

AFRICA UNCORKED

In the Cape winelands, an area blessed with Napa-quality soil and a Mediterranean climate, a prescient gang of winemakers—including a former rugby hero, a surfer-poet, and a multibillionaire—is turning old vines and overlooked varietals into the 21st century's most celebrated wines.

BY GRAHAM BOYNTON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID CROOKES





PEAK SEASON

The tasting room and restaurant (run by chef Richard Carstens) at Tokara, on top of the Helshoogte Pass outside Stellenbosch.

HAVE BEEN VISITING SOUTH AFRICA'S Western Cape province since I was a schoolboy in what was then Rhodesia. I remember sitting on Cape Town's Camps Bay Beach on my first trip here, in the 1960s, and looking up in wonder at the Twelve Apostles, the formidable range of mountains that runs from just above Camps Bay to Chapman's Peak on the horizon to the southwest. There was something about that combination of granite peaks, scudding clouds, and the ebb and flow of the Atlantic tides that has remained in my memory forever. Those were the days when the country was firmly in apartheid's brutal grip; Nelson Mandela and his African National Congress inner circle were imprisoned just off this coast, on Robben Island. The Afrikaner regime seemed as immovable then as those mountains, and it was always with mixed emotions that our family took our vacations in the Cape.

Today, on Camps Bay Beach and on the neighboring Clifton beaches, the landscape remains the same, but the atmosphere has changed dramatically. South Africa, and the Western Cape in particular, is not only back on the international map but is part of the international travelers' circuit. I am here in summer this time, and that means party time—champagne festivals, garden parties at the wine estates, soirees on the luxury yachts bobbing offshore on the Atlantic swell—and the heady mix of British, American, French, and German accents confirms that what we are seeing is a kind of United Nations of vacationers.

The bacchanal is spiced up this year by the presence of Hollywood gossip column regulars. Charlize Theron and Sean Penn are making a movie. The fourth season of *Homeland* has just wrapped, but Claire Danes, Mandy Patinkin, and company may return to film the next season. The locals are thrilled by their proximity to international celebrity, long denied them during the apartheid years, but what pleases them most is the degree to which the bold-face visitors seem stunned by the physical beauty of the Cape.

This is nothing new. When British explorer Sir Francis Drake first set eyes on the Cape, in 1580, he noted that it was "the most stately thing and the fairest cape we saw in the whole circumference of the earth": a large, deep harbor that abuts a natural amphitheater (open grasslands in Drake's time but today the City Bowl, where Cape Town's urban center is located), framed by the cliffs and flat-top summit of Table Mountain and two other dramatic mountains, Devil's Peak and Lion's Head. There are more than 70 peaks higher than 1,000 feet in the Cape Town area, a spectacular contrast to the large, low-lying coastal plane known as the Cape Flats, which lies between the city and the similarly dramatic mountain ranges around what are now the wineland towns of Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, Paarl, and, a little farther to the northeast, Riebeeck Kasteel, the center of the Swartland wine region.

North of all these massive outcrops, the rest of South Africa, and indeed most of



REGIONAL SPECIALTY

From left: Executive chef Margot Janse, of Le Quartier Français, in the garden; a dish of octopus with cucumber-horseradish consommé at the hotel's main restaurant, the Tasting Room; the airy Terra del Capo, one of two tasting rooms at Anthonij Rupert Wines; a charcuterie and cheese board at Tokara.



With gabled Dutch farmhouses
and estate manors, plus
*hot summer days cooled by
sea breezes*, you have what the
gods might have created as
PERFECT WINE COUNTRY.



VINO THERAPY

From left: A wine and chocolate pairing at Waterford Estate, Stellenbosch; La Residence hotel as seen through the vineyard; a tasting in Waterford's shaded courtyard; the Wine Kollektive in Riebeeek Kasteel, the neighborhood where the annual Swartland Revolution is held in November.

