

## Natural beauty and world-class wine – A perfect pairing

*“Only the lips of a lover surpassed it in heavenly sweetness.”*

- 19th century French poet, Charles Pierre Baudelaire, on Constantia wine, in his most famous volume, *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

When Simon van der Stel took ownership of Constantia in 1685, little did he know that it would still be standing over 300 years later.

And yet this once lowly wine farm has not only survived but flourished. Each year, Groot Constantia welcomes visitors from across the globe to marvel, not only at its picturesque beauty, but at the wonder in every sip of its wine.

Today, South Africa produces over 4% of the global production of wine, making the country one of the top ten wine producers in the world.

Whether you're a sommelier, a historian or just inquisitive by nature, there is something to satisfy whatever your palette desires at Groot Constantia.



## Cape of many vines

Most grape production in South Africa is concentrated in the southwestern part of the Cape Province. Key viticultural regions include the Coastal Belt and the Little Karoo.

The Coastal Belt, characterised by sloping terrain, receives an average yearly rainfall of 635mm. Grapes grown in this region are suitable for dry white and red table wines. In contrast, the Little Karoo experiences more extreme climatic conditions, with lower rainfall and higher altitude. Grapes grown here are typically used for sweet wines, sherries, and brandies.

The Vredendal district along the Olifants River irrigation scheme has become an essential region for wine production. Additionally, stretches along the Vaal River and areas along the Orange River near Upington are witnessing the growth of grape cultivation for raisin production and winemaking.

## History takes root

Groot Constantia's legacy traces back to Jan van Riebeeck, who arrived at the Cape in 1652 to establish a replenishment station for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Upon his arrival, he wasted no time assessing the agricultural potential of the Cape's fertile

soil and temperate climate. Recognising the importance of self-sufficiency for the fledgling settlement, he embarked on a mission to cultivate crops that would thrive in this new land. Among these crops, grapes held a particular promise, offering the potential for both sustenance and trade. He requested thousands of vine cuttings from Holland, which arrived in 1655. With the assistance of chief gardener Hendrik Boom, and assistant Jacob Cloete van Kempen, they planted the first vines in the Company's Garden, laying the foundation for what would later become South Africa's flourishing wine industry. This historic moment was captured in Van Riebeeck's journal on 2 February 1659: *“Today, praise be to God, wine was made for the first time from Cape grapes, namely from the new must fresh from the vat. The grapes were mostly Muscadel and other white, round grapes, very fragrant and tasty. The Spanish grapes are still quite green, though they hang reasonably thickly on several vines and give promise of a first-class crop. These grapes, from the three young vines planted 2 years ago, have yielded about 12 quarts of must, and we shall soon discover how it will be affected by maturing.”*

Van Riebeeck's foray into winemaking was challenging. Setbacks marked the early years as the colonists grappled with unfamiliar grape varieties and the peculiarities of the Cape's terroir. After failed attempts at Green

Point Common, they settled on the Liesbeeck River area, encompassing today's Mowbray, Rondebosch, and Newlands.

The successful harvest of the Cape's first grapes in 1659 marked the birth of South African wine.

Van Riebeeck departed in 1662, leaving behind a struggling colony and a wine industry with poor-quality wines due to early grape harvesting and the impact of long sea voyages. Only 17 years later, with the arrival of Simon van der Stel, did the Cape wine industry begin to recover from its decline.

## Laying the foundations

Simon van der Stel, the Dutch Governor of the Cape Colony from 1679 to 1699, is a central figure in the history of Groot Constantia. He was born in Mauritius, and his mother was of Malay descent. He was stationed in Amsterdam, working for the VOC. He owned vineyards just outside of Amsterdam that produced wine and brandy.

Renowned for his contributions to advancing the South African wine industry, Van der Stel was the first mixed-race Cape Governor, a detail that the apartheid government largely ignored.

During his tenure as Governor, he acquired a plot of land (about 763 hectares) in the verdant valley of Constantia, where he established Groot Constantia in 1685. He also granted land to free burghers and immigrants, many of whom started wine farms.



