

Ep 81: The nuances of Cabernet Sauvignon from the different sub-regions of Stellenbosch 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!

So hello and welcome back to another episode. Here we are again, a week certainly flies and today's episode is part 2 with Christo Le Riche. As president of the Stellenbosch Cabernet Collective, he certainly knows a thing or two about this grape variety and how it's growing in South Africa's largest Wine of origin: Stellenbosch. Now Cabernet Sauvignon has been growing here for over a hundred years, and you will find more Cabernet Sauvignon in Stellenbosch than any of the other wine regions in South Africa, Stellenbosch has some of the oldest soils in the world making them incredibly infertile, which can be a great thing for vine growing. And it has a gorgeous Mediterranean climate with loads of cooling breezes coming in off of the coast. But what makes it really exciting is that from site to site, the terroir can really change. And it's these micro climates that are allowing winemakers to really create wines of finesse, elegance and place. And I am happy to say the Christo is gonna take me through three of these wines, will actually kind of four as I do sneak in Christo's wine from part one, I bring it back in at the end to compare. You are gonna go on a tour of the Stellenbosch wine region and understand the nuances and the unique terroir of the different sub-regions of this fantastic Cabernet Sauvignon wine growing region. So perhaps pull up a wine map to follow along whilst you're listening and download the transcript so you can see the names of these sub-regions. So you'll find that in my show notes. Grab yourself a glass of Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon and enjoy.

Janina Doyle 00:02:25 Right, I feel like now it is time that we talk about Stellenbosch as a wine growing region. Obviously in part one, you just touched on the fact that you were using different fruit from different parts in Stellenbosch, and they all have something unique, but yeah, exactly, there's different hills, there's aspects, there's the, obviously these sub-regions. So can you give me a little bit of an idea about these smaller regions within Stellenbosch.

Christo Le Riche 00:02:52 Ohhh, um, I don't like the word little bit. Um, this is, um, I, I actually took, um, Simon Tam. He's a Christie's wine auctioneer in, in Hong Kong. Um, and he was here for a big, we, we flew him into, to, to chair our, our big tasting that we did for Cape Wine in 2018. And I drove him around Stellenbosch for a day and I think his ears fell off. Um, because I was basically just talking about Stellenbosch the whole way in the car the whole time. I actually feel quite, quite, um, yeah, I feel quite,

quite sad for the poor guy to, to have to sit in the car with me the whole day but, um, I love Stellenbosch. I think it's quite, um, I've, I've lived on the Simonsberg. I've lived in Jonkershoek valley. Um, I now live on the foot of the Helderberg. I've lived in Stellenbosch town itself, so it's, I think it's important that you've gotta come here and actually spend some time in and around Stellenbosch. Take two weeks through summer, or whenever you want to come and just feel how the area changes as you're driving around. Like you've, I would highly recommend like renting a Cabriolet, with an open top Cabriolet, driving with your hair, kind of blowing around the air. So you can kind of, as you're driving through the area, you've got a feel of how it changes. Because if you're in Stellenbosch town itself, the Southeast, we've got a synoptic breeze blowing through here, which is called the Southeaster, um, which it, it basically, that's our trade wind through the whole of summer and that doesn't blow in the town of Stellenbosch. So you'll be walking around Stellenbosch and it'll be a barmy 38 degree Celsius. Swelteringly hot. You'll, you can hardly breathe. Then you walk around the corner and I literally talk about one kilometer, um, moving in towards Jonkershoek, and it's suddenly the temperature drops to 28 and the wind is coming through at 35/40 kilometers an hour. As the wind comes down that valley, or you drive south towards, um, False bay and you stand in those vineyards at around one o'clock and the air conditioner switches on, and you get that sea breeze moving in from the Southwest. And it just, especially on the calm days when there's no wind, um, it actually cools down the vineyards where you wanna put on a Jersey at three, four o'clock in the afternoon. But you're driving to Stellenbosch and it's still boiling hot. Or you move out and up onto the Simonsberg mountain and as you rise through the vineyards, you can feel the temperature drop as you move higher and higher up in altitude. So you've got these pockets throughout Stellenbosch, whether you are on the Bottelary Hills or in the Stellenbosch Kloof, or up on the Simonsberg or standing up at Uva Mira, which is at 500 meters above sea level and they make Chardonnay, um, and you can harness all these different regions together and you can showcase Cabernet in such a diverse way, but there's the seam that runs through it, of this beautiful acidity. Um, this edgyness, we've got a tannin that that's kind of distinctly Stellenbosch, but there's variation within, depending on the region. Um, and it's, it's just so much fun to just kind of explore and, and, and see if you can pick up these differences and nuances that all the different nooks and crannies of the region can give you.