See page 111 for "A Case of the Best": wines that should make the trip home with you.



sub-Saharan Africa, is by comparison chaotic, politically volatile, turbulent. But here, secreted behind the granite cordon sanitaire, is Africa as a cross between the Mediterranean and California, an organized, orderly, sophisticated, and bucolic playground. The Atlantic and Indian oceans crash onto brilliant white beaches, and between the mountain ranges are verdant valleys decorated with rows of giant camphor trees and gardens dense with hydrangeas, aloes, and 6,000 varieties of plants native to the Cape. And on the slopes around them grow the rows of vines that now produce some of the best wines on the planet. Add to this the gabled Dutch farmhouses and estate manors, some dating back to the 18th century, plus an ideal climate of hot summer days cooled by sea breezes, and you have what the gods might have created as perfect wine country.

Today it's not just that increasing numbers of international jetsetters are vacationing here; many have been buying up large chunks of wineland real estate. First there was Laurence Graff, the British diamond multimillionaire, who in 2003 purchased the modest Delaire wine estate, at the top of the Helshoogte Pass,

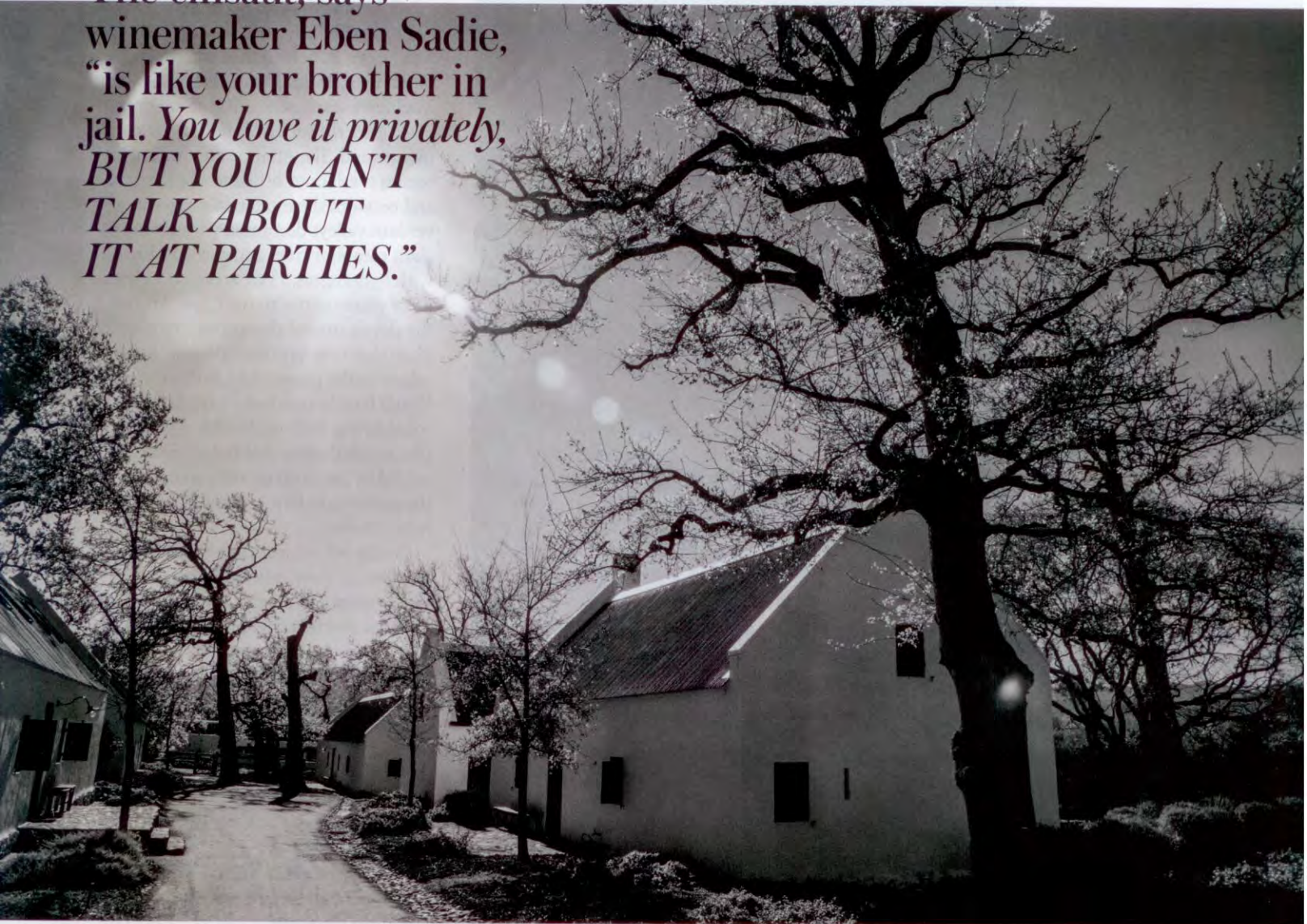
and lavished untold millions on transforming it into an extravagant spa resort and winery, the Delaire Graff Estate. In 2014, Sir Richard Branson snapped up Mont Rochelle, a pleasant but unprepossessing property that looks down into Franschhoek, gave it a lick of paint and some new carpets, and, in characteristic fashion, announced it as the valley's latest luxury lodge. Most notable of all, the Indian health-care and telecom billionaire Analjit Singh bought three adjacent properties on the slopes of the Klein Dassenberg Mountain in 2013 and at the time of this writing is creating Dassenberg Estates—a boutique hotel, a spa, and a winery—slated to open this fall.