An outstanding view of Groot Constantia

Inspired by European vineyards, Van der Stel envisioned Groot Constantia as a model farm dedicated to grape cultivation and the production of fine wines. Under his meticulous stewardship, Groot Constantia quickly gained renown for the quality of its wines, earning accolades from connoisseurs worldwide.

Simon van der Stel's vision for Groot Constantia extended beyond winemaking to encompass agriculture, horticulture, and architecture. He introduced innovative farming techniques, cultivated exotic crops, and constructed elegant buildings that reflected the grandeur of the Dutch Golden Age. His commitment to excellence and innovation transformed Groot Constantia into a thriving estate admired for its beauty and productivity.

## A long season of struggle

In 1712, Van der Stel died, and the estate was held at auction for over four days. The land was officially sold in three parts. The largest portion went to Bergyllet, while the land known today as Groot Constantia was sold to 73-year-old wealthy Swede, Oloff Bergh. The smallest portion, now known as Klein Constantia, was sold to Johan Jurgen Kotze. In 1724, Oloff Bergh died, and the farm was passed on to his wife, Anna de Koningh, the daughter of Batavian slaves. She became the first woman of mixed-race descent to own a wine farm in South Africa. However, she had no interest in wine-making and struggled to manage the property effectively. Groot Constantia fell into disrepair and the quality of the wine produced also suffered during this time.



Wine barrels at the winery

1. Jonkershuis Restaurant
2. Simon's Restaurant & Deli
3. Production Cellar (Sales, Tasting, & Art)
4. Historical Bath
5. Cloete Cellar (Sales & Tasting)
6. Manor House (Museum)
7. Bathrooms
8. Double Decker Official City Tour Bus
9. Art Gallery



However, agriculture and viticulture continued under her ownership. Then Carl Georg Wieser and Jacobus van der Spuij followed as owners from 1734 to 1759 and 1759 to 1778, respectively. While Wieser expanded the vineyards, Van der Spuij showed less interest in winemaking, relying on a slave cellar master.

In 1778, Jan Serrurier briefly owned Groot Constantia before selling it to Hendrik Cloete, a wealthy landowner and winemaker, who revitalised the farm. Thereafter, the estate remained in Cloete's family for several generations. Cloete invested in new infrastructure, included a wine cellar and renovated the homestead. Under his ownership, Groot Constantia's wines gained worldwide renown, and the property underwent significant changes. After he died in 1799, his son Hendrik Cloete Jr. took over, until he also died in 1818. The widow of Hendrik Cloete Jr. then divided the estate and sold portions of it to her sons in 1823. The larger portion, which retained the name Groot Constantia, was sold to the oldest son, Jacob Pieter Cloete in 1824. This became the magnificent wine estate that we know today as Groot Constantia.

Despite its illustrious past, the estate faced numerous challenges that affected the wine industry. These included the abolition of slavery in 1834 which negatively impacted labour availability, as well as outbreaks of fungal diseases in the 1850s and vine diseases in 1866. Furthermore, changes in import duties on French wines imported into Britain in 1860 put added strain on the industry.

The Cloete family exemplifies the success of the burgher community in establishing themselves at the Cape. They achieved notable prosperity in agriculture, eventually ascending to the ranks of the burgher elite. Despite their longstanding presence in the Cape and close ties with the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the Cloete family notably aligned themselves with the British, marking a significant shift in their alliances.

During the Cloete family's ownership, Groot Constantia relied heavily on slave labour. Records show that many enslaved people were involved in various tasks on the farm, although specifics about their roles are limited. With the inception of the Slave Office and Slave Register in 1816, documentation of enslaved people's personal histories improved, providing valuable insights into their lives and contributions to the farm.

Eventually in 1885, after a series of setbacks, Groot Constantia was put up for auction and was purchased by the Cape Government for a relatively low sum (R125.522 / £5275 / \$6621). The estate underwent restoration efforts, including refurbishing the homestead, which now houses the De Pass Collection. In 1993, the Groot Constantia Trust was established to manage and preserve the estate's heritage.



