

Wine & architecture

Obvious choices sadly lacking



CORKSCREWED
Tim James

For about 75 years KWV controlled the South African wine industry, the decline of its rule more or less coinciding (fittingly) with the coming of formal democracy to the country. Among the many bad aspects of the KWV reign (there were also positives) was its neglecting to introduce a wide range of grape varieties suitable to the Cape's climate. We're still stuck with a lot of sameness.

If KWV had been more oriented towards quality, where would they have found interesting varieties? In vineyards around the Mediterranean, of course, perhaps especially in central and southern Italy. More latterly, a few Italian varieties have been planted here, although as yet we have seen no releases from the southern peninsula or Sicilian varieties like aglianico and nerello, which should do well on our own sunny slopes.

Somewhat infuriatingly, an Italian variety more experimented with here is the unlikely nebbiolo, the home of which is in the cool hills of near-Alpine Piedmont (its name comes from the Italian word for fog).

Steenberg makes the best of the few varietal nebbiolo but, in fact, this aristocratic grape has so far been most successful here when mingled democratically in blends. The same is true for sangiovese, the great Tuscan variety at the heart of chianti.

The best of these few blends is the leader of the Nederburg pack, Ingenuity Red, a fine combination of mostly sangiovese and nebbiolo, with a dash of barbera, another northern Italian variety. Certainly it's one of the more unusual wines at the top end of local reds. Another



Wholly untrivial:
Morgenster Caruso

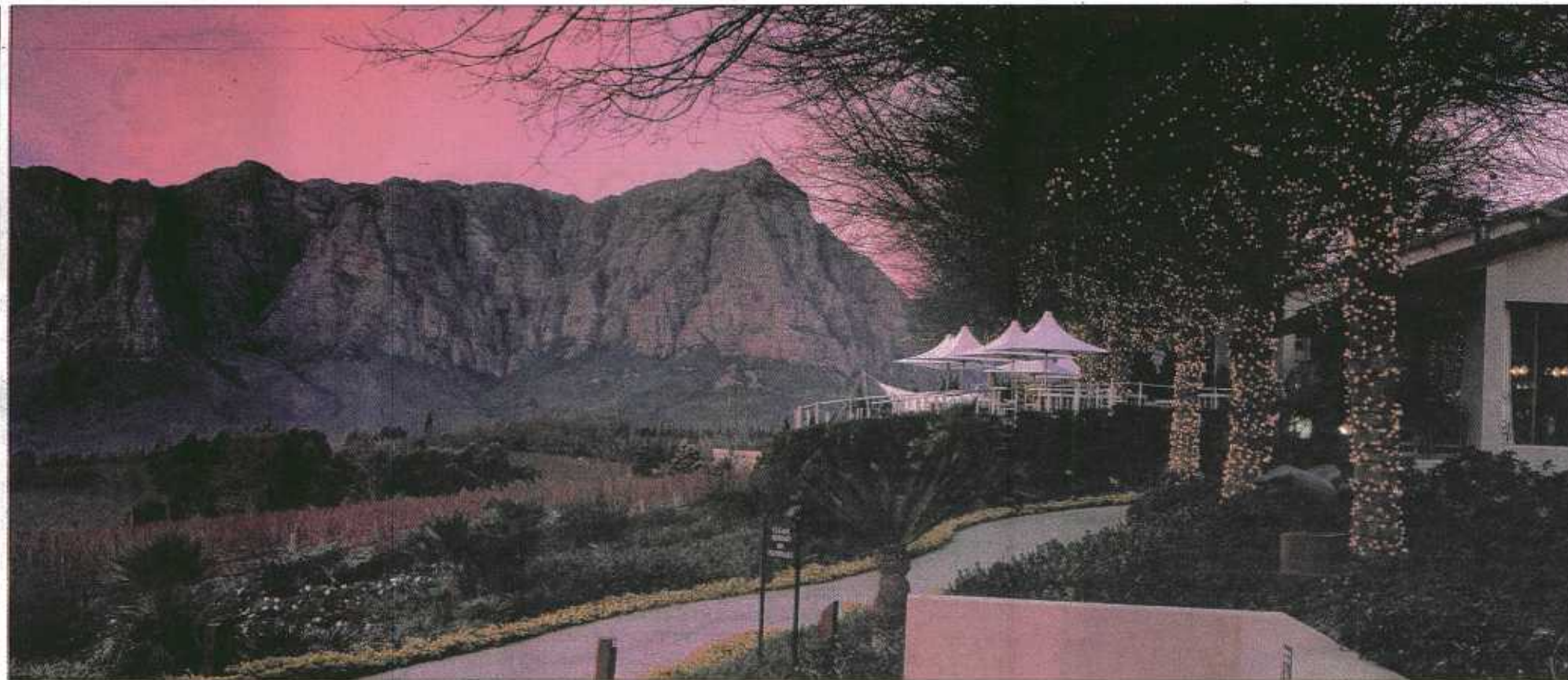
fine mix of the same varieties, though it also takes in some French grapes, is Hannibal from Bouchard Finlayson.