My enviable mission is to travel through the Cape's winelands and gauge the spectacular transformation that has taken place in the 20 years since the end of apartheid, a half-century stain on the long history of this far corner of Africa. European settlement began in 1652 with the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, who had been instructed by the Dutch East India Company to set up a permanent base. Dutch, German, and then Huguenot settlers (the latter group fleeing anti-Protestant legislation in France and bringing with them a tradition of gastronomy and viticulture that they transplanted gradually) arrived in the second half of the 17th century. Their intermarriages led to the beginnings of the Afrikaner nation, although for centuries they lived relatively harmoniously alongside the indigenous Khoikhoi, a small tribe. (Today's black population in the Cape is made up of migrants from all over Africa.) The Cape changed hands frequently until 1854, when it was granted its own legislative body; 37 years later it got its own prime minister.

Stellenbosch was founded as the first Afrikaner settlement, in 1679, and by the early 1700s a small town had been built; around it, in the valley at the feet of the Simonsberg Mountains, were the farms.



The cinsaut, says winemaker Eben Sadie, “is like your brother in jail. You love it privately, BUT YOU CAN’T TALK ABOUT IT AT PARTIES.”



Unlike other colonial African frontier towns, Stellenbosch quickly built a school, then a theological seminary, and eventually the country's first Afrikaans-language university.

SO IT SEEMS FITTING THAT I START MY JOURNEY here, at the Harvard of Afrikanerdom, where the doctrine of apartheid was developed by one generation of Afrikaner academics in the mid-20th century and torn down as untenable by another generation at the century's end. Today Stellenbosch University and its neat, pretty town have become the center of IT development in South Africa. As I wander along the oak-lined streets, past the gabled, whitewashed buildings and immaculate Victorian houses that dominate the town center, I'm struck by how unchanged Stellenbosch is, how in a country that is heaving with transformation it has remained serene and easygoing.

Four miles outside it lies Vriesenhof, the wine estate belonging to Jan Boland Coetzee, a legendary Stellenbosch rugby hero and winemaker who is both a traditional Afrikaner (his forefathers arrived from Europe in 1678) and a reformist who supported so-called colored (mixed-race) farm workers' rights in the 1980s. (In the Cape,

people of mixed race make up 49 percent of the population.) When I ask Coetzee to describe precisely where we are, he smiles and says, “We're on the south-facing slope of the Stellenbosch Mountains, close to Stellenbosch town, close to heaven—just four doors away.”

His thick crop of once sandy hair has turned gray, but he remains a solid chunk of Afrikaner muscularity. He makes wines that are rich in local character and flavor, brilliantly reflecting the terroir of this region. In his younger days Coetzee was a mold-breaking winemaker, having lived and worked in Burgundy and then come home to challenge the straitjacket conventions of the South African wine industry; like other progressives of the day he was reduced to smuggling forbidden foreign vines into the country, in his case in his son's diapers. That was at the time of high apartheid, when the minority Afrikaner government attempted to control everything to do with politics, literature, the arts—even winemaking. The all-powerful state-funded KWV (Koöperative Wijnbouwers Vereniging) set policies and prices for the wine industry and imposed draconian regulations. At the same time, international boycotts of anything South African further isolated the industry, resulting in the country's wines being virtually unknown internationally through most of the 20th century.