Janina Doyle 00:06:05 Awesome. Well, actually, we, we have three different wines that you are gonna be representing today. Of course, you know, we did Le Riche. So I'll go to the first one because then I I'd like to see kind of, I know all three of them are for different areas, so we'll see how you can explain the different regions. So the first wine that I have is from Jordan, uh, The Long Fuse, Cabernet Sauvignon 2018. So where are these guys based actually in comparison to your winery, Le Riche, actually, we should probably do that.

Christo Le Riche 00:06:35 Yeah so we, we're sitting to the south of Stellenbosch, um, basically right off False Bay ocean, we're about eight kilometers as the crow flies from the ocean itself. Um, so we are on the foot of the Helderberg mountain. Um, we don't have a classified Ward, where our winery is, we're still working on that. So that'll come in the next couple of years, but, um, we're basically in the Southern, most Southern portion of Stellenbosch. Uh, comparative to Meerlust, I think would be a good wine to taste, to give you an idea of what the area actually tastes like.

Janina Doyle 00:07:05 Okay, well, the, the history, yes. Is Meerlust the oldest winery in Stellenbosch, or at least one of them?

Christo Le Riche 00:07:12 I think Alto is actually one of the oldest. Uh. You don't have a lot of Alto in the UK because we drink 98% of it locally. Um, they do 600,000 bottles, but we, it also goes local. I think they export 2%. Um, but they're now under new ownerships. But Meerlust, you definitely get it up in the UK. And they've obviously, I mean, they're the, they were one of the first Bordeaux blends to be made in, I think, '78. Um, and they were old Stellenbosch farmers, winery farm that was growing grapes for them, and then they turned into a bottling farm, similar to Kanonkop. Um, so, so that's one of the reasons these are big established producers, which, which you see is they've got that history with Stellenbosch farmer's winery. Rustenberg, funnily enough, was actually independent producer. I, as far as my knowledge goes, they didn't deliver to the farmer's winery. Um, and they were actually bottling under the Schoongezicht label before that. But, um, any case the, so Jordan is again, lying to the west of Stellenbosch. So they're lying between Stellenbosch and Cape town. Um, and that's where you find the Bottelary Hills. Now the Bottelary Hills is a granitic outcrop that's sitting kind of to, yeah, to the west of Stellenbosch. They go up to about 500 meters above sea level where the mountain range on the east of Stellenbosch is going up to 1,200 meters just to kind of give you a height scale. So they're about halfway up.

Janina Doyle 00:08:36 Ah so in terms of plantings, and altitude, you're saying a 1000 meters that's, I mean, in terms of Europe, we, we'll ignore South America and, and Argentina here. In terms of Europe, like 1,200 meters is like pretty much our highest vineyards in Europe. So where...

Christo Le Riche 00:08:50 Yeah. So, so we are not planting on 1,200 meters up there. It's pure sand. Um, the wind blows 120 kilometers an hour and it's just inhospitable. Um, but, so the highest vineyards in Stellenbosch are going to about 650/600 meters above sea level. But you've gotta consider that that is within between 5 to 15 kilometers as the crow flies from sea level, flat ocean. So it's an extremely intense and fast rise to a very high height. Um, and there's very few other regions. I don't think there's another region in the world that has such a quick climb from sea level up to, to mountain, kind of mid, mid slope mountains. And I think this is one of unique things about Stellenbosch and, and what makes us, gives us such that, that's such an amazing terror to work with. But yeah, so, Bottelary Hills, um, Jordan, they're sitting on the Southern slopes of the Bottelary Hills. So this is really one of the coolest regions in Stellenbosch. Um, for reason being that they sit right in the face of, of the sea breeze. So they far enough from the ocean that the ocean itself doesn't regulate their temperature as what, where we are. We'll still, we won't have as cold nights, where there, where Jordan is sitting, they're just a little bit further away, um, the land cools down, but you get this afternoon breeze coming in. So you'll know that Jordan obviously are doing great Chardonnays as well. Um, a lot of the young guys are making some really good Chenins coming out of that area. I know Bruwer Raatz does some great Cab Franc as well. Um, so the sites that work for Cab there are those that are typically north facing or tucked away outta that sea breeze. And this, this block from Jordan is actually coming from a vineyard that's right next to the cellar. And the cell is dipped into the Stellenbosch Kloof. So it's actually, Jordan as a farm, um, does quite a few cold sites, but their Cab site is, is a little bit tucked away. And you find that on the wine where you'll always see with the Jordan a little bit more red fruit coming through, which you also see on this wine. Um, it's got a lovely, acidic tension to it, but there's this brightness and a freshness about the wines, which is really delicious. And it gives the wine good ageability as well. So they take a long time to ripen. Uh, they pick a little bit later in the season, um, but it does give you this lovely, bright fruited kind of style in the warmer vintage. In the, in the cold vintages, you'll find a little bit more herbaceousness

coming through. Um, so it, it, you've gotta watch your vintages as well, but it's it, you could get that lovely freshness on these wines.

