

WINE
TALK

Great Garagiste!

In garages, sheds and backrooms across the Western Cape, small-timers make exceptional wine, says Jacquie Latimer

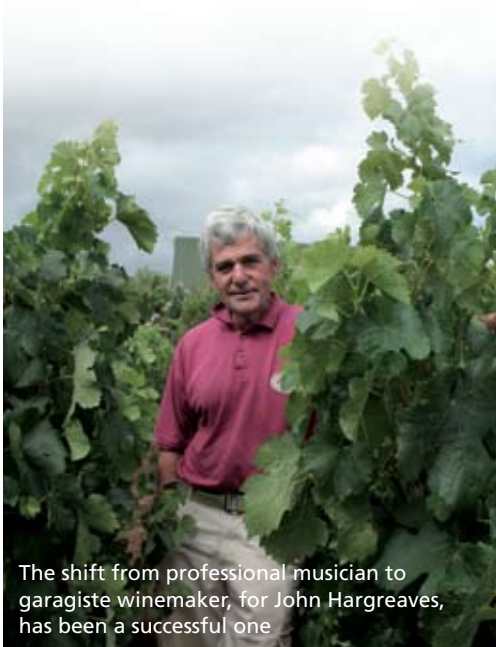
Rusty is convinced something is lurking beneath the barrels of red wine in John Hargreaves' cellar. While his owner shows me around, Rusty stalks his prey doggedly, snout resting on the concrete floor, front paws outstretched and tail standing to attention.

"There's no mouse there," John laughs as we bend down to check for quarry beneath the barrels. "Fox terriers are born to hunt. He's just going through the motions." The tiny cellar under John's garage is home to six barrels of handmade wine. Watercolours, old photographs and newspaper cuttings of John in his musical heyday hang on the walls. A wingback chair and side table complete the picture of a haven for peaceful contemplation, enjoyment of fine wine, and phantom mouse chasing.

John Hargreaves is a professional musician and ex-music teacher who has 'retired' to McGregor to make wine. He still plays gigs, but it's his **WOLFDORING** wine, which he makes in his converted garage, that is now his driving passion. With this shift from music to wine, John joins the ranks of local hobbyist winemakers who have dreamed of making their own wine and done just that—in the garage.

The term *garagiste* comes from the French for 'garage mechanic' or 'garage owner' and has come to describe the brave souls labouring in garages, sheds, backrooms or other originally

non-cellar intentioned structures, to produce wines, some of it outstanding. These intrepid small-scale winemakers take their cue from pioneers like Cathy Marshall, the first South African garagiste, who held a grape-stomping party on Muizenberg beach in Cape Town in 1995 and started **THE BAREFOOT WINE COMPANY**.



The shift from professional musician to garagiste winemaker, for John Hargreaves, has been a successful one

The next year, Cape Wine Master and Wine-of-the-Month Club panellist, Clive Torr wrote 'Chateau Street Garage Wine' in gold pen on 200 bottles of Pinot Noir made from a single barrel in his garage in Chateau Street, Paarl. Clive now heads up the South African Garagiste Movement and produces his acclaimed **TOPAZ** wine from his home in Topaz Street, Somerset West, which, when I arrive, is gearing up for harvest.

It's 10am and we chat and drink rooibos (he's run out of real tea!), followed quickly by wine. I get comfortable on the deck overlooking his back garden—a Pinot Noir vineyard—and Clive tells me a story over a glass of devilishly good Pinot, straight from the barrel.

"It all started in France in 1992, when Jean-Luc Thunevin started Chateau Valandraud with grapes bought from the Saint-Emilion area," Clive begins. "Thunevin turned his back on tradition, embracing a philosophy of minimal interference with nature. With extreme care, he handcrafted what was to become one of the finest red wines ever made. Robert Parker gave his Merlot-Cabernet Franc blend a perfect 100, placing it alongside Chateaux Lafitte Rothschild, Latour and Margaux.

