

Discovering SA's hottest wine talent

Wine Cellar: Fine Wine Merchants & Cellarers once again identified SA's hottest young winemaking talent - breaking the rules and pushing the limits at their annual Young Guns event - with this year's Young Guns going "Back to Basics".



Roland Peens and James Pietersen, Wine Cellar: Fine Wine Merchants and Cellarers

Roland Peens, director of Wine Cellar and James Pietersen, manager of the South African portfolio, talks about the discovery of talent, their passion for the 'Young Guns' platform and SA's winemaking evolution.

So Peens, tell us a little bit more about the actual Young Guns event, we hear it's a platform for emerging South African winemaking talent?

It most certainly is. Our annual Young Guns events take place in Cape Town and Johannesburg and have become one of the most anticipated wine tastings of the year. We try and make the event as fun as possible, with lots of interaction, live Twitter feeds, music and candid stories from the young winemakers. This year's tasting is titled 'Back to Basics' and we want to showcase cool new wines and winemakers without all the snobbery.

That sounds fantastic, a real breath of fresh air. Tell us Pietersen, who are these 'Young Guns'?

Most importantly, these winemakers produce wines for themselves and they are all personally invested in their own project. They are not

constrained by vineyards, marketing managers, market demands or formulaic winemaking. They are pushing the boundaries of fine wine in South Africa and we believe producing some of the most dynamic and exciting wines in the world today.

They also produce interesting grape varieties such as Grenache, Carignan, Semillon - you won't find any Sauvignon Blanc and Merlot! Their winemaking techniques are also humble and traditional, often different to what was taught at University. The Young Guns produce small volumes by nature and, therefore, these are limited wines not freely available, except from Wine Cellar of course.

Indeed! So what would you say are this year's 'Young Guns' really about?

Most of the nine dynamic winemakers we've selected this year have full-time day jobs, and their wines are a personal side project. Starting small they will slowly grow their volumes and then go full time. The first few years of Young Guns all came from the Swartland, which has been a breeding ground for more daring winemaking. No doubt of course ignited by revolutionary figures such as Eben Sadie, Adi Badenhorst, and the Mullineuxs.

This year, most are actually Stellenbosch based, showing that the status quo is changing in the most traditional of wine regions. The 14 wines on show vary from Pinot Noir outside Villiersdorp, Chenin from Stellenbosch, Semillon from Elgin and lots in-between. We are excited to show a host of new labels, styles, and personalities who are pushing the boundaries! Future legends in the making.

Please remind us since when has Wine Cellar hosted Young Guns?

This all started in 2011, when we realised there wasn't a platform for a crop of young winemakers that were bucking the trend and making really interesting wines. We never thought that each year since would realise a new crop of Young Guns looking to make a name for themselves. We're proud to say that Young Guns is now a high point on the wine industry calendar and definitely a departure from the often snobby traditional format of many wine tasting events. We were the first to showcase the likes of Craig Hawkins, Chris Alheit, Peter-Alan Finlayson, Donovan Rall and a host of other winemakers who are now firmly part of SA's winemaking elite.

Peens, Young Guns has grown from strength to strength over the years – how did the idea for Young Guns first arise and what was your motivation behind creating this platform?

The wine industry is very small and most of South Africa's finest and most exciting wines find their way to Wine Cellar. In fact, we are often the starting point for many new releases and new brands. Over 17 years we have built up unique insight and fantastic relationships within the industry and it's our job to keep up to date. Pietersen and I taste over 4,000 wines per year and we keep our palate 'close to the ground'. In showcasing these new wines that were so different from the norm, we were able to educate the consumer about different styles, varieties and evidently, experiences. Seven years later and there is now a palpable demand for wines off the beaten track and it's an honour to be a Young Gun.

And 2011 seemed like the right year for this endeavour?

The last five to eight years has seen a huge change in the South African wine industry. The shackles of boring varieties, conservative styles, and formulaic winemaking seem to have been lifted. This is probably due to winemaking stars such as Eben Sadie becoming internationally regarded and highly successful. These 'new wave' producers often don't own any vineyards or even their own cellar. Unlike wine estates who are constrained by vineyards and capital costs, they are able to scour the Cape to find interesting vineyards and hence produce interesting wines. The South African wine revolution is firmly set.

Wine Cellar's pick of the crop for Young Guns 2017 were:

Callan Williams of Garajeest
Danie Carinus of Carinus Vineyards
Franco Lourens of Lourens Family Vineyards
Jessica Saurwein, Saurwein)
Lukas van Loggerenberg, Van Loggerenberg Wines
Etienne Terblanche and Stephanie Wiid of Thistle & Weed
Paul Hoogwerf and Douglas Mylrea of Maanschijn

All Young Guns wines are available [to order](#) from Wine Cellar, depending on availability.

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