Janina Doyle 00:11:24 Now it's interesting you say that. So if I was to compare that to obviously, people, if you have not listened to part one, make sure you do so you can listen to me talking about Le Riche Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, but, so your one, your one was not huge. It wasn't a monster. It wasn't bold, but it was certainly concentrated. I find with Jordan and maybe this is to do with the granitic soils, maybe this is to do with the slightly larger diurnals and the colder nights, but I find this slightly more savory, a little bit more kind of cigar box, tobacco a little bit more, maybe pencil shavings, more of a nod towards Bordeaux, if you were trying to, but still, again, lots of fruit. I wouldn't, it's not as earthy as I would expect, or as dry as I would expect in Bordeaux, but it's interesting just already thinking about tasting some different Cabernet from Stellenbosch and already picking up those differences. Um.

Christo Le Riche 00:12:16 Yeah. So, so if you taste Jordan, um, those sudden slopes of the Bottelary, so well, Polkadraai is, is really the ward region. And you compare that with the Banghoek. Now the Banghoek is another region, um, Delaire....

Janina Doyle 00:12:31 There's too many regions. Too many regions.

Christo Le Riche 00:12:32 Delaire, well, I mean, if you think about Bordeaux, there's a huge amount of regions there. It's about just come and explore and it'll make a lot more sense, but, um, so the Banghoek Valley has also got that little bit of a coolness feel to it, um, in, in their style of wines. And you definitely get a little bit more of that cigar box, tomato leaf character coming through. Um, and as with Bordeaux, you get a little bit more of that vintage variation coming through as well. So Bordeaux obviously sitting on the verge of where Cabernet ripens and in a bad year, as we knew '13, '12, it's, the wines are almost undrinkable, but in the warm years, the wines are beautiful and you get a lot more of that warmth and that fruit's coming through. So depending on where you are in Stellenbosch, you do also get that variation playing through and typically with, with these Jordans and the wineries in those region, um, you do get that coolness and that tension that does sit on the wines.

Janina Doyle 00:13:23 Mm can't help but keep on comparing to some of the others, but I should, I'm I'm rushing ahead now. Now, and I agree with you, there's that like, kind of almost like red plums, I get a little bit of cassis and a little bit of prune, so I'm still getting darker fruits, but there's also playing in a little bit of maybe some blueberries and violets just in the background. So it's got a, a whole array of kind of different fruits, but I think that that's cause there is this kind of restraint. I just think if people were just wanted to have a Cabernet Sauvignon, that's not so fruit driven certainly in this vintage, I think Jordan's done pretty good with that. So that interesting. And you said about granitic soils where they are, which is by the Bottelary and the Polkadraai Hills, but coming obviously back down south where you are, where Meerlust is, down in the south, much closer to False bay, what is, what are the soils like typically there in comparison?

Christo Le Riche 00:14:12 So the majority of Stellenbosch is on granitic soil, that kind of our major, um, but we've also got seams and kind of these tons of what we call Tygerberg shales, um, that comes to Stellenbosch. So, but I mean, we've got extremely old soils here. So when you talk about the origin of the soil and what the soil actually looks like in front of you, it often is extremely difficult to assess what you're actually working with. So whether you are working with a granitic soil or shale soil is often quite

tricky to tell. Um, but where we are, um, a little bit down on the slope, now do consider that the, the, the, my reserve is, has got Simonsberg, Jonkershoek, as well as where my winery is based, wine going in there. So it it's, you can't say, it's not a single vineyard, so you're not gonna get that pinpoint, um, kind of identity, but where we are, we usually work with a little bit more duplex soils. Now these are older soils where the clay is migrated down. Um, these soils are typically here before the mountains popped up and you get a lot of coffee stone gravel in the top soil, little bit more loamy. They're poorer soils, um, with a thick clay banks sitting underneath, probably from anything from like, uh, like 80 centimeters or deeper. Where with Jordan, you've got your more recently weathered granite. Um, and these soils are typically much deeper. They can go up to 4, 5, 6 meters. They work well with dry land farming. Um, where Jordan is, they get a little bit less rainfall than what the areas on the mountain get. The mountain gets up to 120 mm where we're kind of, our winery is, and Jordan is, we get around 600mm to 700 mm annually. So you can see the rain doubles as you get closer to the mountain slope. Um, so that, that also plays an influence. But yeah, so the Bottelary, upper slopes of the Bottelary have got these, these, uh, deep granitic soils. But as you move to the lower slopes, you start to see that duplex soil coming in again. So someone once described it, it's like a pimple coming out of the landscape. And the top of the pimple is this more recently weathered granite and where down the side and the bottom, the lower areas is all the old skin. And that's kind of the soils we work with is that more duplex soil that's sitting at the bottom.