Hendrik Cloete Sr. (1725-1798) with his slave attendant Augustus van Bengalen

## Groot Constantia wines in popular culture

Groot Constantia wines have left an indelible mark on popular culture throughout history, with references to its wines found in poetry and literature and even associated with iconic figures like Napoleon Bonaparte.

One of the earliest references to Constantia wines appears in the poetry of German poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock in 1795. In his ode "Der Kapwein und der Johannisberger," Klopstock sings the praises of the virtues of "daughter Konstanzia," preferring her wine with its "bridal blush and scent of rose oil" over wines from his homeland. This early reference

highlights the allure and appeal of Constantia wines beyond South Africa's borders.

In 1811, Jane Austen immortalised Constantia wines in her novel "Sense and Sensibility." In a scene where Mrs. Jennings offers Elinor a glass of Constantia wine, she reminisces about her late husband's fondness for it, emphasising its medicinal properties and exquisite taste. Austen's inclusion of Constantia wine in her novel highlights its status as a beverage of choice among the upper class, adding to its allure and mystique.

Constantia wines also found favour in the eyes of Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte during his exile on the island of St. Helena from 1818 to 1821. Records indicate that Groot Constantia supplied Napoleon with at least 30 bottles of Grand Constance every month during his exile. He insisted that it sweetened the bitterness of exile. This association with the iconic Napoleon further elevated the prestige of Constantia wines, making them a symbol of luxury and refinement.

The cultural significance of Constantia wines extends further into literature and poetry. In 1870, Charles Dickens referenced Constantia wines in his novel The Mystery of Edwin Drood, further cementing their place in popular culture. French novelist, Joris-Karl Huysmans, also mentioned Constantia wines in his work in 1884, indicating their international acclaim and recognition.

In recent years, the legacy of Constantia wines has been revived with the relaunch of the award-winning Grand Constance in 2005. This historic wine, favoured by Napoleon himself, continues to captivate modern audiences with its rich history and exquisite taste. The association with Napoleon has led to record-breaking sales of Grand Constance wines at auctions, further solidifying its status as a collector's item and symbol of luxury.

## A monumental legacy

The architecture of Groot Constantia reflects a rich blend of styles spanning centuries of history. Originally designed in a late Dutch Renaissance style, the manor house exudes elegance and refinement with its double-storey structure and grand rooms paved with white marble. The wine cellar, built behind the homestead, showcases elements of neo-classicism, with a sculpture adorning its pediment believed to be the work of the renowned German sculptor Anton Anreith. The Jonkershuis complex, once serving as slave quarters and stables, features characteristic wolf-nose gables and a widened gallery. Over the years, additions and renovations, including the installation of slender gables, ornamental vases, and the figure of "Abundance" on the central gable, have contributed to the estate's architectural evolution. Despite the passage of time and various modifications, the buildings of Groot Constantia continue to stand as enduring symbols of South Africa's architectural heritage.



### Did you know?

South Africa is home to the world's longest wine route, the "Route 62." Stretching over 850 kilometers, this scenic route winds through picturesque landscapes, charming towns, and numerous vineyards, offering wine enthusiasts a delightful journey through South Africa's diverse wine regions.

## A Guide to Cape Dutch Gables

A gable is a common Dutch architectural detail, which served as a feature to distinguish the home of a proud farmer from that of his neighbor.

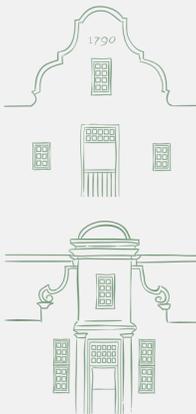
Etymologically, the term gable, or 'gewel,' likely shares roots with the Dutch word 'gaffel,' referring to the forked pole supporting the roof ridge of early medieval dwellings.

### Holbol Gable

Towards the close of the 18th century, the Cape's gables saw the influence of the Baroque style, introducing an abundance of ornamental details, swirls, and embellishments. However, what truly distinguished this gable type from the earlier Bolbol style was the incorporation of some concave lines to offset the convex contours.

### Neo-classical Gable

This gable style was one of the later designs in the Cape – elegant, understated, and dignified. It featured minimal ornamentation, often incorporating urns within the gable caps. Although the earlier concave contours were still championed, neo-classical gables also favoured straight lines, as well as the incorporation of pilasters and pediments. The pediment itself could be in the form of a triangle, a curve, or feature sculpted details.



