

Gary Jordan; instant success after 21 years.

Gary Jordan is a familiar figure on the SA wine scene. He can be found at most wine industry events, from judging at The Old Mutual Show, to promoting 'Just Riesling' or Premium Independent Wineries (PIWOSA), and the Cape Winemaker's Guild, and award ceremonies (receiving and giving) and has even danced his way to internet stardom (see Harvest Shake at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yj-byv-dyjw>). He is, in the SA wine world and increasingly abroad, a celebrity. And all in a very short time. "It took me 21 years to be an overnight success", jokes Gary.

Celebrity status, however, was not what Gary or his wife Kathy were seeking. Their involvement with wine events is always driven by the credibility of the occasion, a desire to promote the industry and above all, their passion for good wine.

Gary and Kathy began winemaking as consumers. Yes, Gary's family had grown grapes for others on their Wellington farm but there was no inherited winery or winemaking tradition. Gary's love for wine just evolved, starting early it seems, meeting Kathy when she was just 17 and now proudly (?) boasting that he 'taught her to drink'. Both knew they would leave their training and careers and pursue their dream to make wine. An offer to study at the prestigious UC Davis in California was the catalyst, Gary had been turned down from Elsenburg College as being out of kilter with their younger student profile! Both were enjoying their time in Sonoma and had received offers to make wine there when a news broadcast changed their lives.

The release of Nelson Mandela brought them home. "We just knew we would make wine here, and that was the moment we knew it would happen". They returned to the farm where they had lived in a cottage with views stretching across the Polkadraai hills and which had been planted with varietals matched to individual terroirs. The farm had a 300 year history and had been acquired ten years before by Gary's parents. It was chosen for its slopes (facing in all four directions) and its granite soils, and in 1993 produced its first vintage. Gary had to change very little, most locations perfectly suited their variety, Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling on the coolest, South facing slopes, Cabernet Sauvignon on the North facing; "the temperature variance is amazing", says Gary, "it can be 8°C between slopes".

That doesn't mean Gary has little to do, as a Geologist he is still learning about the soils on different sites, and parcels his vines into areas as small as half a hectare if it has its own microclimate and soil type. You would expect Gary to believe in the importance of soil, and he does. "We're on granite here dating back more than 580 million years, it's quite acidic and we have used up to 30 tons per hectare of lime in places to counter that", and they've just acquired another 20 hectares over the hill so there is more to discover and more sites to try.

Jordan's has been an 'Estate' (completing every stage of wine growing, making and packaging on the farm) since 2010 and visitors are welcome to view the gravity flow winery. After, perhaps, they

have eaten at George Jardine's award winning restaurant or wandered the superb grounds. I asked if the current economic climate meant that offering more than just wine was the key to survival. Gary believes for some wineries it is, and those just supplying grapes to others will suffer worst. "We could do well on just our wines but we want to give a whole experience, we want people to slow down and linger when they come here and so that they can better enjoy the wine and food we are building guest cottages".

I also asked if Gary was taking a back seat soon; he gave me a look. Gary is very much 'hands on'. He trusts his staff, especially winemaker of ten years Sjaak Nelson, but decisions are jointly made. Gary has input in all areas. "I'm autocratic, definitely, but I listen and take advice, some might feel I'm very easy going, even a soft touch, but cross me and". Anyone who saw Gary's passion and determination during the threatened recent mining applications in the area knows how to finish his sentence.

In just twenty years Jordan Wine Estate has established itself as a centre for sundowners and jazz and fine food and wines which have garnered dozens of awards at home and against the best in the world. Jordans has involved itself in local festivals, wine shows and charity drives. Frequent overseas trips and endless requests for interviews and appearances around SA has stirred Gary to appoint a vineyard manager, "to make those key decisions when I'm away, but not without consulting me", smiles Gary.

Despite the social commitments and the restaurants (one in London) and the accommodation plans and the calls from Nashville, it is still all about the wine. The new 20 hectares will be planted with Tempranillo, Cinsaut and Grenache as well as more Cabernet Sauvignon. This will allow all sorts of 'seasoning' experiments with classic varieties. Gary is working on new bore holes among the vineyards as well so he happily spends time 'rolling in the dirt' as he puts it.

Despite Gary's obvious successes you feel he has more to do and frowns at the idea of being an SA 'wine legend'. He is determined to keep promoting our wines here and abroad – the London restaurant is a way of getting quality SA wines under the noses of customers in the UK – and believes in the importance of entering our wines in foreign competitions. Gary is against the idea of sending more wine abroad in bulk for overseas bottling and despite lamenting the fact that it is more expensive to bottle wines here than abroad, believes that this practice will not improve our image. Is a world view important, I asked, especially for young winemakers? "You can't make a great wine unless you have tried one yourself", answers Gary.

So what does a wine legend drink after a day that would leave most exhausted? "Last night it was Riesling, but Kathy and I can get through up to five bottles in a day...just tasting", he assures me with a smile.