

# VERGENOEGD

## SATISFACTION

## ACHIEVED?

David Swingler

When I bumped into international wine entrepreneur Peter Stuart at the 2017 winelands party of the year – Bot Rivier’s Barrels-&Beards of which I’ve written here before – he proposed a quick word-association game. ‘What if I said “Vergenoegd”?’ Peter offered. My lip curled, my heart sank, and I scurried through my mind in search of words that were honest, when it would be difficult to be polite.

‘WELL, UM, IT IS – WAS – A LEGEND IN ITS TIME...’ I SPLUTTERED, ‘A PIONEER ONCE... BUT PERHAPS ITS PARADE HAS PASSED IT BY?’ WHEN HE SAID HE’D JOINED A PROJECT TO REVITALISE THIS ONCE GRAND ESTATE I THOUGHT HE’D PEERED TOO DEEPLY INTO THE EVENING’S TASTING AND WISHED HIM WELL AS I SLIPPED AWAY.

Granted in 1696, this 160ha spread with largely sedimentary soils over clay just 3km from False Bay was acquired by Johannes Gysbertus Faure in 1820 and remained in the Faure family for six generations. While it pioneered then-novel Cabernet Sauvignon and is fondly remembered for its sturdy red wine of the Seventies, the operation did not adapt to inevitable change. Wannabes caught up and, like a lot of the vehicular traffic heading north to Stellenbosch on Baden Powell Drive, passed it by.

German Prof Dr Dr Peter Löw is clearly blessed with both boundless energy and great teams. After graduating in 1979 he garnered a PhD in Law from Würzburg University, a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Armed Forces in Hamburg and is Professor of Applied Economic Philosophy at the Papal Philosophical-Theological University Benedict XVI in Heiligenkreuz, Austria. More

pertinent, he’s a turn-around entrepreneur and has, since 1992, bought and returned to profitability over 200 companies world-wide. The Löw focus is on underperforming assets with high operating improvement potential. Vergenoegd was an obvious fit.



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Löw’s LIVIA group (Löw International Ventures & Investment Activities) stepped into wine in September 2014 when it acquired heritage vineyards and a winery at the historic *Schloss Frankenberg* in Bavaria, Germany. It produces white wine there from 30ha. With a sense that the Cape winelands were packed with potential, Prof Löw and his team sought a place steeped in history, in which they could celebrate the past while refreshing the present and focusing firmly on the future. The underperforming asset Vergenoegd was irresistible, and they bought it in 2015.

But turning around a historic estate such as this is no overnight quick-fix. It takes both time and money – lots of both – to revitalise an agricultural offering with long lead times. The LIVIA focus is to preserve the rich tapestry of history, retaining the character, charm and authenticity of the place, whilst making modern wines and creating a leisure offering that attracts both young and old.

If you played the word association game with a Stellenbosch University student as I have, the response to ‘Vergenoegd?’ is likely to be ‘Runner Ducks!’ The resident 1000-strong flock feed on vineyard pests to reduce chemical control, supporting the farm’s commitment to biodiversity. Visitor numbers surged after a Go-Pro clip filmed from the back of a Duck-on-Parade hit YouTube. The ducks flock into the vineyards to feed thrice daily, and the incubator and hatchery rooms enthrall the youngsters.

VERGENOEGD-LÖW HAS WORKED HARD TO RAISE ITS VISIBILITY WITHIN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND NOW HAS A VERITABLE OFFERING FOR VISITORS. APART FROM DUCK PARADES AND THE USUAL CELLAR TOURS AND WINE TASTING, THERE ARE TASTE EXPERIENCES WHERE ONE CAN BLEND OLIVE OIL, TEA AND COFFEE, A WEEKLY SATURDAY FAMILY MARKET AND THE HUGELY POPULAR LIVE SUMMER CONCERT ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH NOVEMBER THROUGH APRIL.

The hungry will find succour with al fresco picnics – ordered, or made up as you please in the Deli – and ‘fine farm food’ in the a la carte Manor House restaurant. Soon there’ll be *myrun*, a 3km or 5km run on Sundays where you’ll be able to earn Discovery Vitality points as you work it off!

But this is primarily a wine farm and the wines needed, well, some work. Marelize Jacobs, who had prior experience here, was appointed Head Winemaker from 2016 and, apart from planting white varieties on the farm for the first time, she has upgraded drip irrigation with new fermentation tanks in the cellar allowing more flexibility during harvest. A new grape destemmer enhances the quality of berry allowed to get into the wine.

The ranges have been cleaned up and better branded. The lifestyle *Runner Duck* trio of Sauvignon Blanc, Rose and Red is for earlier enjoyment with screwcaps for ease of access. The Shiraz, Merlot and Red blend comprising the *Classic Range* – elegant with structure – are soon to be joined by a Blanc de Noir. Made from merlot, tasting it was like Throwback Thursday to the heady days of Boschendal Blanc de Noir in the Eighties! The *Vintage Range* showcases Cabernet Sauvignon



(currently 2013) and the Estate red, a Bordeaux-blend currently from 2008. The best Merlot will soon be dressed in these clothes. A series of Ports closes the portfolio.

Vergenoegd has gained a Löw, the Runner Duck ‘V’ logo will soon give way to more formal heraldry, and with over 70 000 visitors a year V-L is now a destination. It’s early days wine-wise, but the preview I had of the more modern wines was tantalising indeed.



**David Swingler** is a writer and taster for Platter’s South African Wine Guide for 21 years to date. Dave Swingler has over the years consulted to restaurants, game lodges and convention centres, taught wine courses and contributed to radio, print and other media. A psychiatrist by day, he’s intrigued by language in general, and its application to wine in particular. Correspondence: [swingler@telkomsa.net](mailto:swingler@telkomsa.net) ■