

## MICHAEL FRIDJHON WEEKLY

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### The crowd at the starting blocks

**Which of today's little-known newcomer wineries will track the likes of Thelema?**

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It is a frequently heard lament — mainly from older-generation wine drinkers — that the names of many of the better performing wineries are unknown to them. This in itself is hardly surprising. The Cape wine industry continues to show not merely resilience, but real growth. Each year the annual Platter Guide discovers at least 50 new players. I try to keep up with the new arrivals by volunteering to do assessments on these maiden releases. Most are names about which I have not even heard a pre-emptive whisper.

A few do something noteworthy within a year or two of coming to market. Of these, a couple sustain the creativity and become fixed stars in the firmament. Once upon a time Thelema, Vergelegen and Cape Point were unknown even to industry insiders.

When Gyles Webb launched his Helshoogte property about 20 years ago, there were fewer than 200 producers in the Cape winelands. The property — at the top of the pass dividing Stellenbosch from the Franschhoek side of Paarl — was in something of a viticultural no man's land. The fresh, bright and very pure fruit of the Thelema wines made a startling statement — as did a succession of awards all garnered within five years of Webb's first release.

On this basis, Cape Point — established only in 1999 — has done equally well. The Noordhoek winery enjoys an enviable reputation for its white wines and won enough trophies in the past couple of years for its name to be known beyond the inner ring of wine buffery. Like Thelema, it needed to establish itself, its style of winemaking, and the location of its vineyards before it could become mainstream. It had to do this against the backdrop of 400 registered producers and a burgeoning export market.

Of the next-generation newcomers who already enjoy quite high visibility, Kevin Grant's Ataraxia comes to mind. The chardonnay and sauvignon blanc are among the most sought after of the Cape's limited-release offerings. Usually, bigger volumes are required before a name can truly be said to be on the vinous landscape. Quoin Rock is now certainly en route, notwithstanding the unfortunately high profile enjoyed by its owner, Dave King, as he continues his dispute with the taxman. A succession of show awards, South African Airways listings and prestigious production contracts (the newly released Gary Player wines were made in the Quoin Rock cellar) have contributed to this visibility.

However, like Ataraxia, it must make its presence felt in a market in which there are now more than 600 registered producers. There are literally dozens of very promising newcomers — whose vineyards are in prime locations and whose maiden releases have already won impressive ratings. Names like Constantia Glen and Eagle's Nest — both on the slopes above the better-known Constantia properties — are likely to be there. So might Tulbagh Mountain Vineyards, already the darling of the UK fine wine brigade.

Edgebaston-Finlayson and De Morgenzon both launched on a Platter five-star award. Mont Destin looks promising; Marianne Estate, owned by the Dauriac family of St Emilion and well located, is in with a chance.

Glenelly could be like Tokara and rise swiftly to prominence as serious (but not gratuitous) investment combines with an extremely well chosen site.

All of these are certain to do well: but whether they will achieve the same prominence in as little time as the big names of today seems high improbable — given the crowd at the starting blocks.

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