



Tim's Wine Market

June 2025

By J.P. Donnelly-Davis

This month we take a break from our study of California appellations to head to the southern hemisphere with two selections from South Africa. The wines from South Africa straddle a division in the world of wine, with styles that emulate old world structure but often with very new world fruit. This month we present two wines that express the modern, new world character of the region from two of our favorite producers. We hope these selections encourage you to explore more of the exciting wines this country produces. - **Tim**

2021 David Finlayson Cabernet Sauvignon | \$29

David Finlayson is a third-generation winemaker in Stellenbosch, working extensively with older, high-elevation vineyards. The Finlayson story began with David's grandfather, Dr. Maurice Finlayson, who left his native Scotland to pursue viticulture in South Africa. After turning his talents to winemaking and vineyard management, Maurice was joined by his sons, their wives, and eventually a slew of grandchildren by the early 1990s. Feeling a little cramped on the family estate, Peter Finlayson left the farm and worked for several other producers before purchasing the Glen Carlou winery, known for its very old ungrafted vines. His nephew, David, would later join him in the vineyard.

After a brief yet prestigious post-graduate stint at Château Margaux, David returned to Glen Carlou to accept a position as head winemaker. Together, he and his father Walter revitalized the farm's older vineyards, specializing in French varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, and Cabernet Franc. These wines were a callback to the early days of Stellenbosch winemaking, where many of the wineries in the region had a strong French influence. They were so successful that the winery was purchased by Donald Hess, best known for the Napa Valley Hess Collection. The two then purchased one of the oldest wine farms in Stellenbosch, and today the wines that bear David's name still have their roots in French viticulture.

This Cabernet Sauvignon is sourced from cooler-climate vineyard sites throughout the appellation, including high-altitude fruit from Stellenbosch Mountain as well as the coastal ward of Somerset West which experiences some maritime influence. In addition, some of the younger-vine fruit from the "GS" vineyard, where David makes his flagship Cabernet Sauvignon, is used in the production of this wine. This vineyard was formerly managed by visionary South African winemaker George Spies, who produced Bordeaux-style reds in the 1960s, when much of the country's winemaking was still given over to sweet wines. Advances in cellar technology and tasting a few older vintages from the Spies family inspired David to produce varietal Cabernet Sauvignon.

To make this wine, multiple green harvests are employed in each vineyard to reduce yields, ensuring quality and concentration. Harvest, sorting, and de-stemming are all done by hand before fermentation in stainless steel. After post-fermentation maceration, the finished wine is racked to new and gently-used French oak barriques for 14 months. The wine is then lightly filtered before bottling.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. This is a wine that needs a bit of time to open up but, once it does, is certainly worth the wait. On the palate, this wine delivers notes of cooked blackcurrant, plum leaf, fresh blueberry, cigar wrapper, and old leather. Drink 2025-2029 with sausage stew, grilled lamb patties with yogurt sauce, or marinated flank steak.

2020 Painted Wolf "Guillermo" Pinotage | \$29

Located north of Stellenbosch, the Swartland is one of the country's largest wine-growing districts, stretching from the Atlantic coast to the base of the towering Cederberg mountain range. Though the region is home to a number of different terroirs, one constant is the hot, dry climate, with many grape varieties grown in Stellenbosch struggling to survive in the heat. However, the Pinotage grape thrives in this environment, often producing a fuller-bodied style unique to the region. In addition, the lack of humidity and vineyard pests makes it possible to work with minimal intervention, free from man-made chemicals. As such, a lot of Swartland wineries embrace the sustainable and "natural" side of the spectrum, even in a country where these styles of winemaking are becoming increasingly popular.

Painted Wolf is a winery committed to nature, as one could expect from a winery named after an endangered species. In fact, owners Jeremy and Emma Borg created the Painted Wolf line of wines specifically to raise money for the wild dogs. Long before they made the shift to winemaking, the couple lived in tents for years on end, producing wildlife documentaries and traveling throughout sub-Saharan Africa. The couple donate a significant portion of their profits to wildlife conservation, having raised nearly 5 million South African Rand (\$300,000 USD) so far, and their values are shared by the vineyards and grape growers they work with.

One of the most important partners at Painted Wolf is Billy “Guillermo” Hughes, who traded his organically-grown grapes for company shares in the founding days of the winery. Billy’s vineyard, Kasteelsig, is biodynamically managed and dry-farmed, minimizing the impact on the land. It is from this vineyard that most of the fruit for this Pinotage comes from, along with Billy’s own wine project, Nativo. The soils here are all red clay and shale which helps to retain precious moisture from the Swartland’s short rainy season. This wine is named after Billy as a thank-you for his years of exceptional grape growing. The nearby Werdie vineyard contributes fruit as well, organically farmed at higher altitudes near the Darling sub-zone. Billy’s vineyard contributes weight and power, while the Pinotage grown at Werdie farm contributes freshness and acidity.

All fruit from both vineyards is harvested by hand and fermented on native yeasts. A fraction of the fruit ferments in open-topped wooden vats with the balance going into stainless steel. Once dry, the wine is raked to a combination of French and American oak barriques for 14 months before bottling. When you open this wine, I recommend decanting for up to half an hour, and do not be afraid to chill it down to cellar temperature, about 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Once this wine has some time to open up it delivers notes of dried cranberry, redcurrant preserve, rooibos tea, black pepper, and earth. Drink 2025-2029 with grilled chicken kabobs, sausage and vegetable skewers, or lamb chops.

Sausage with Mielie Pap & Gravy

This is a very traditional dish in South Africa, traditionally served with boerewors, the local sausage. It reminds me of sausage and polenta from Italy but the seasonings for the gravy are warmer than you find in most Italian cuisine. Boerewors is hard to find in the US but good quality bratwurst or Italian sausage makes a good substitute. - **Tim**

FOR THE MIELIE PAP

4 cups of water

1 TBS coarse salt

2 cups of mielie meal (white grits)

FOR THE GRAVY

4 TBS olive oil

1 –2 TSP chilli flakes

1 TBS coriander

28 oz/800 g –chopped and diced tomatoes

3 cups of white onions – diced

3 TBS tomato sauce/ketchup

2 TBS Worcestershire Sauce

1 TBS brown sugar

1 cup of water

Coarse Salt & Black Pepper to taste

FOR THE BOEREWORS

**2 lbs of Boerewors or similar sausage
(preferably in a loop)**

FOR THE MIELIE PAP (pronounced “milly pup)

Bring water and salt to a boil in a large heavy saucepan. Add the mielie meal and mix together well with a wooden spoon. (The consistency you get from the pap will not change with cooking. So make sure it is the texture you want it at this stage.) Reduce the heat to medium/low. Cover securely with a lid and simmer. Open the pot and stir occasionally during the cooking and reseal. Cook for 30 minutes

FOR THE GRAVY

Heat the oil in a sauté pan on medium heat. Cook the onions until brown then add the chili flakes and coriander and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the tomatoes, ketchup, Worcestershire sauce, sugar, and water. Cook for 30 minutes till the sauce thickens and water evaporates. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

FOR THE BOEREWORS

Heat the grill on high heat. Cook the boerewors for 5 minutes. Flip and cook for another 5 minutes. (Do not prick the sausage while cooking. You don’t want to lose all the juice).