

Tim Rands, who died in early September, was one of the South African wine industry's most innovative producers and distributors. A founding partner in Boekenhoutskloof (the highest profile but lowest volume of his various wine business interests), he was also the driving force behind Porcupine Ridge, Robertson Winery, Krone, The Wolftrap, The Chocolate Block, Reyneke, Porseleinberg, and Vinimark - the largest independent wine distribution business in South Africa.

His enterprises were built on a combination of inspired marketing, sound management practices, tough but fair trading arrangements, carefully established partnerships and a vision which extended well beyond the horizon of many of his competitors. He trained as a lawyer, but swiftly found himself uncomfortable with the application of justice in the old South Africa. He then joined Stellenbosch Farmers Winery, completed his MBA, and went on to become a founder of City Lodge. Those in the know say that much of the detail of the concept, as well as the branding, was the result of his input.

In 1985 he launched Vinimark with his wife Linda. A relatively new and untested concept in South Africa, it was a wholesaler/broker/distributor combination whose original focus was the burgeoning supermarket wine business. As it grew, it took on the supply logistics for an increasing number of smaller, independent properties whose route to market had become threatened by consolidation within the trade, or by the arduous stock management conditions imposed on them by the supermarkets and the chains. As this component of Vinimark grew, it expanded into on-consumption sales. The mere fact of enhanced distribution helped to build brands. Rands recognised that the vehicle he had created could also be an important tool in creating his own portfolio of wine properties.

Boekenhoutskloof, whose original partners included Hans Enderle, John Hunt and Reg Lascaris as well as winemaker Marc Kent, launched with the 1996 vintage and became an instant success. A combination of small production volumes and instant iconic status has made it one of those rare creatures - a cult wine which has not merely survived intact, but grown in status in the two decades of its existence. One of the most successful cellars in the history of the Platter Guide (by 2010 it had had more five star listings than any other winery), it has spawned a series of wholly different quality wine operations. Each one of these brands - Porcupine Ridge, The Wolftrap and The Chocolate Block - was immaculately positioned, from a price, image and beverage perspective. Given Rands's consummate marketing skills, his role in their conceptualisation cannot be in doubt. Thereafter Marc Kent's inspired wine-making translated the vision into a reality, while the Vinimark machine produced the commercial success.

Porseleinberg is a wholly different enterprise: it captures something of the current appeal of the Swartland, but unlike almost all the high profile cellars in the area, and unlike all of Rands's other brands, it set out to be a planted-from-scratch estate rather than a marque which depends on growers' fruit. Accordingly it requires a much longer term investment, and a much longer term vision. In the early years of Vinimark's success - where profits came from the smart use of under-utilised assets belonging to others - it wouldn't have been possible. Arguably it reflects a change in Rands himself - from operator to investor, from grape buyer to grape grower, from trader to proprietor.

To most people in the South African wine industry Rands was largely invisible. Modest by nature, and averse to the limelight, he was inaccessible rather than aloof. There's an element of this in the Porseleinberg packaging, with its white-embossed-on-white label, and in the wine itself, unshowy but nuanced, intense but not brash. It may be that this simple vineyard and cellar on the top of the Porseleinberg - as well as the Bridge House

school in Franschhoek (of which he was a founder and driving force) - will become the abiding monuments to a man who revolutionised the modern Cape wine industry.