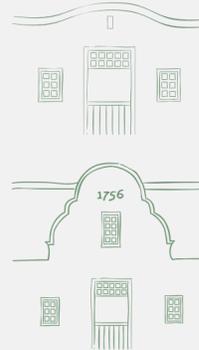
The interesting sculptural forms of the Cloete Cellar

These triangular, slanting features serve as ornamental embellishments: bell gables, 'neck' gables, and others, which reflect contemporary art-historical styles in their design. The oldest preserved gable, from Joostenberg in 1756, has a 'Baroque' concave-convex style. Had similar gables preceded this, they would likely have been preserved.

Culturally aware historians have interpreted the six gables of an H-shaped homestead, projecting their presence to the front, sides, and rear as a representation of the 'conquest of the land.'

### Wolfsneus Gable

This translates to wolf's nose gable. It was the earliest type of gable, and is positioned on the front of a structure, to sit above a dormer window that allows daylight into the loft space directly above the front door.



### Bolbol Gable

Later designs of gables reflected the increased prosperity of the Cape. Certainly by the mid 1750s, gables were more elaborate and decorative in design, reaching new heights. Gables whose contours were all rounded and convex in shape were called "bolbol" gables (bol means rounded in Dutch).

## A year in the life of a South African wine farm

A year in the life of a South African wine farm is characterized by a cyclical pattern of tasks and activities closely tied to the seasons.

### December to February

The vineyards are lush and vibrant in the summer, with grapes ripening under the warm African sun. This period marks the peak of the growing season, requiring intensive vineyard management practices such as pruning, canopy management, pest control and regular irrigation to ensure optimal grape development and flavour concentration.

### March to May

As autumn sets in, the focus shifts to the harvest season, known as "crush." This is a bustling time on the wine farm, as workers handpick the ripe grapes and bring them to the cellar for processing. The grapes are carefully sorted, de-stemmed, and crushed to extract the juice, which will undergo fermentation to produce wine.

### Following the Harvest

The winemaking process begins in earnest. Fermentation tanks are filled with grape juice, where yeast converts sugars into alcohol, creating the basis for wine. Winemakers closely monitor temperatures and fermentation progress, adjusting to achieve the desired flavour profiles.

### June to August

Throughout winter, the vineyards enter a period of dormancy. Pruning takes centre stage as workers trim back the vines to promote healthy growth in the upcoming season. It's also a time for farm maintenance tasks, including equipment and infrastructure repairs.

### September to November

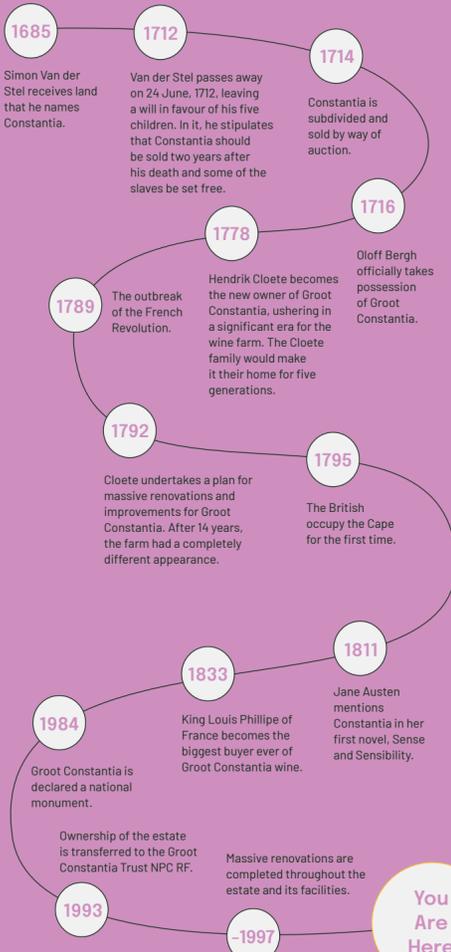
With the arrival of spring, the vineyards come alive once again as new growth emerges on the vines. Budbreak signals the start of a new growing cycle, and vineyard managers carefully tend to the young shoots, ensuring they have the support and nutrients they need to thrive. This period also marks the beginning of the flowering and fruit, setting the stage for another year of grape production.