"After that, garagiste operations sprang up around France, defying the methods dictated by large-scale production. Instead, great care was taken during harvesting and grape selection and every step in the winemaking process was meticulously carried out by hand. The resulting individual wines have been marked by an incredible depth of flavour and intensity and can command staggering prices."

South African garage wines aren't quite in the same league yet, but recognition for these finely-crafted

wines is growing, and so are their price tags.

It's been over ten years since the garagiste bug bit South Africa and some of the first garagistes have scaled up and outgrown their garage status. Clive explains. "Once an operation exceeds a certain size, it is no longer considered garagiste. Many of those who started out as garagistes, like Cathy Marshall, Eben Sadie and Chris Williams, have gone on to larger-scale operations or winemaking positions at top wineries. They are no longer garagistes, per se, but there is no doubt that the ethos of handcrafting with extreme care has contributed to the quality of the wines they make today."

In 2002, Clive and Tanya Beutler started the SA Garagiste Movement in response to the growing number of boutique winemakers and the need for networking and support. "We realised that it would be invaluable for like-minded people to be able to share ideas, raw materials and equipment, especially when you're talking about tiny volumes. Many of our members have other fulltime jobs and have let their hobby take over a little more than expected," laughs Clive.

South African garagistes come in all shapes and sizes and from a number of different backgrounds. Clive is a qualified winemaker and Cape Wine Master. Other garagistes, like Dr Philip Mostert, a countryside GP whose **DISPORE KAMME** Syrah 2002 received a Grand Gold Medal and Best Garagiste Producer award at the Michelangelo International Wine Awards in 2003, are

professionals with a passion for wine.

In the garagiste community, a distinction is made between certified producers and those making wine at home for consumption by their friends and family. To be considered a commercial garagiste, total production cannot exceed 9 000 litres, the operation must be certified with SAWIS and the Wine and Spirit Board, it must be fully funded by the garagiste and the wine must be made by the garagiste. Today there are more than 20 certified boutique producers and over 400

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hobbyists making wine at home for personal consumption.

Trevor Kinnear is a software guru whose heart is in winemaking. Leveraging his IT know-how to support fellow home winemakers, he launched the web portal www.garagiste.org four years ago. "It's really expensive to get hold of small quantities of quality grapes and raw materials and the website helps put people with similar needs in touch with each other. From there, they can pool resources, co-ordinate purchasing and exchange ideas."

Trevor also refers potential winemakers to the three day **GARAGISTE WINEMAKER COURSE** offered by senior Oenology lecturer, Prof Wessel du Toit, at Stellenbosch University. "The course is quite technical," he says, "but is an excellent grounding for anyone considering making their own wine."

When I phone Prof Du Toit to chat

about the course, he's soft-spoken and friendly and clearly passionate about his subject. "There are a lot of courses about tasting and wine appreciation, but very few about winemaking, besides the formal qualification route," he explains. "This course is really for anyone interested in wine production. I've had people on the course who don't know anything about wine production. I've also had Cape Wine Masters and winemakers attending. It does help to have a bit of a scientific background for understanding the chemical processes, but it's not strictly necessary."

The course runs over weekends and includes lectures and practicals on Friday evening and all day

Saturday and Sunday. "We go into the theory, but we're also very hands on, going through each of the steps of the winemaking process from harvesting to de-stemming and pressing to fermentation and bottling. We examine the equipment needed for small-scale winemaking and also discuss the problems that can arise. Besides all the serious stuff, we also always have a lot of fun and our students have done very well. I've had a student win a Veritas double gold!"

I leave impressed and inspired. It might just be time to brush up on my matric chemistry and get down and dirty with a basket press. **GT**

Other garagiste labels to look out for: Akkerdal, Anatu, Black Pearl, Byde Bona Dea, Lady Aurret, Matzikama, Migliarina, Oude Denneboom, Topaz and William Emerson.