Two Italian-owned local wineries have – unsurprisingly – been inspired to make wines with grapes from *la patria*.

Those of Idiom are altogether too ripe, powerful and sweet for my taste but Morgenster, owned by magnate Giulio Bertrand, offers some that appeal more (although the winery's flagship remains the Bordeaux blend going simply by the estate name). The two reds, in fact, include substantial contributions from cabernet and merlot, and neither would easily be mistaken for Italian wines, certainly not Italians in the classic mould. They are undoubtedly modern, driven by very ripe fruit, with firm tannins that are as cashmere-soft as we have come to expect from Morgenster.

Both are named after famous operas. Nabucco is the grander of the two (as it should be at about R300), with a majority contribution from nebbiolo giving a sour cherry succulence and tannic power. Tosca, featuring sangiovese and costing R100 less, is also serious, dry and well structured, but the generous fruit is more elegantly accessible in youth (both of these will beneficially age a good few years, I'd guess). Drink them not too warm.

The third of Morgenster's Italian Collection is a particular delight – a rosé (rosato?) named, with a sideways shift in the cliché, after a famous tenor and made wholly from sangiovese. At about R80, Caruso 2010 is possibly the priciest local rosé but it's also possibly the best – wholly untrivial, with enough weight and savoury interest to avoid the sneers of the more dourly serious wine-lover, and enough charm and spicy, cherried fruitiness to please everyone else. The gorgeous shade of pink (like 1960s lipstick) used on the label and bottle capsule just adds to the pleasure.



Delaire Graff: The restaurant, situated up a slope, has both internal and external areas and dramatic views from Stellenbosch across to the Franschhoek Valley. Photographs: Craig Fraser

Wine and design

Architect Hugh Fraser, co-author of a new book on wineries, looks at the modernisation of local tradition

The task of reviewing wine estate architecture probably falls into the same bracket as chocolate taster or motoring correspondent. The job, however, is not without its dangers. The urge to taste the product of the vine is very real but once indulged all memory of the task at hand evaporates. So a certain discipline is required, with a focus on the buildings and less on the product.

