

## STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA --



This is your Foreign Correspondent reporting to you from Stellenbosch, South Africa, in the heart of the South African wineland about 75 miles east of Cape Town.

On the heels of an excellent LFW event at Skip and Anne Walker's home featuring select wines from South Africa, we ventured to that country for a first-hand tasting experience. Near the town of Paarl, we discovered Seidelberg Wine Estate, a beautiful wine farm with a hilltop view of the dramatic Boland mountain range. The winery featured a class restaurant and a glass blowing art center. It grows 12 grape varieties and produces 28 different wines.

In a curved brick cavern tasting room, dark and comfortable, and with the help and expertise of Deidre, we sampled a number of Seidelberg wines. First, was the 2007 Sauvignon Blanc. Citrus and asparagus aromas gave way to hints of lemongrass and tropical fruit. With an alcohol content of 12.5%, this most popular summer white wine has a crisp dry and refreshing aftertaste. It is bottled with a screw cap and we enjoyed it thoroughly. It sells at the winery for the equivalent of \$13.32 per bottle.

Next was the 2006 Chardonnay from Paarl, South Africa. With 14.0% alcohol, this wine is fermented in steel tanks with oak staves. The bottle is finished with synthetic cork. This complex buttery wine presented hints of honey and citrus and a subtle toastiness. It was among our favorites and we purchased a bottle for the evening. It sells at the equivalent of \$14.32 per bottle.

Most intriguing, however, was the Seidelberg Pinotage wine, a product of cross-pollination between Pinot Noir and Hermitage grapes. We had sampled a Pinotage Rose from Graham Beck Wines at the Walker event, but the full on taste of Pinotage was unique to us. The history of Pinotage is quite interesting. It is a result of an experiment with cross-pollination undertaken in 1925 by Professor Abram Parold of the University of Stellenbosch. The grapes are grown as a bush vine and are not trellised and was first presented to the consumer in 1932. The bottle is finished with Portuguese cork. This is not a wine for the faint-hearted. It has a concentrated berries and cinnamon aroma, backed by a powerful fruit and tannin structure. Its aftertaste is long and spicy, and well worth the experience. We were informed that Pinotage is not sold by Seidelberg outside of South Africa so we purchased a case at the equivalent of \$24.32 per bottle.

As a post script to this report, we dropped in on the Graham Beck Wines tasting room, which has only been open since December of last year. It was a beautiful state of the art, well designed facility with no expense apparently compromised. We tasted many wines not generally given to the public and received a brief tour of the building. Among the notables was the Board Room where each Board member has a table drawer in the Board Room table. When pulled open, each Board member has his or her own individual spittoon -- but that's for another report.

This is your Foreign Correspondent, Paul (and Ellen) Gutierrez, signing off . . .