

A Week in the Life of Carolyn Martin of South Africa's Creation Wines

By Richard Siddle August 26, 2016

Carolyn Martin and her husband Jean-Claude have done more than most to put the cool climate region of Hemel & Aarde, and Hermanus, on South Africa's winemaking map. Here she talks about the importance of wine tourism and viticulture for the future of the country's wines.

Creation Wines have become a benchmark for some of the quality winemaking in South Africa and are slowly gaining traction in the premium on-trade. Helped by the passion and infectious enthusiasm of its co-founder, Carolyn Martin.



What was the highlight of your last working week?

Having a feast cooked for me by one of the best curry chefs in South Africa; her restaurant is called the 'Holi Cow'.

And the lowlight of your last working week?

Being stuck in a lift on the 9th floor of a hotel for 30 minutes - no cell phone reception - and wondering if anyone will hear the emergency bell!

What is the best part of your job?

Meeting the fascinating people who are our customers ~ including private clients, talented chefs, sommeliers and wine, food and travel writers and bloggers from all over the world.

What is the thing about your job you would like to improve?

An aerodynamic way to transport the load of wine and accoutrements that have to be moved around for presentations and shows! The Tasting Room, situated right in the middle of our vineyards, is a blessing and if this could be 'beamed' to wherever I was in the world it would be wonderful!

How has 2016 been for you and your business?

The 2016 vintage was good, including the apprentices who came to help with the harvest! We added a services centre to our tasting facilities and this had a cranky start with infrastructure issues that had to be resolved. These included a small electrical fire, rewiring DB boards and finally I decided that the business needed rewiring too - with a proper reporting structure and heads of departments put in place so I didn't personally fuse!

We have now caught up with ourselves and everything is working better than before. Team members are more confident and capable and the customers are happy as everyone has clear roles and responsibilities. In short, we are now able to work on what excellence really means in all aspects of the business.

What are the key trends that are impacting your business?

The flora and fauna of the Hermanus area have become a key tourist destination

1 Wine Tourism: is a huge part of the South African wine scene and has the potential of changing the perception of South African wines worldwide in a number of ways:

- It raises the profile of South African wine
- Gives local and international visitors the chance to experience the terroir first hand and creates a sense of place
- Shows the best of the industry (not mass produced unidentifiable bulk)
- Develops a sophisticated wine culture
- Stimulates innovative culinary experiences
- Creates skills development opportunities, jobs and social upliftment and tourism exposure for the local economy.

2. Viticultural practices are improving and a more scientific approach is developing. For instance virus-free mother blocks such as the one at Creation create new material of superior quality to ultimately impact on grape and wine quality in South Africa. Jean-Claude (Carolyn's husband and co-founder of Creation Wines) had the foresight to plant one of Vititec's first virus-free mother blocks post-apartheid at Creation. During the apartheid years virus-free vines were hard to come by.

3. Grape security means sustainable viticulture - not only for the sake of end quality but also in terms of taking care of the workforce and upskilling them.



What is the favourite restaurant you have eaten this year and why?

Yudhika Sujanani creates wonderful curry dishes from her restaurant in Johannesburg. Again it has to be Holi Cow in Johannesburg. It was so unexpected, so unpretentious. Just like walking into someone's house. It only has a few tables and then having the best home cooked curry feast, cooked and presented to me by the mother and daughter of the establishment. I was persuaded to go there by a friend; it might not have been my natural choice. I learned that spicy food, generally the enemy of wine and normally not my favourite, can be incredibly flavourful and fragrant. It does not have to burn your mouth and destroy your palate!

What has been the favourite bottle of wine you have had in the last month? Why and where did you drink it?

Jean-Claude and I had a bottle of Clos Rougeard Le Bourg - a great Cabernet Franc - with one of our barrel producers, Cavin. This was in July so not quite last month but the one that stands out most recently. It was very elegant.



And the favourite cocktail you have had this year? Why and where did you drink it?

Inverroche Gin from the Western Cape. I prefer the Amber variety which is a local gin made with wild African fynbos and particularly good with Fever Tree tonic and orange zest.

If you could pick three people for a classic dinner party from the trade who would they be?

The wine writer Robert Joseph, Josephine Prieure and Damien Wilson.

What has been the best job you have had in your career?

I am still in it; it's a combination of all the things I love most: good company, food and wine!

Who have been the mentors in your career or people who have inspired you the most?

For both JC and me it has been our family. We grew up in wine families and with foragers and gardeners and people who have worked the land. There were even a few academics who chose to live a rural life. For me the most important role model was my grandmother, Eleanor Finlayson, with her incredible willpower to see things through. For JC during his early training years, Gantenbein played a very important role by introducing him to some of the best wines in the world.

The best film or book that includes wine and drink?

A must for wine lovers ... I just loved Ruth Reichl's *Garlic and Sapphires* and look forward to reading Fuchsia Dunlop's *Shark's Fin Sichuan Pepper* which has been highly recommended by a friend.

Where did you go on your summer holidays and what did you drink?

Summer holidays were spent in Burgundy and Champagne drinking both, and in Switzerland enjoying a range of Italian, Swiss and French wines.