STAY THE COURSE

From left: A row of guest suites at Babylonstoren, a resort and farm in Franschhoek; the palm and olive tree-flanked pool at La Residence; the veranda of Riebeeck Kasteel's Royal Hotel.



TIPS & TACTICS

CAPE CORNUCOPIA

Any visit to the Cape's winelands will likely start and end in Cape Town. The best time to go is the Southern Hemisphere summer (October to March); the winter months (July and August) are often wet and cold. Below are places not to miss, in town and beyond. If you want a travel specialist to organize the trip for you, we recommend either Philadelphia-based **Premier Tours**, whose South African-born Julian Harrison knows the winelands intimately (julianh@premiertours.com, 800-545-1910), or U.K.-based **Africa Travel**, where Frances Geoghegan is similarly expert (frances@africatravel.com, 888-228-3417).



STAY

ELLERMAN HOUSE, Cape Town This luxurious boutique hotel, art gallery, and wine emporium in Bantry Bay, an oceanside suburb of Cape Town, has drop-dead views of the Atlantic. Thirteen rooms in the main house and two dramatic three-bedroom villas form the core. The food is excellent and the wine gallery quite superb. From \$526, 011-27-21-430-3200, ellerman.co.za

BELMOND MOUNT NELSON, Cape Town The venerable "Nellie," a pink colonial edifice set in nine acres of lush garden, has been the hotel of choice for presidents, prime ministers, royals, and Hollywood stars since it opened in 1899. Some of the colonial traditions remain, most notably the elaborate afternoon tea service in the lounge. From \$665, 011-27-21-483-1000, mountnelson.com

LA RESIDENCE, Franschhoek Liz Biden's extravagant and secluded villa complex, on a hill above the town, is a favorite of Wall Streeters and Hollywood stars. The opulent decor may remind them of home—if their homes resemble Chinese royal palaces or Louis XIV boudoirs. From \$694, 011-27-21-876-4100, laresidence.co.za

LE QUARTIER FRANCAIS, Franschhoek This 21-unit auberge has a mix of rooms and suites (the pool suites are best for families) and is conveniently located right on the village's main road. From \$450, 011-27-21-876-2151, lqf.co.za

EAT

THE TEST KITCHEN/POT LUCK CLUB, Cape Town Chef Luke Dale-Roberts is a Cape chef with a serious international reputation, and his two restaurants (the less formal Pot Luck Club on top of the Biscuit Mill Building and the Test Kitchen, on the ground floor) are probably the best in Cape Town proper. The Test Kitchen is number 48 on the World's Best Restaurants list but is unquestionably the number one value. Five-course lunch with wine pairings, \$106; 10-course gourmand dinner with wine pairings, \$203; 011-27-21-447-2337, thetestkitchen.co.za

THE TASTING ROOM, Le Quartier Français, Franschhoek If this restaurant is the mother ship of Franschhoek's culinary revolution, then chef Margot Janse is the godmother of the new Cape cuisine. Her food is a celebration of indigenous South African ingredients. Dishes like salted farmed kabeljou (cod) and confit suckling pig with fynbos caramel confirm this and provide a surprising and startling gastronomic adventure. Eight-course dinner with wine pairing, \$120, lqf.co.za

BREAD & WINE VINEYARD RESTAURANT, Franschhoek As unpretentious as the chef who created this charming lunchtime rendezvous, Bread & Wine is owned by the same people as Le Quartier Français. Neil Jewell is a transplanted Englishman who is known as the king of charcuterie in the Franschhoek Valley—his wagyu bresaola and biltong (dried beef) and mouthwatering home-cured bacon are worth the visit. Two-course lunch for \$25, 011-27-21-876-4004, moreson.co.za

TOKARA, Stellenbosch Although Richard Carstens has a penchant for French-Asian fusion, the dishes here are somewhat El Bulli-ish in their deconstructive creativity. Try his beef tartare and sashimi with katsuobushi, sorbet, daikon, tomato, and red pepper dashi as a starter. Tasting menu from \$55, 011-27-21-885-2550, tokararestaurant.co.za

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VERDANT VIEW

The villas at La Residence feature decor from India, China, and Europe, as well as scenery that owner Liz Biden calls “prettier than Tuscany.”