Janina Doyle 00:16:23 Intriguing, love it. Right. So then let's compare. So the next wine that I have is The Warwick Estate, The Blue lady, um, this is 2017. So we're going a vintage before. Where is the Warwick Estate situated?

Christo Le Riche 00:16:41 So Warwick is sitting to the north of Stellenbosch. Um, it's probably one of the most Northern, um, farms in the region. So it's sitting on the, on the kind of, um, Cape town side of the Simonsberg mountain. So the Simonsberg mountain is our Northern boundary really of, of Stellenbosch. It's this almost this free standing, um, colossus of a mountain that's go also goes up to a thousand meters. Um, and Stellenbosch owns the Southern slopes of this mountain. Paarl will obviously have the Northern slopes of the mountain. Um, and as you move on the mountain from east to west, it becomes warmer. So on the west, on the Eastern side, you've got Tokara, Thelema, um, and, and kind of those two wineries, which is stylistically that slightly cooler more herbaceousness and then you move over to Rustenberg and then you move over onto Kanonkop, Muratie, um, Delheim and then Warwick, um, Lievland, um, sitting on the Western side. And as you're moving west, it gets a little bit warmer. So specifically where Warwick is, they don't get as much influence from that sea breeze. You're now sitting at about 20 kilometers away from the ocean. Um, they do are, they are a little bit further up the slope, but not that high. So about 2 to 300 meters above sea level. Um, and they've all also got a little bit more of that deep red soils that you would have, similar to what Jordan would have, um, that they're working on. So those deep red soils have got slightly more vigor. So we also, where Warwick is situated. So you often see that these soils will, um, also because they're so deep, they're a little bit cooler. So they ripen, they will bud later in the season and they'll ripen later in the season. So these farms will be picking off and up into, into April. Um, so quite late ripening farms and depending where you are on the mountain, you'll go from cooler to slightly warmer, um, sites. But I mean, we know the, the, the quality of Warwick and Kanonkop, which are sitting lower down on the slopes and they've, they've got this lovely warmth to them, but there's a linearity about this tannin structure on these wines, which is for me, typical

Simonsberg. So you often see Merlot, Cab Franc being incorporated, which gives you a little bit more, that kind of width in the mid palate.

Janina Doyle 00:19:06 I was waiting cause you're describing this kind of slightly more linear style, but actually, out of the three wines, obviously the one we tried in part one, and then obviously, Jordan, this is the roundest for me. This is the weightiest of all.

Christo Le Riche 00:19:19 But that's, that's also something that is stylistic to Warwick as well. They do like going little bit bigger, more bolder, little bit riper in style. Um, and, but it's also what works in that little nook of Stellenbosch in the way that they go about, about making their wines as well.

Janina Doyle 00:19:35 Delicious. I mean, this is the thing, you know, all of these are really good examples of fruit driven Cabernet Sauvignon with balance, with tannins that aren't overpowering with, I mean this, this, the oak here seems to be pretty restrained. It seems very much in the background. I imagine it's just seen a very small amount. This is, this probably has the most kind of cassis, blackberry notes of the three so far, just for me with a bit of forest floor in there, even maybe, uh, yeah, maybe a bit of herbaceousness, like thyme, but it, for me it's more about just the roundness and the, the softness of, of the fruit, but it's, I mean, it's hard to, they're all, they're all great. Which is, which is good, which says, says good things for Stellenbosch.

Christo Le Riche 00:20:20 It does, but it makes it tricky to understand. It's not, it's not a region where you can just walk in and say, that is a Stellenbosch Cabernet. It's all big, it's all powerful. You've got these nuances and you've got these different kind of influences that are coming through in the region. It's, that's part of our diversity, which is our blessing and our curse.

Janina Doyle 00:20:37 Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Well, anyone who wants to try, I've just realized, I didn't say about the first one, both of these wines, both the Warwick Estate and The Jordan, The Long Fuse are both from winedirect.co.uk. So that's perfect. The Jordan, the one before was £17.95 and this is £24.95. So there we go. So if you prefer a slightly more savory style go for that one, if you prefer the slightly rounder style, go with the, with The Warwick Estate. Well, maybe you can tell me to, is there a defining feature for Cab Sav from Stellenbosch? Is there something, is it that specific, more linear tannin? Am I asking a question that can't be answered?

Christo Le Riche 00:21:16 It's hard to say, obviously if I give you a flight of 30 Cabs, Stellenbosch Cabs, you'll know exactly what I'm talking about.

Janina Doyle 00:21:22 Um, okay. All right. When should we do that?

