



RICH BLEND: Neil Ellis, second from left, with his children, from left, Charl, Warren and Margot, who have joined the family business

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Pioneer's family grapevine hits top notes

FROM the Karoo sheep farm and the tiny corner store to the Oppenheims of De Beers and Pick n Pay's Ackermans, family businesses are a cornerstone of the economy, making up at least two-thirds of businesses globally.

The family business is as common in wine as it is in mining, banking or retail, be it the French wine-making dynasties, South Africa's Ruperts with their vast business interests that also include wine, or by comparison, smaller players such as Warwick's Ratcliffes or the Ellis

A VINE TIME



SAM VENTER

family in Stellenbosch.

Neil Ellis last year celebrated 30 years of making wine under the Ellis name, with his three children now having joined the family business – Warren as

winemaker, Charl heading up finances and Margot taking care of marketing.

Their flagship released last year, The Webb Ellis 2010, a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah, is a very limited release – just 780 numbered bottles at R1 000 each – made to celebrate family and innovation meeting tradition, as the next generation joins the previously one-man-

show. The name has nothing to do with the famous rugby trophy, rather it recognises the contribution of Ellis's wife Stephanie, whose maiden name was Webb.

Neil Ellis is recognised as having pioneered the French negociant approach to South African winemaking back in the 1980s – selecting specific vineyards where particular grape varieties do best to source the fruit to make wine bottled under his own name.

Many of those initial contracts with growers have endured, with Ellis still procuring grapes from four key areas – Jonkershoek in Stellenbosch, Piekenshoek in the Cederberg, Groenekloof in Darling, and Elgin.

Ellis was the first to release wine from the Groenekloof hills near Darling on the West Coast, sparking local winemakers' interest in the cool-climate possibilities of the area.

A selection of his Groenekloof wines tasted recently shows the benefit of those cool sea breezes that mean long ripening that develops complex flavours and aromas.

The cherry on the top is the maiden Cinsaut Noir 2012 (R275) released late last year.

Cinsaut is a lighter-coloured, translucent red like a pinot noir, served lightly chilled for great summer drinking, but not to be under-estimated. This a wine of substance – easy to see why it received 90+ "outstanding" rates

from top wine critics Tim Atkin in Britain and America's Stephen Tanzer.

The fresh crimson colour belies what happens next – a spicy nose, hints of tea and cedar wood lead to a full, rich palate of bright red fruit, black cherries and olives, with warm spices.

The 2015 Groenekloof Sauvignon Blanc (R102 cellar door) is full of crisp zestiness and fresh citrus and tropical fruit.

The cool-climate influence is definitely there on the Groenekloof Shiraz 2012 (R113), smooth and rounded, with a lightly spiced nose complemented by a hit of white pepper on the finish, with juicy ripe fruit in between.

A well put together package of yummy shiraz.