

Mark Solms is apologising about his appearance. "I slept in this suit last night. I went straight from the airport to the hospital, saw two patients and then drove out here to the farm."

The man the American Psychiatric Association named International Psychiatrist of the year in 2000 has just flown in from London and is exhausted, but looks delighted to be home.

We're drinking his favourite Shiraz, Africana, and I am trying to stop myself from making appreciative noises. Considering his distinguished achievements as a world-renowned neuroscientist who discovered the forebrain mechanisms of dreaming, Professor Mark Solms is very down to earth. His passion for the people on the farm and what they've achieved together over the last six years is obvious as he talks about the landmark empowerment deal he believes is key to the farm's success.

"I had two objectives when I returned to South Africa to manage the family farm in 2001. The first was a selfish one," he says. "I wanted to settle in this place because I felt I belonged here. I also wanted to make a contribution to the country. The farm is a microcosm of agricultural society. Most of the labourers were poor and unemployed, with few or no choices in life."

Mark realises that real transformation cannot take place without workers being able to work for something they value. "It made sense

that they should be able to work towards owning land," he explains.

Although this thinking is at odds with other wineland transformation efforts which consider land too expensive to transfer to labourers, Mark encouraged friend Richard Astor

transformation is hard work, but it's simple and effective. There just has to be willingness to see real change."

Farm manager and Wijn de Caab Trust board member, Nico Jansen, says, "We feel we are part of something bigger here. The change among the workers has been huge. It's as if they've seen that there is another side to humanity. There is more than wasting your life and drinking away your problems."

"The museum has also helped," says Nico, referring to the farm's Museum van de Caab, which describes the history of the farm and region from prehistory to the present through many individual voices. "At first I didn't understand how looking at the history of coloured people would be a good thing, but I changed my mind. Many of the farms around here were owned by freed slaves in the early days." He says the archaeological excavation on the farm, which includes a Stone Age and Huguenot site, has become a source of pride for everyone. "Our histories are here, side by side. It makes us feel connected to our past and to each other."

With a musical heritage centre in the pipeline and a harvest festival planned for next year, this sense of connecting with the past to enrich the future can only further nourish the community.

Of course, the focus of everyone's hard work is their award-winning wine. "We've planted mainly Rhone varietals, concentrating on Viognier,

Wakeful Dreaming

Jacqui Latimer speaks to Mark Solms and his team about making wine in the style of the ancients



Mark Solms and winemaker Hilko Hegewisch toast the fruits of their labour

to buy the nearby property, Lübeck. Using the Solms property and Lübeck as collateral for a loan, they bought the adjoining Deltameer farm and transferred it into a trust owned by the farm workers.

The three farms together are now known as Solms-Delta, with profits being shared among the partners. The farm workers' Wijn de Caab Trust uses its profit share from the Solms-Delta enterprise to pay off the Deltameer loan. "This could be the story of any farm in the region. This model of

Shiraz, Mourvèdre and Grenache,” says ex-Boschendal winemaker Hilko Hegewisch. “With winemaking, you’re always looking for approaches that will give your wine the edge, so when Mark suggested we try desiccation, I was up for the challenge, having already played with sun-dried grapes during my years at Boschendal.”

Mark believes that the ancient Mediterranean practice, which concentrates flavour intensity and colour, will transfer well to the temperate Franschhoek climate. “Bunches are strangled on the vine by pinching the stems and then left to sun dry,” explains Hilko. “The natural acids are captured in the berries, along with the grape sugars; but over a period of about three to six weeks up to 40 per cent of the water content evaporates. The method is

labour-intensive and you lose almost half your volume, but the results are more than worth it.”

And the wines are delicious. From the graceful floral intrigue of Amalie, a dry white Viognier and desiccated Grenache Blanc (19 per cent) creation to the rich minerally stature of the southern Rhone style red, Hier-vandaan, these wines take you on a magic carpet ride of pure enjoyment. The Africana with its startlingly dry smokiness and throaty whisperings of strawberry and spice is the ultimate seduction. That is, unless you’re in the mood for eloping with the Lekkerwijn Rosé, a temptress in shimmering pink and gold who’ll steal your heart and leave you dreaming of spiced apricots.

As I gather up my notebook and take one last sip of Shiraz, Mark

laughs, “You know, we almost didn’t go into wine. There were a few options I was considering when trying to decide what to farm,” he says. “I was thinking of olives, organic herbs or wine, and leaning towards the herbs quite heavily for a while. One evening I was chatting to my neighbour and he said that I should imagine how wonderful it would be to one day pass on a successful herb farm to my kids. That’s when I knew it had to be wine.”

Given the energy and enthusiasm of the people of Solms-Delta, I am sure organic herb farming would have been successful, but I for one am deeply grateful to that neighbour. No matter how scrumptious, a salad of fresh herbs could never compete with a bottle of Lekkerwijn or Africana for my culinary affections. **GT**



lmsSQUARE 7707

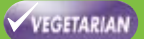
Scientifically proven formulation
with patented Grapecydin™

BIOXIDIN™ has more than DOUBLE the antioxidant activity of any existing antioxidant.

The patented grape seed extract takes radical action against free radicals to:

- Slow ageing
- Protect the body against disease
- Strengthen the immune system

Available from all major pharmacies.
V 100% vegetarian.



Merck (Pty) Ltd, Reg. No. 1970/004059/07,
Tel: 011 372 5000, Fax: 011 372 5252, www.merck.co.za.

BIOXIDIN™ THE MOST POTENT ANTIOXIDANT