Christo Le Riche 00:21:24 It's not every day that we do that. Um, I know Greg Sherwood is sitting there with a whole collection, um, which he'll be doing quite soon for us, but, um, as soon as we can fly, we will come to the UK, we'll do you a nice, big, big Stellenbosch Cabernet tasting, which I think, that's that's high on our radar. But the, I think the things ones can look out for when you looking at Stellenbosch, you will find, uh, herbaceous seam running through most of them, not all of them. Um, which is for me a positive and that's a, that's a freshness and that's for me kind of that tip of the head towards your more Bordelaise style. Um, then you will find a good acidity sitting on these wines. Um, we do have a nice natural acidity coming through on the wines. If the wine makers haven't gone to ripe, which we used to do that in the 2000's, we have completely moved away from that. Um, and I think the guys are making much better wines at the moment. Um, then in terms of tannin structure, it's a little bit

more grippy. We don't have as fine chalky tannin as what you would describe Napa, but we don't have as, as intense and powerful tannins as what you'll see in Bordeaux. Ours, I would almost describe it as a little bit more gritty, maybe slightly more wild, but that's kind of, I mean, we are in Africa, so that's, that's kind of part of our character. Um, but wild's a different word, but it's, it's kind of a little bit more gritty. Um, yeah. So, and I think there's, there's a lovely intensity to it as well, but it can also be that lovely juiciness that sits there. And I think that's, that's one of the, the calling cards for Stellenbosch, is we're sitting on that new world, old world balance. And we get these lovely, like powerful tannin structures that are there, but there's a juiciness to them as well. Um, and that's that coating of warm fruit, because of our sunshine, our climate that we are getting, um, you've got this old world, um, savouriness that can be kind of complimented by a new world fruit. And it's, that's, that's really what I love about the Cabs that we're doing from our region.

Janina Doyle 00:23:29 Do you know it's so funny isn't it that you said the best way to describe it is this mix between, in the middle of new world and old world. And that's actually just for me, how I describe South Africa in general, as a wine producing country, you know. I always say to people like it was actually in the 1600s, when you first got your grapes and started doing really well and fantastic things. And when you think about the rest of the new world, it's actually really only in the 1800s when other countries started taking off and doing things. So it is, it's almost like the style you've described. It's almost just the way you are as a country for producing wine, you're in the middle somewhere.

Christo Le Riche 00:24:06 No, definitely. I mean, we were, we were making wine long before Australia turned into a prison. So the, I think what, the influences that have come over our wines as well. I mean, we, in the eighties, a lot of our winemaker studied at Geisenheim. I think today you see a little bit more influence, well, we've seen two schools of influence. The one is coming out of Montpellier, which is actually giving a lot of bursaries to our students, uh, wine making students. And the other side is we are getting a lot of influence coming in from the American side with people like Andrea Mullineux coming in, Samantha O'Keefe, and a lot of our winemakers going to Napa and America actually working there because the language barriers there and they pay well. So it's, it's been, you've seen a lot of our winemakers traveling to Napa. So it's, you've got these two influencers, but they'll go to Napa. And then from Napa they'll flip over and they'll go and do a harvest at a natural producer in Spain somewhere, or it's, or it's this complete like anthesis of two different, different kinds of, of influence and training schools that you're working with. And I think that's, that's part of this amalgamation that, I mean, they call us the rainbow nation and I think that's part of what, what really is South Africa. And then just looking at these two wines that you're drinking now. I mean, Gary Jordan has just bought a farm in England. And he's actually busy developing a, a farm here on your coastline. But he's much more Bordeaux influenced. Where Warwick is owned by Americans. Um, and their style was also set when it was still under the, the Ratcliff family with the influence of Zelma Long and Phil Freese, which is obviously they've, they, they are two of the heroes of coming off, um, Opus One viticulture and the development of the To Kalon vineyards, et cetera. So the Warwick is much more influenced by an American palate, where your Jordan I would say is much closer to your Bordelaise palate coming in.

Janina Doyle 00:26:02 Spot on from what I, my tasting notes. Absolutely.

Christo Le Riche 00:26:04 Yeah. And so you've got this influence, we've obviously got Glenelly, that's owned by Madame May de Lencquesaing ex-(Chateau Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande), coming off of Bordeaux. Um, we've uh, my dad having traveled to Bordeaux much more. I mean, America wasn't

even on the map when he was, when he was kind of starting his career. He was very good friends, friends with Paul Pontallier from Margaux. Um, so you've got these two schools of influence working on each other with a seam of Geisenheim through the eighties and a lot of Germans, um, Günter Brözel, um, one of the first guys who worked through distel, et cetera. So it's, it's been a very interesting melting pot of influences and, and you see that in our wines. And I think that makes it a bit muddling. Yeah. Understanding what is, what is the history of a property and the style of a property versus the style of the, the, their ward that they're in, whether you are on the Simonsberg or, or Helderberg, um, is part of understanding why the wines that you tasting taste the way they taste. And it's, you've gotta kind of, once again, come here and come and travel, and come and taste and, and we'll show you and we'll tell you.