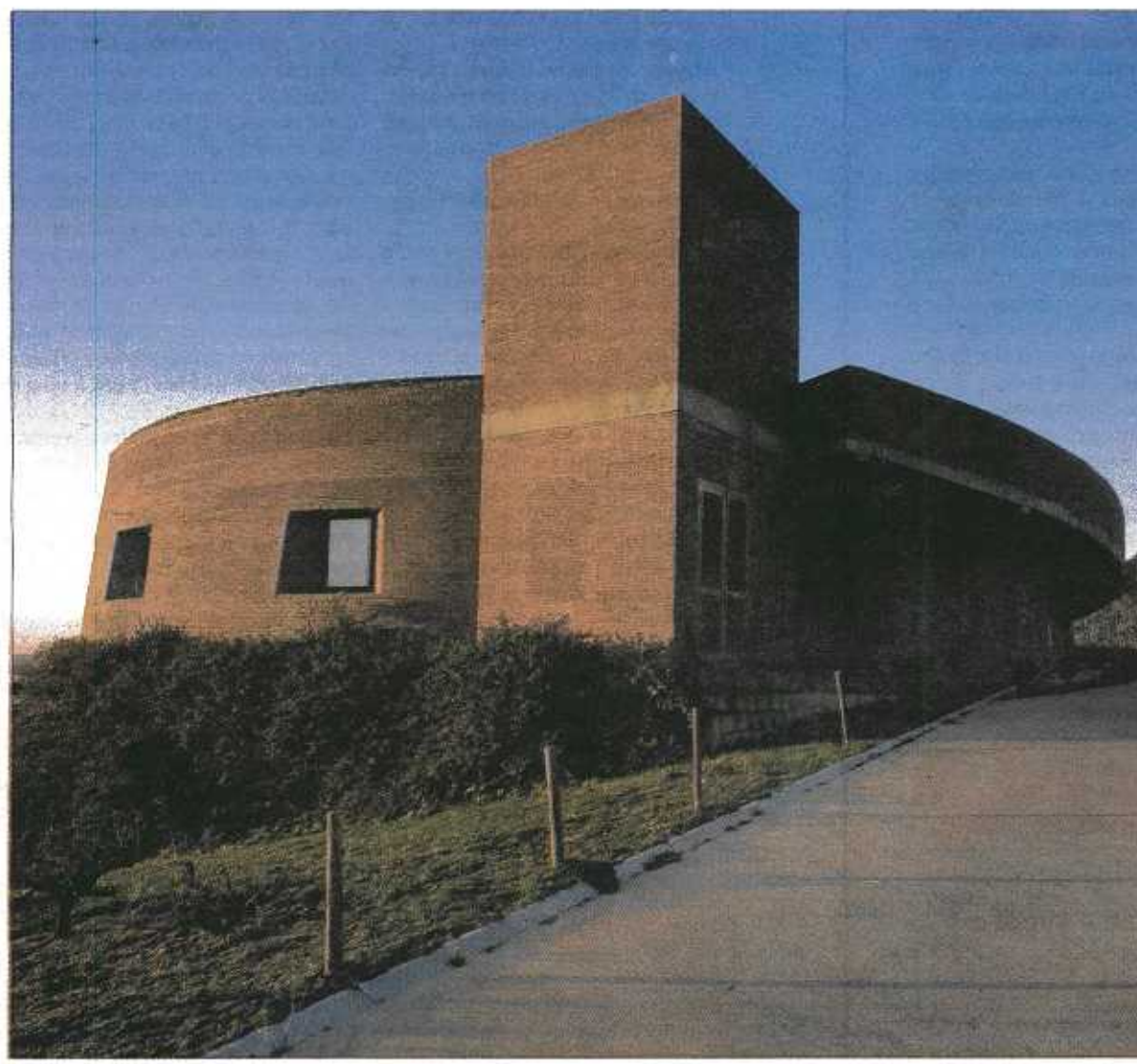
After 1990 South Africa began to assert itself in the production of wine in the New World. Allied with tourism, it followed that vineyard design began to evolve in a very different way to the traditional idea of a wine farm.

Economic forces too have had a profound effect on the composition of this typology. The tradition of the owner-family combining production with a residence is fading fast on account of the massive investment required to build a new winery, generally putting them out of the range of a single person.

The new wineries are themselves now corporations, combining restaurants, merchandising and other facilities deemed necessary to sell wine in an increasingly aggressive world market. Borrowing a saying from publishing: how to make a small fortune in wine – start with a large one.

The estates of Rustenberg and Tokara were the early proponents of change but architecture moves more slowly and wineries do not exist isolated from the forces that affect the rest of building design. The development of technology and materials have a profound effect on the design of buildings.

Probably the only common element that binds winery design is its necessary process-driven structure. Berry



L'Ormarins: (above) Architect Johan Wessels designed the Anthonij Rupert Cellar on L'Ormarins for client Johann Rupert. He drew inspiration from a range of sources – including the intricacies of watch-making (one of the Rupert family's luxury business interests) and, more obscurely, the Vallée de Joux in Switzerland, the region from which the Huguenots (who first brought winemaking to South Africa) originated

collection, fermentation tanks and maturation cellars are possibly all that binds this genre of architecture. The modern farm is as sleek as a high-tech laboratory, debunking the romantic notion of an old rambling French vineyard. And even when this concept is pursued, it is merely a façade to shield what actually happens. The control of bacteria is critical in the making of wine, which requires the interiors, at least, to be sterile and brimming with stainless steel.

Perhaps the only other element

linking wineries of the Western Cape is location. One would be hard-pressed to find a winery here, the setting of which was not spectacular. That aside, the design of wineries is subject to the same forces that operate on any other contemporary architectural design.

South African wine heritage commenced in the late 17th century with vines brought by the early Huguenot settlers. The architecture reflected the Calvinist ideals they brought with them, spawning one of