These days the self-declared mold-breakers are clustered some 40 miles northwest of Stellenbosch, in the Swartland. A little more than a decade ago they moved onto vineyards that had old vines, which were previously used for cheap bulk wines but are now turning out international award winners.

LEAVE STELLENBOSCH AND GO TO THE SADIE Family winery, where I’m greeted by Eben Sadie, who is regarded as a prophet among South Africa’s younger generation of winemakers. Now in his early forties, Sadie has the absentminded scruffiness of a surfer-poet, which is what he is when he’s not making South Africa’s most celebrated new wines. He doesn’t own a television or a radio, doesn’t read newspapers, and says he is “nourished by music and poetry and wine.” All Sadie is interested in, he says, is working this land. “I never wanted to make wine. I wanted to farm. I moved here for the soil. The winery is merely a place where I can connect up my electricity.”

The morning’s tasting is a rich mix of flowing wine and equally flowing Sadie aperçus. We taste his two signature wines, Columella (named after an admired ancient Roman agronomist) and Palladius (after Columella’s successor), and then plunge into ones called Skurfberg, Pofadder, and Treinspoor (all Afrikaans names). Along the way Sadie proclaims the virtues of long unfashionable grape varieties such as cinsaut: “Cinsaut is like your brother in jail. You love it privately, but you can’t talk about it at parties.” I’m particularly taken by the delicate, fruit-driven, cinsaut-based Pofadder, named after an extremely

poisonous snake, and the lemony chenin blanc Skurfberg. Both are hard to find, as Sadie produces only 5,000 bottles of each per year, but they are worth searching for. Sadie may be entertaining, but it is his wines that really do the talking.

Sadie is a member of the Swartland Independent Producers, a collective that also includes Coetzee’s son-in-law Adi Badenhorst and a young American, UC Davis graduate Andrea Mullineux, and her husband Chris. The producers insist that their wines are “naturally produced,” and they have become master marketers, holding an annual celebration called the Swartland Revolution in and around Riebeeck Kasteel. They have helped put South African wines on the international map.

AFTER A SHORT BUT EXTREMELY SWEET excursion to the Swartland, I return to Stellenbosch and then go across the Helshoogte Pass into the Franschhoek Valley. Your first sighting of this chocolate-box-beautiful valley tells you why international investment is pouring in. What started out in 1688 as a remote settlement for 176 French Huguenot refugees has evolved into a vacationland of significant beauty, with wine shops, art galleries, and a clutch of excellent restaurants. Over the past 20 years Franschhoek has become to the South African food revolution what the Swartland is to its wine revolution.

There has been a dramatic growth in luxury accommodations. Le Quartier Français, a 21-room auberge that [CONTINUED ON PAGE 110]

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[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 84] combines informal service with chic design, was the first, having opened in 1990. In 2004, Liz and Phil Biden opened Franschoek's most flamboyant hotel, La Residence, which quickly became a favored retreat for the rich and the famous. (Richard Gere and Robert Redford have checked in.) Liz Biden says that the valley has in the last decade gone from a sleepy retreat for retired South African couples to a cosmopolitan center for well-heeled travelers, and the arrival of such proprietors as Branson and Singh merely confirms the desirability of the neighborhood. "When you see the physical beauty of the area, you can see why they're buying into Franschoek," she says. "It's prettier than Tuscany, and the locals speak better English. And it's physically, geologically much more interesting than Napa Valley."

It was here 20 years ago that a young Dutch woman, Margot Janse, took over as head chef at Le Quartier Français. Around the same time, Nelson Mandela became the country's first democratically elected president, and South Africans, black and white, were able to shake off the shackles of apartheid. Leaving behind a culinary culture that had seen chefs and restaurateurs eschew local products in favor of anything from overseas, Janse and a few like-minded young chefs began to use homegrown produce and cook seasonally appropriate dishes. Suddenly, and in more ways than one, it was cool to be South African.

The Tasting Room, Le Quartier Français's restaurant, is now a must-visit on the Cape gastronomy circuit and has been named one of the top restaurants in the world in the San Pellegrino annual listings. Janse has inspired a generation of chefs to take the culinary high road, and Tokara, Pierneef at Le Motte, Foliage, and Bread & Wine, a quartet of excellent contemporary restaurants in Franschoek, have emerged as testimony to this.

