

Last week's focus on the inherent personality of coherently produced wines provoked a further series of reflections: if there's such a thing as a "house personality" - one which transcends site - then what happens when the same producer owns vineyards in two vastly different appellations. The Griers of Villiera have their original farm on the Paarl side of Stellenbosch. They also own an estate in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of France. Despite the fact that the equator separates the two properties, the personality of the Griers is evident on all the wines.

For almost 25 years David Trafford has been making New World-style wines from his high altitude Stellenbosch vineyards. In their time the best of these wines have won widespread recognition (De Trafford tied for the Producer of the Show award at the inaugural Old Mutual competition in 2002. Last year the cellar yielded the Platter red wine of the year). Almost all of them are readily identifiable from their opulence, their fruit intensity, the polish and texture of their tannins. If you had to choose one Cape producer capable of beating the Californians at their own game, you'd have to consider offering the slot to David Trafford.

But then about ten years ago he began a new vineyard project at Malgas at the estuary of the Breede River. The Sijnn wines have their own personality, an earthier, austere and more nuanced style, a function of the varieties he chose to plant there as well as the kind of fruit the stony landscape is destined to produce. Make no mistake, Sijnn is as much the outcome of intention as it is of terroir. When you find such a place, fall in love with it, choose to develop vineyards there, select varieties that will take root in those soils and yield fruit which reflects the environment in which it is grown, you are imbuing the process with aesthetic choice. The winemaking fraternity might have regarded his initial decision with more than a raised eyebrow - but no one could seriously have been surprised by the result.

The same is equally true Gyles Webb's two wholly different sites, one in Stellenbosch (home of the Thelema wines) the other in Elgin, source of his cooler climate Sutherland wines. In both cases he developed the vineyards from scratch, Stellenbosch in the 1980s from an old fruit farm at the top of the Helshoogte Pass and Sutherland more than 20 years later. Both properties are a reflection of intention - in how the soils were prepared, what varieties were selected, what rootstocks were used, what wines were envisaged. True, technology has moved on, and the experience the Webbs acquired in Stellenbosch enabled them to approach Sutherland with greater understanding and perhaps with even greater dimension to their vision.

It's hardly surprising that both sites yield wholly different wines, though everything which comes from Webb's cellar also has a common aesthetic. Unshowy and precise, the Stellenbosch reds are linear and restrained. They might always have been a little like this, given the altitude of the vineyards, but they have been crafted to express the site and its potential, as well as the vision of the proprietor. The Rabelais blend (for several years a Platter five star laureate) will disappoint anyone looking for a blockbuster - but then so will any of Gyles Webb's other wines. The Sutherland wines are equally nuanced, with refreshment and detail more important than palate weight on the 2014 Sauvignon Blanc and the extraordinarily spicy 2015 Riesling.

That said, it's not a simple equation, a formula allowed to run without any adjustment. The Sutherland white Rhone blend (which in its time has won both a gold medal and a trophy at the OMTWS) has been allowed to fill out - not in a way which suggests an ounce of surplus weight, but more by way of muscle and tone. When it comes to the

Webb's wines, finesse is not a euphemism for scrawny.