Janina Doyle 00:27:13 You don't need to ask me twice Christo. I am coming.

Christo Le Riche 00:27:16 I've asked you three times already.

Janina Doyle 00:27:17 To be fair, you have, and I'm coming. No, I definitely will when I get the opportunity. Now let's finish off with the last ones. Then we can have a, well, you've already kind of concluded. But the last wine that I have is the 21 Gables Cabernet Sauvignon. I believe, I think it's 2018 as well. Let me grab the bottle. 2018. Yes. And it's from Spier right? Oh, these bottles. They're not the lightest bottles in the world, but hey, I do quite like to feel like I'm pouring something when these are premium wines. So, um, yeah, to be honest, if we talk about sustainability as, as we were talking the other week, that's a whole other conversation, and I know that's very important to you all.

Christo Le Riche 00:27:54 That's, it's such an important topic of conversation and it's in Africa, it's such a difficult one to solve because we've got a monopoly on glass, coming from Consol glass, who we have, have no love for the company. Sorry, I should have said that on, on public air. Um, and then all the electricity for their glass melting is coming from coal fired power plants. So 90% of our power is coming of the dirtiest electricity in the world. So even if we go lightweight, it's still, it's still got a lighter carbon footprint to import from France, which is working off nuclear. So it's, it's this insane understanding of if we import a bottle from Europe, it's got a lower carbon footprint than what we produce it locally. So we've gotta figure this out in South Africa and we're busy working on it. And we're definitely also committed to this cause. Um, one of the big ones is convincing our government to step away from coal, but that's a, that's a little, little project on its own

Janina Doyle 00:28:46 Slowly, slowly, step by step, right? I appreciate that you know, the more premium bottles in every country in the world have heavy bottles. That is the way it is because people want to feel like they've got something special.

Christo Le Riche 00:29:00 Sadly it sells. And you don't want to make decisions based on that. But it's, it's there it's yeah, it's terrible, but it the worst part of it unfortunately.

Janina Doyle 00:29:07 Don't worry. We put that conversation to the side. So I'm smelling this straight away. This is the most smokey, I'm getting like incense sticks. Um, it's, it's got this really sweet smokey nature and like kind of cigar box, chalky, pencil shavings, it's actually the most different. So where are Spier based?

Christo Le Riche 00:29:28 So Spier is actually quite a large producer. Um, you might see their wines throughout the UK as well. They're one of the biggest in Stellenbosch. They work with a range of wines,

but they've got an absolutely amazing team that they work with. Um, great winemakers working under them. Um, one of the winemakers actually was with me in, uh, in Napa valley, um, in the season I was there and she's now doing their organic range, but, um, this specific, um, wine is coming off the Helderberg. So they own a piece of vineyard on the Helderberg mountain. It's the most Southern property on the mountain, but it's facing north. And, um, I, I like using this wine because it's such a great expression of the Helderberg. Now, the, the Spier wines are bigger, they're bolder. Um, but that is also the character of the Helderberg. So as, as what you have on the Simonsberg mountain, moving west east to west, um, you've got a change in style. You've got the same on the Helderberg mountain, um, where you're moving north to south. So on the Northern side, you've got farms like Keermont, uh, De Trafford, uh, Waterford, where they're working with a little bit more, there's a little bit more shale intermixed with the decomposed granite. Um, and they've got a little bit less vigor, um, and it's, it's just, they make a little bit lighter wine. So if you taste the Cabernet from that side, they're not as intense, but as you come around the corner, you go through past Rust en Vrede, and Ernie Els, Guardian Peak, um, and then coming to this property of Spiers and there's, there's a lot more intensity and power. And that's for me, the Helderberg. It's, it's a Southern area in Stellenbosch so it gets that cooling sea breeze, but it's north facing slopes. So they get a lot of sunshine, a lot of intensity coming through. And you see that in the wines where if you work with the fruit here, they've got amazing acidity, but at the same time, unbelievable intensity and power. And it's, it's one of the beauties of this region, but you've gotta appreciate that these wines are intense. They're big, they're beautiful, but there's this garrigue character with the herbaceousness that runs underneath and that provides a freshness. And as I mentioned earlier, there's this acidity that sits on this mountain, which, which provides this, this, this lovely concentration with a refreshing seam. And I think that in terms of Cabernet is so important. If you don't have enough acidity on your Cabs, they just become dry and heavy and unpleasant. I mean, wines should be a refreshing drink in the end of the day. So getting that balance right is, is what for me is so beautiful about, about the Helderberg and with these lovely gritty, um, big tannin structures that are sitting on the wine, but coated in beautiful black fruits, um, often olive tapenade. And with the savory undertone, it sounds a bit contradictory, but it's there.

