a third wine, which is actually show, we call it the Stellenbosch heritage blend. Um, it's called our Richesse. And that's actually looking at the history of blending with Cabernet in, in Stellenbosch. So firstly, going back to the old Cabernet-Cinsaults, that's actually what I grew up drinking, which was traditionally 75% Cab, 25% Cinsault. So our Richesse is 40% Cab, 20% Cinsault. And then we use about 10% each of the Bordeaux varieties going to Merlot, Cab Franc and Petit Verdot. So it's kind of the more modern style of Stellenbosch, which is leaning towards the Bordeaux blend. And the more oldschool style, which is that Cabernet Cinsault component, um, and kind of just giving a tip to the hat of how Stellenbosch has been working with Cabernet over the last hundred years.

Janina Doyle 00:37:49 Lovely. Listen, everybody who's in the UK, you can easily get hold of all of these wines. Certainly I know because I already wrote it down that the, um, the Cabernet Sauvignon, the first wine, £18.99 in Waitrose plus lots of independent online merchants. So that one's super easy to find. I've seen a lot of that online and the delicious wine that I'm drinking now, you can get it from drink finder £38.75. And Christmas may be done, but it's still time to treat ourselves. So absolutely grab a bottle of that. And a of course I not sure what the Richesse is, uh, selling for probably similar probably just a little bit...

Christo Le Riche 00:38:25 Yeah. That will be sitting at about, I think between 14 to 16 pounds, um, in that vicinity.

Janina Doyle 00:38:32 Ah so the, okay. The most, the most affordable. Everyone get onto that.

Janina Doyle 00:38:41 So that's the end of part one. Part two is out next week where we'll be tasting other Cabernet Sauvignons from Stellenbosch. And Christo's gonna talk me through the whole region, explaining the nuances of Cabernet Sauvignon as you move around this one region. So prepare yourself to be a Stellenbosch Cab Sav expert. Now, as always, I shall leave you with a quote. And this one is from André Tchelistcheff who most people would agree to have been the most influential winemaker of Napa Valley's history. And he most famously said:

“God made Cabernet Sauvignon. Whereas the devil made Pinot Noir.”

Well, there's nothing wrong with a devilishly good Pinot Noir if you ask me. So that is it for today's episode. I, I can only assume you are all now reaching for a glass of Cabernet Sauvignon. Do like the podcast, share the podcast with your wine loving friends and subscribe if you haven't already. If you're listening on apple podcasts, do leave me a comment as it does make the podcast more discoverable. Thank you as always for listening. I hope you're as excited as I am for next week's episode. And until then, cheers to you.