After several days of driving from vineyard to vineyard, I'm happy to spend a night at Le Quartier Français and dine at the Tasting Room. The menu is part Ferran Adrià (for starters: black pepper snow, beets and lime, and foie gras with edible silver disguised as a chocolate bar) and part nouvelle Cape cuisine (salted farmed kabeljou with black mussels and charcoal), and it is sensational. Over the next two days I also eat at

Tokara, where the very creative chef, Richard Carstens, offers Baked Alaska Rainbow Trout (filet of trout, citrus salsa, and smoked salmon ice cream) as his specialty dish—my most extreme culinary experience on this trip—and I have a languorous lunch with friends at Bread & Wine, a delightful terrace restaurant on the Mōreson wine estate. All of which confirms that the Cape winelands can withstand comparison to centers of culinary excellence in France, Spain, Australia, and the United States, and acts as a reminder that the days of cultural isolation under apartheid are long gone.

THE MOST SPECTACULAR piece of real estate in the Franschoek Valley belongs not to yet another foreign gazillionaire but to a local. Johann Rupert, the owner of Richemont, a holding company for such brands as Dunhill, Cartier, Montblanc, and Van Cleef & Arpels, owns L'Ormarins, a sprawling wine estate—cum—stud farm in two prime locations at the foot of the Groot Drakenstein Mountains. He studied economics and company law at Stellenbosch University and is a proud Afrikaner. So proud that when in 2005 the British magazine *Wallpaper* declared that "Afrikaans was one of the ugliest languages in the world," he promptly withdrew all advertising.

He is also politically outspoken, and at a recent meeting of one of his holding companies, he denounced the country's ruling elite—essentially the African National Congress under President Jacob Zuma, who assumed office in 2009—and cautioned that the dramatically underperforming economy threatened to derail post-apartheid South Africa. The headline read: "South Africa going bust gradually, warns Rupert."

"I was quoting Ernest Hemingway's famous line from *The Sun Also Rises*," Rupert tells me when I visit him at L'Ormarins, his wife Gaynor's stud operation and, most important for travelers, the site of Rupert's Franschoek Motor Museum, a stellar collection of more than 200 vintage vehicles dating back to the Ford Model T. "Hemingway had written: 'How did you go bankrupt? Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly.'" He is unrepentant about his pronouncement and says the country's economy is in a perilous situation because state-run enterprises such as South African Airways, the national airline; Eskom, the national power company; and many others are being

mismanaged on an epic scale. "We are paying for apartheid because during that time we never gave [the black population] proper education. So now we have uneducated people making big decisions," Rupert says. "We have to fix this quickly."

I have come here for a reality check after my week of living the Cape good life. Has the African post-colonial malaise insinuated itself into this seemingly Mediterranean outpost? There may be a snake in the wine-lands garden, but Rupert won't dwell on it for long. Like most Africans he is genetically predisposed to optimism. We soon put politics aside, and he's off on an extended monologue about the good things here in the Cape. He enthuses about his state-of-the-art vineyard a few hundred yards away, announcing that he is now making a South African version of Armagnac that he calls Sagnac. He declares that his own Anthonij Rupert Wines (named after his late brother) have been compared to the best of Burgundy by several wine writers.

As I leave I ask Rupert whether he and his Afrikaner tribe see their future here in the Cape. He growls his response: "My first forefather came here in 1662...and I am still here."

ON THE DRIVE BACK TO Cape Town, along the N2 Highway, I push Abdullah Ibrahim's *Mannenburg* into the CD player and float along on a cloud of hypnotic and mournful Cape jazz. Ibrahim, formerly known as Dollar Brand, is from the Cape, and this piece of music, recorded in the early 1970s, during some of the darkest days of apartheid, became an anthem of resistance. I'm driving past the endless sprawl of shantytowns that is the Cape Flats, once the dumping ground for apartheid's unwanted people of color and now a magnet for millions of economic refugees from all over Africa. Khayelitsha, Guguletu, Langa, and Manenburg were names once associated with the shame of a minority white regime; now they speak of a post-apartheid government that seems incapable of stopping the spread of poverty.