Janina Doyle 00:32:26 No and actually with this one, as I said to you, like, I've got this more incense sticks and this cigar box on the nose, but on the pallet, this olive tapenade, it's because it's like, it's giving you this like herbacious, but perfume all at the same time, mixing with some blackberries and mulberries. And you said it's quite big and there is, um, a weightiness to this wine, but actually it's very energetic. I think it tricks you with the acidity and with the freshness. I feel like it's lighter than it actually is. It's very pretty, actually, this is the, the prettiest. So I would say, um, of the three that we've tasted today, Jordan is the most, um, Bordeaux in style. Warwick is the biggest, most Napa style, as you've said, and this is the most perfumed in style, but all again, and you are completely right. I haven't mentioned acidity on anything because they've all been high and my mouth has watered and I've just kinda taken it for granted. But yes, I agree with you pretty, uh, pronounced tannins. And I feel like I need to go back to yours. Let's, let's bring this back into the episode. Um, and so I can compare because I've compared those three, but this one I started, mm. Now going back, do you know what, going back to yours, yours is the most concentrated of fruit. Yours, and actually, okay, I don't, is this a good thing or a bad thing? I think it sits in between being Napa and Bordeaux.

Christo Le Riche 00:34:00 But that's, that's exactly where I want the wine to sit. So, as I said...

Janina Doyle 00:34:04 OK yay. So it's good. I was scared for a second.

Christo Le Riche 00:34:05 We, we try and showcase Stellenbosch and Stellenbosch is exactly that it sits between these, these two kind of, uh, internationally acclaimed Cabernet powerhouses. But I mean, Stellenbosch is there and we, we, we, we're part of this, um, we just haven't told our story much. Um, and it's, it's, it's the beauty of what the region is, but in South Africa we drink it all ourselves. So we haven't exported enough of the quality stuff that we have here because we like drinking it so much.

Janina Doyle 00:34:35 Well, yeah. I mean, you said, so we, we we've talked about Cabernet Sauvignon. Quite clearly you are trying to promote as a wine region, Cabernet Sauvignon, and you've set up the, The Stellenbosch Cabernet Collective. So, so why do you, do the wine makers in this region feel like actually Cabernet Sauvignon is where you need to head, where you need to lead with?

Christo Le Riche 00:34:56 So it's the most planted grape in Stellenbosch. Um, so if you taste the terroir of Stellenbosch, Cabernet is the one's gonna do it for you because you can find those individual expressions from all over the region. But it's also have, has the history. It's got the quality. It's been producing the most award-winning wines that we have in South Africa for over 30 or 40 years, um, locally and internationally. Um, and it's, it's for me, really the, the calling card of Stellenbosch. Now that doesn't mean Stellenbosch, doesn't have absolutely amazing Chardonnays, Chenins, um, some beautiful, um, Shiraz is coming out through it as well. And that's because of this diversity of regions that we've spoken about. But if you want to have a grape or cultivator that can showcase Stellenbosch, um, Cabernet really is that variety to do it, but it's also got the ability to handle handle the, the warmer climate so if we have climate change coming in, it's got a thick skin, it's got that ability to, to handle it. We've got the deep red soils that, that have got that water retention on them. Um, we've got the natural rainfall as well. So it's, Stellenbosch really does have all the elements that we need to produce great Cabernet. And if you look within a South African context at the, and now the platter results that came out last week, of the 18 Five Star Cabernets that were handed out, 15 were from Stellenbosch. So you really it's, it's the one variety within this South African context where Cabernet has, has picked Stellenbosch as its home. Um, and I think Stellebosch is very happy to have it.

Janina Doyle 00:36:38 So the Stellenbosch Cabernet Collective, is this just to really promote Cabernet Sauvignon so that the rest of us around the world can actually start paying attention and understand that this is what you're doing. Is that the, the point?

Christo Le Riche 00:36:51 Yes, exactly. So look, it's it's, uh, the collective is an open, anybody can, who wants to get involved can get, you've obviously gotta pay your fees to be joining up, but it is, um, we, we are not a country that has any kind of government support or government marketing bodies, really, because there's just no support coming from them. So we've gotta do it ourselves. Um, but I think South Africans aren't, we just, we're a nation of people that don't like talking about ourselves. So we don't tell our own story, unlike the Americans. Um, so it's, it's something that we are extremely bad at, is telling people how, how, just, what (Janina: How good you are) what the place is all about and it's, um, I'm glad you said that. I don't have to say it. Um, so really what we are doing, what we are doing as a collective is just taking, taking the store of Stellenbosch and the story of Stellenbosch Cabernet and we're just starting to tell people about it, which is a very easy thing to do, because it's a great story. Um, and we're just putting it out there in a cohesive, um, cohesive message and we, for the first time, and it's actually mind boggling, that's never been done, but we've, we've asked, um, Cathy van Zyl, who is one of our local MWs to just compile a document that describes Stellenbosch, the region, the soils, the winds, and how it influences Cabernet. And this has never been done. So it's these obvious things, the

information is all there. We've done all the research, but we've just never compiled it into a book and given it to somebody where, I mean, how many books have you read on Bordeaux or the other regions in the world. But it doesn't exist about, about our wines because we just don't tell our stories.