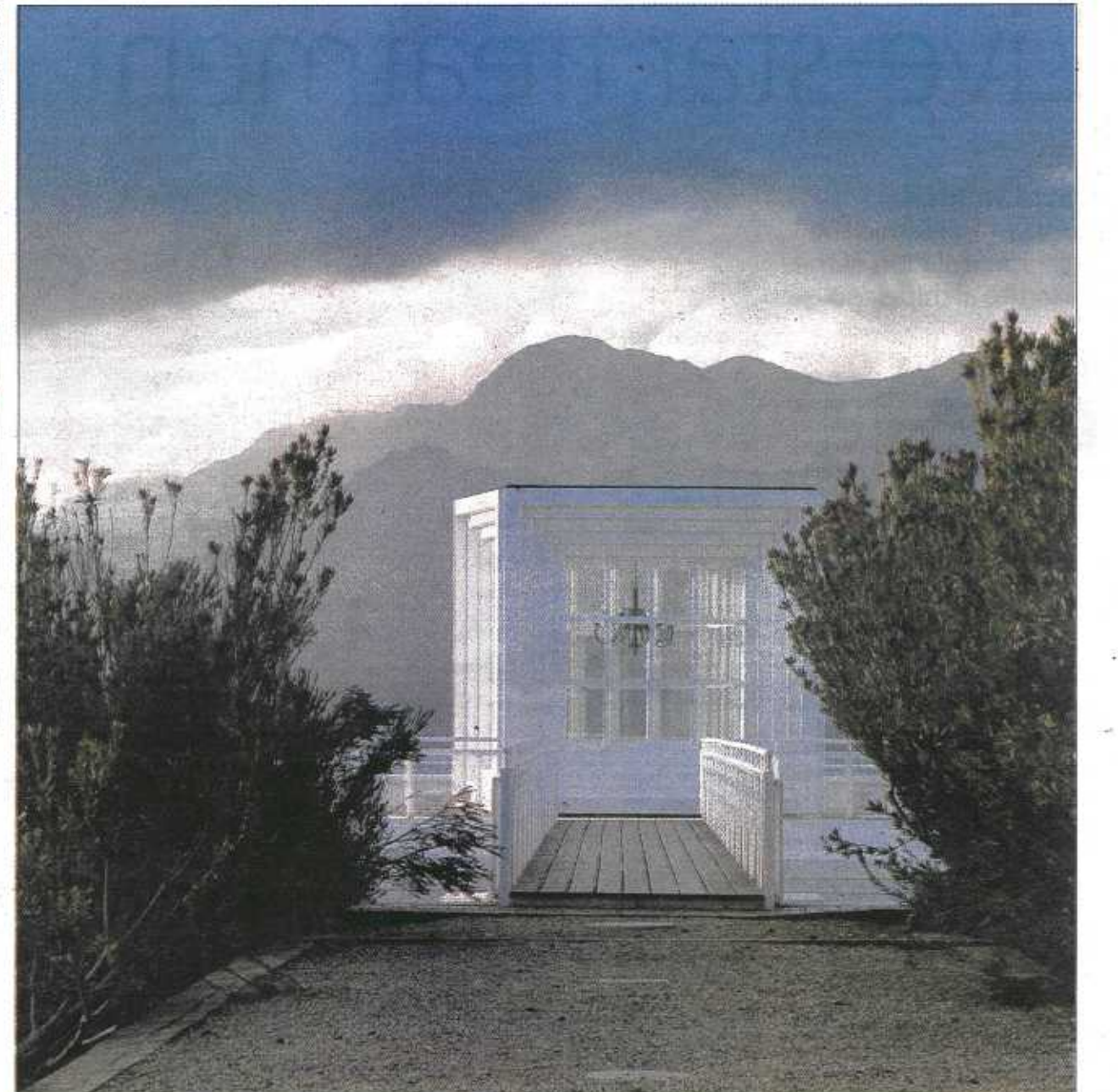
Delaire Graff atop the Helshoogte Pass: "By breaking up the scale of the development and creating three separate buildings, we were able to create a sense of intimacy and informality, while giving the development a comfortable human scale," says Derick Henstra of DHK Architects

the very few indigenous South African architectural styles.

The origins lie in the townhouse façades of Amsterdam, with an evolved aesthetic of thatch and severe white, with little decoration beyond the curlicues of the gables. The contemporary architecture has transformed into essays of interpreted traditional styles and new visions of concrete and glass.

This architectural genre generally remains understated; however, it is interpreted in a manner reflecting the ethos of the owners. Even the production process itself is interpreted in a variety of manners, some with gravity feed and others not. Responsible use of building materials, large use of water and alternative energy uses are also finding an influence on this architecture.

The focus of the book is contemporary vineyards and the photographs



The update of the 310-year-old Vergelegen Estate (above) is designed by architect Patrick Dillon. The rooftop of the wine cellar is reached by a bridge from a raised berm densely planted on either side with indigenous proteas. From here there are wraparound views over the dramatic Helderberg and Hottentots Holland mountains and to False Bay

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