Throughout the year, South African wine farms also welcome visitors for tours, tastings, and events, providing an opportunity to share the beauty and bounty of the vineyard with wine enthusiasts worldwide. Overall, a year in the life of a South African wine farm is a dynamic and rewarding journey, shaped by the rhythms of nature and the skillful hands of those who tend the vines and craft the wine.



The Groot Constantia range of wines is distinguished by its exceptional quality, reflecting the rich heritage of the renowned Groot Constantia Wine Estate and showcasing a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation in every bottle.

## A Timeline of the Past



### ARTS & CULTURE

The wine farm's proximity to the greater Cape Town area means that some of the country's best cultural experiences are only a stone's throw away. Still, Groot Constantia offers a variety of cultural experiences beyond its wine and on-site restaurants. The estate often hosts exhibitions of local artists as well as music concerts, wine festivals, and cultural celebrations.

### WINE TASTING

To be anywhere near Cape Town is to be close to a treasure trove of fun and adventure. However, Groot Constantia does offer a variety of activities for all ages. No trip to a wine farm is complete without wine tasting. Enjoy sampling the farm's signature wines and a chocolate pairing, or take a tour of the estate's wine cellars. Families can also enjoy Groot Constantia. There is a playground and plenty of open spaces for little ones to run around and have fun. For the wanderers, the estate offers a variety of hiking and walking trails.

### WINE TASTING IN SIX SENSATIONAL STEPS

Wine tasting involves six steps that require the use of almost all your senses. Here's a breakdown of the typical steps:

**Visual Inspection:** Begin by observing the wine's appearance. Tilt the glass against a white background to assess its colour and clarity. Note whether it is clear or cloudy, and observe its colour's intensity, which can provide clues about its age and varietal.

**Aromas (Nose):** Swirl the wine gently in the glass to release its aromas. Place your nose into the glass and take a few quick sniffs to identify the wine's bouquet. Try to discern different aromas, such as fruits, flowers, spices, or earthy notes. Note the intensity and complexity of the aromas.

**Taste (Palate):** Take a small sip of the wine and let it coat your mouth. Pay attention to the wine's taste sensations, including sweetness, acidity, tannin (for red wines), and body. Identify the primary flavours, such as fruits, herbs, or spices, and any secondary flavours or undertones. Consider the wine's balance and structure, noting whether the components harmonise or if one element dominates.

**Mouthfeel:** Evaluate the wine's texture and mouthfeel. Note its viscosity, or "legs," which refers to how the wine clings to the side of the glass. Consider the wine's weight on the palate, whether light, medium-bodied, or full-bodied. Assess the level of alcohol and acidity and the presence of any astringency from tannins.

**Finish:** If you're tasting multiple wines, swallow the wine or expectorate (spit) it out. Pay attention to the wine's finish, or aftertaste, which refers to the lingering flavours and sensations on the palate. Note the finish's length, whether short, medium, or long, and any changes in flavour or intensity.

**Overall Impression:** Reflect on your overall experience with the wine. Consider how it compares to your expectations and preferences and its potential for ageing and development. Formulate your final impressions and opinions, remembering that wine tasting is subjective and personal preferences vary.

By following these steps, wine enthusiasts can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the wines they taste, allowing them to savour each bottle's sensory experience and nuances fully.

### ANIMAL AND PLANT LIFE SIGHTINGS

While Groot Constantia is by no means a Big Five hotspot, it can still form part of a Western Cape safari itinerary because of its central location. However, the estate is home to an eclectic mix of critters, six to be exact. The "Little Six" are a celebration of some of South Africa's smaller but special animals. These are the baboon, caracal, bee, ladybird beetle, Cape Eagle Owl and white duck. Bring your binoculars to spot the elusive six while touring the vineyards!



### CONTACT

Ask us to help and plan your unique African adventure!



go that way

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