Janina Doyle 00:38:31 And it's like, when I say to you, oh my God, too many regions. And you're like, well, Bordeaux has regions, but we are used to the understanding that there's Pauillac and, you know, there's Margaux. We know that, but when we think about Stellenbosch, that's just, that's the region full stop. Yeah. And we're not used to it.

Christo Le Riche 00:38:47 Yea and Stellenbosch is kind of the only region in South Africa. And that's like South Africa is seen as a whole where we very much, we are so diverse within short distances that we can do Pinots within 15 minutes drive from Stellenbosch, as you get into Elgin, it's literally just going over the pass and the climate goes from winter to almost more summer rainfall. Um, well, not summer rainfall, but they get a lot of rain in summer where Stellenbosch doesn't because of these mountains, which I've spoken about.

Janina Doyle 00:39:16 Mm. I mean, that's, it's exciting. And at least now there's that big push for people to understand. So what do you think is the future to finish off? What is the future for Stellenbosch?

Christo Le Riche 00:39:28 Oh, it's extremely bright. Um, I, I think, I think anybody who hasn't heard that South Africa is, is exciting, um, hasn't been in the wine trade or in the wine kind of listening to any wine writers over the last 10 years. We've had this amazing group of young guys who are learning from the old guys. And I think that's one of the major things in Stellenbosch, which I love is that I can go walk up to my dad or, um, Neil Ellis or, um, the late "Duimpie" Bayly, and, and, and Kevin Arnold. And I can chat to them about their experience of 40 years of winemaking in Stellenbosch at multiple properties. And they can tell me about their, they, um, kind of teachers who have been coming from the fifties and, and that's something which is, is within a, South African context, quite unique to Stellenbosch. We've got that history, we've got the wines back dating, and now you've got this young generation that are being kind of inspired, inspired by this movement in South Africa, but also have done their own travels and they love their area and the region, and they're putting their own signature on the wines. Um, making them, I think, better and, and more detailed and more focused and more vineyard focused than what we've ever been before. And I think it's, well, it's not a matter of if, but it's a matter of when will our wines be seen with the best fine wines in the world, because that's really where Stellenbosch should be positioned.

Janina Doyle 00:40:55 I love it. Christo, you have been so amazing at talking about yourself, your story, your winery. And you've been so gracious as to talk about these other wineries in such a beautiful, interesting fashion. And if all the other winemakers are as interesting and as informative as you, then I assume that this future that you're expecting will come about much faster. So thank you for your time.

Christo Le Riche 00:41:23 Pleasure and thank you. Thank you for having me on the show. It's been, it's been great fun um, chatting about Stellenbosch.

Janina Doyle 00:41:29 Well I will enjoy drinking my Cabernet Sauvignons and look forward to trying another 30 to fully define what Cabernet Sauvignon is from Stellenbosch. So please come across to the

UK soon. I'm coming to you when I can. And, um, we'll drink some Cab Sav together. Have a lovely, lovely day. Take care. Thank you. Bye.

Janina Doyle 00:41:56 You can see that Christo is very keen to have us all come out and visit him. So with more than 150 wineries, part of the Stellenbosch wine route, I think we will all have a lot of work to do here. So whilst you're absorbing all that new you information, I shall leave you with a wine quote. So with the nod to the last episode where Christo was talking about the ageability of Cabernet Sauvignon, I probably should have done it the other way around and had the quote then. I found one from Francis Bacon. So he was a English philosopher and was the Lord Chancellor back in the 1600s. And he said:

“Age appears best in four things, old wood to burn, old wine to drink, old friends to trust and old authors to read.”

So at the very least, grab some friends, sit around a fireplace, especially if you're in England right now, it is bloody freezing and grab yourself a beautifully aged bottle of Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon. Now, after my episode on extreme vineyards last year, several of you came back and said, you did like the idea of maybe looking at the oldest wineries in the world. And so next week that is exactly what we are going to do. So thank you as ever for tuning in, for listening, for liking the podcast. Subscribe if you haven't and share this with your wine loving friends. Leave me a comment if you can, especially if you are listening on apple podcast, as like I say, it makes the podcast more discoverable. Thank you all for being here. I am raising my glass of Cabernet Sauvignon from Stellenbosch, and until next week, cheer to you.