As *Mannenburg* fades on the car stereo, I am past the Cape Flats and into Cape Town. Tonight I shall stay at Ellerman House, Paul Harris's beautiful hotel on Bantry Bay. After breakfast on the veranda, which overlooks perfectly manicured gardens and, beyond, the Atlantic Ocean—to me this is one of the

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most perfect vistas in the world—I wander through the hotel taking in the great works of South African art. Everything is here, on the walls of drawing rooms, hallways, restaurants, from old masterpieces by Jacob Hendrik Pierneef, Irma Stern, and Gregoire Boonzaier to significant works by contemporary artists such as John Meyer, William Kentridge, and Anton Kannemeyer.

Suddenly, the electricity is switched off. Everywhere. For the next three hours traffic lights cease to function, shops close, restaurants stop serving food. It will happen again tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that. The locals patiently explain that this is called load shedding, rotating blackouts imposed by the national power supplier, Eskom, because the existing power stations can't keep up with demand. But among themselves they curse Zuma's ANC government and see the blackouts as vivid evidence of its inability to run a First World country. The feeling of frustration and disappointment is summed up by one columnist, who writes with appropriate acidity, "After 20 years of democracy, and 12 months since Nelson Mandela was laid to rest, the mood in South Africa is bleaker than at any time in recent history—and with good reason. Still, the weather is lovely and the scenery is beautiful."

Maybe uncertainty is the price you pay for paradise. •

Cape Cornucopia

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 83]

TASTE

WATERFORD ESTATE, Stellenbosch On the slopes of the Helderberg mountain range, this stunning estate is the most visitor-friendly vineyard in Stellenbosch. Cellar master/partner Kevin Arnold not only makes marvelous wines (the Jem and the Library Collection blends); he leads a wine drive safari through the estate, conducts chocolate and wine tastings at the winery, and sells more than 25 percent of his wines at the cellar door. 011-27-21-880-5300, waterfordestate.co.za

VRIESENHOF VINEYARDS, Stellenbosch One of the great characters of the Cape winelands is Jan Boland Coetzee, a progressive, inclusive member of the new South Africa. His pinot noir and grenache are worth the journey alone, but if you make an appointment you might get to talk to the great man himself. 011-27-21-880-0284, vriesehof.co.za

MEERLUST ESTATE, Stellenbosch Meerlust has been in the Myburgh family since 1756, and the current owner, the elegant and cool Hannes Myburgh, is the eighth-generation keeper of the flame. The historic manor house is his home; the adjacent wine shop holds tastings by appointment. 011-27-21-843-3587, meerlust.co.za

ANTHONIJ RUPERT WINE ESTATE, Franschoek There are two tasting rooms on the L'Ormarins grounds: one in the farm's 19th-century Cape Dutch manor house, recently restored at great expense, and the other, the Terra del Capo Tasting Room, at the entrance to the property. The latter comes with an antipasto bar, the former with great views of the Franschoek Valley and the Groot Drakenstein Mountains. 011-27-21-874-9041, rupertwines.com

THE SWARTLAND Everybody's talking about the Swartland. The problem is that most of the small-production family winemakers, such as Eben Sadie, are somewhat reclusive. The best opportunity to meet them and to learn about the region is to attend the annual Swartland Revolution (theswartlandrevolution.com), which is held in Riebeeck Kasteel every November and limited to around 500 ticket holders. If you can't make the Revolution, the best place to taste the wines is in Riebeeck Kasteel. One of the winemakers—the Mullineux Family—has a cellar and tasting room in the village, and the others' wines (notably the Sadie Family, Badenhorst Family, and Hughes Family Nativo wines) can be found at the Wine Collective on the town square (thewinecollective.co.za). **G.B.**

The Lost Villaggio

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 106] prominence. After the fall of Rome, however, the town slowly faded. It was razed in the 16th century by Khayr ad-Din, who was better known as the pirate Barbarossa (Redbeard), and his men. It took more than a century for it to revive. The most prominent landmark from this time, Torre Truglia, a lookout tower built to defend against Saracen attacks, still stands.

If you stroll along the Riviera di Levante's eastern side, you will see a large, ruin-encased grotto looming in the distance. (The town derives its name from the Latin *spelunca*, meaning cave or grotto.) The ruins were once the massive summer villa of Tiberius, and the cave was the natural setting for many of his dinner parties.

The official entrance to Tiberius's estate is now within the Sperlonga Archaeological Museum, which includes a collection of ancient marble sculptures that were once placed throughout Tiberius's exceptional dining grotto. They were discovered in 1957 (during the construction of Via Flacca), smashed into thousands of fragments, and buried in the sands of the cave. There are different theories as to why they shattered, but they have since been carefully reconstructed, and they represent a cycle of stories from *The Odyssey* and *The Aeneid*. Tiberius, setting an early precedent for Godard, may have commissioned artists to create powerful scenes from the mythic journey.

Whenever I visit Sperlonga—as I ramble around the bright town or swim in the sea or visit these ruins—I can't help but wonder why it faded from the international travel consciousness. Sure, there is no power of celebrity attached these days to the little town, just as Rome's Cinecittà is now more a nostalgic theme park than a vibrant cultural institution. But with time I have come to realize that Sperlonga simply prefers to be out of the spotlight. Elsewhere in Italy, as De Fabritiis put it to me, there is a "performance of tourism." Positano, for instance, has transformed itself to fit the tastes of well-heeled travelers, with exalted luxury hotels and shops (and powerful publicity machines). Although Sperlonga geographically resembles Positano and other towns on the Amalfi Coast—Rapunzel-like beauties perched on high—it has ably maintained an unpretentious yet potent charm. Sperlonga is a delightful place to visit that insists (be it shyly or confidently) on a different kind of prestige: life unfolding unassumingly against the eternal beauty of the landscape. •

A CASE OF THE BEST

Here are a dozen wines that you should pack up and take home. They are exemplars of the terroir and the character of the winemakers—and a reminder of the world's most beautiful winelands.

1. CAPE POINT VINEYARDS ISLIEDH 2012 Duncan Savage is the hottest of the Cape's young winemakers, and his Bordeaux-style sauvignon blanc-sémillon blend is memorable. \$50

2. BADENHORST FAMILY WINES RED BLEND 2010 One of the players at the Swartland Revolution, Badenhorst makes an unusual blend of syrah, grenache, cinsaut and tinta barocca that is magnificent. \$35

3. PORSELEINBERG 2010 Inspired by Marc Kent, the man behind Boekenhoutskloof, this is a first-release syrah from a remote and wonderful Swartland vineyard that is already drawing rapturous praise from critics. Small supply (3,000 cases) and hard to find, but worth the search. \$80

4. MEERLUST RUBICON 2008 Venerable red blend that is accessible now but would benefit from a decade of cellaring. \$30

5. ANTHONIJ RUPERT 2007 First release of a Bordeaux blend based on cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc. \$75

6. WATERFORD ESTATE THE JEM 2009 Cellar master Kevin Arnold is somewhat secretive about the exact ingredients of this sumptuous Bordeaux-style blend, but the 2009 is a winner that will age with grace and beauty. \$72

7. KANONKOP PAUL SAUER 2009 Described by the competition as the country's premier wine. Wonderful balance, often underestimated, but South Africa's rival to Bordeaux's best. Great value. \$45

8. VRIESENHOF PINOT NOIR 2010 Particularly good vintage from legendary Burgundy-inspired winemaker. \$25

9. KLEINOD TAMBOERSKLOOF 2009 A syrah from a small-producer Upper Blaauwklippen Valley vineyard that has

received plaudits from Robert Parker and others. Generous fruit, great balance. \$12

10. THELEMA CABERNET SAUVIGNON 2009 This estate on top of Helshoogte Pass, between Stellenbosch and Franschoek, has produced some of the country's most consistently brilliant wines for a quarter of a century. This is one of the best. \$35

11. SADIE FAMILY POFADDER 2013 Although the Sadie Family's Columella and Palladius are its most famous wines, I am offering up two others. This delicate old-vine cinsaut represents the best of the prophet Eben Sadie. Hard to find. Worth the search. \$50

12. SADIE FAMILY SKURFBERG 2013 Gorgeous old-vine chenin blanc. This is for cerebral wine consumption, and cheap at the price. \$55 **G.B.**