

Q&A w/ Tania Kleintjes-Moses: Chenin Blanc, women in wine and proud legacies

By  Juanita Pienaar

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With her maiden vintage (2016) as the organic winemaker for Spier, two of Tania Kleintjes-Moses's wines roped in big accolades with the 2019 Platter wine guide. The 2016 Spier Farm House Organic Rose was awarded four-and-a-half stars, while the 2016 Spier Farm House Organic Chenin Blanc was awarded a Platter five-star rating, which is the highest rating awarded to wines.



Tania Kleintjes-Moses, Spier Wine Farm's organic winemaker. © SMPhotography.

Here, Kleintjes-Moses elaborates on why she chose a career in winemaking, why she thinks the industry is still very much a boy's club and how she is channelling her *groot oupa*, trying to leave behind a proud legacy of her own.

Please tell us more about yourself and what it is you do.

I am Tania, child of God, mommy, wife and winemaker. I am Spier Wine Farm's organic winemaker. I handle the whole production of the Spier Farm House Organic wine range from post harvesting to bottling and certification.

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[When our winemakers are not in the cellar making wine, they're getting dressed up, enjoying the fruits of their labour. 🍷🍷 #spierwine #cellarmaster #organicwinemaker #spiercreativeblock](#)

A post shared by [Spier Wine Farm](#) (@spierwinefarm) on Jul 19, 2018 at 8:00am PDT

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■ **List a few of the accolades you have received and tell us more about the wine that was awarded.**

- I completed my MSc degree in Oenology while working at Spier;
- I have been a judge at two of our national wine competitions since 2011;
- With my maiden vintage (2016) as the organic winemaker for Spier, two of my wines roped in big accolades with the 2019 *Platter's by Diners Club South African Wine Guide*. The 2016 Spier Farm House Organic Rose was awarded four-and-a-half stars, while the 2016 Spier Farm House Organic Chenin Blanc was awarded a Platter's five-star rating, which is the highest rating awarded to wines.



90 wines get Five Star rating in 2019 *Platter's by Diners Club South African Wine Guide*

6 Nov 2018



The grapes for these wines come from Spier's organic certified vineyards. The grapes were hand-harvested in the early morning, pre-cooled and sorted by hand. A low-intervention approach was used throughout the winemaking process.

The natural yeast flora of the grapes completed the fermentation in 300-400L French barrels in a temperature-controlled environment. Older barrels were used for the fermentation and subsequent ageing of the wine. Both wines aged for seven months in the barrels before bottling.

Comment in the Platter's Wine Guide about the 2016 Farm House Organic Chenin Blanc:

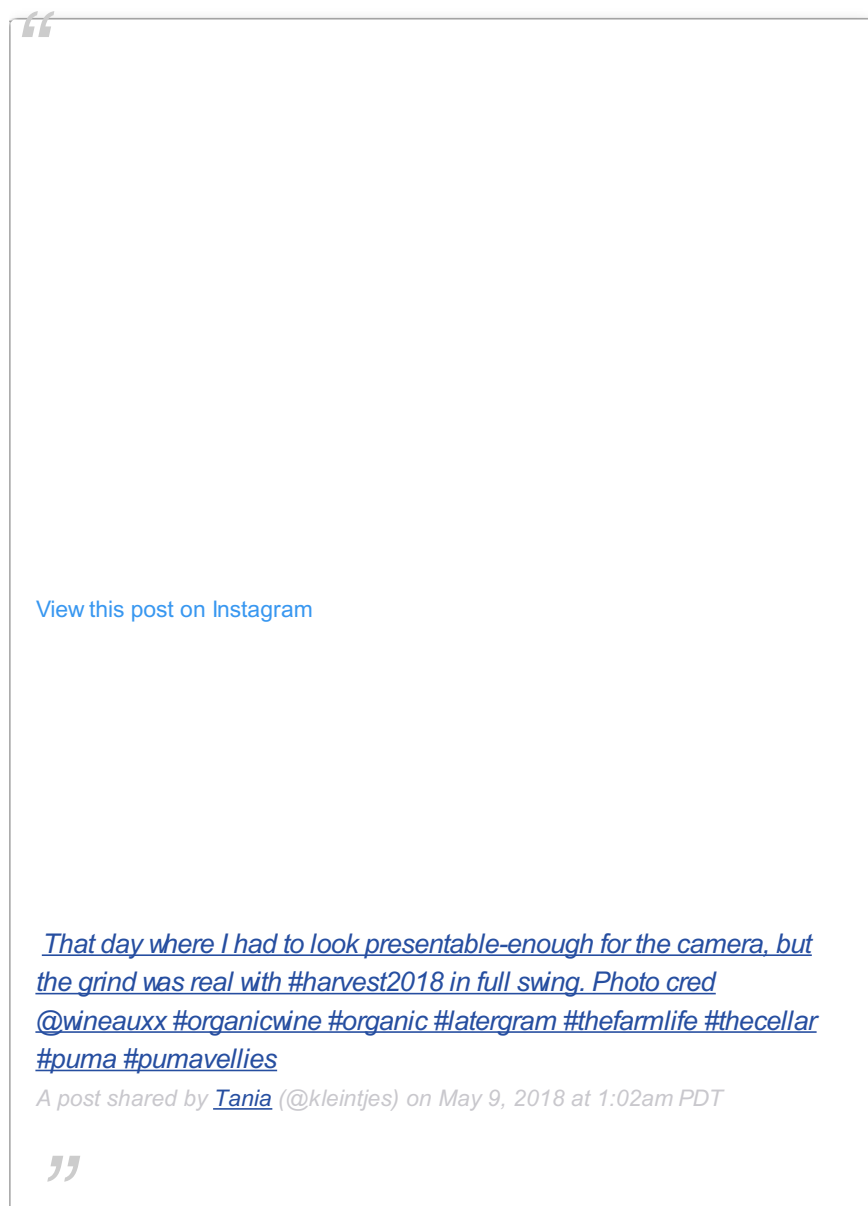
“ Shows artisanal touch with rich textural lees influence, layered complexity of fruit and minerality, subtly nuanced finish. ”

■ The choice to study viticulture and oenology came from my love for science and nature. It was the perfect marriage between the two that interested me, and I thought, "It's one product, how difficult can it be?" Years later in the industry and I am still learning!

My career choice was mainly fuelled by my rebellious nature. Although my graduating class was 60% women, the percentage of those who actually went on to work in the cellar was minuscule. So, it was an obvious choice for me to tackle the white male-dominated field. It later grew into a love for creating something that brought people a little happiness.

The organic wine direction started off as an opportunity at Spier. Spier's first organic certified harvest was 2015. It soon became clear that the process and certification were more than could be handled by the current team that handles the conventional wine, and that a specified team had to be assigned to it.

I was the assistant red winemaker at Spier for five years and quality manager for two years; I was quick to respond to the call to manage the organic process.



It wasn't until my second baby was born in 2017, that it had become a life choice. With organic winemaking, everything done and added to the wine during production is highly regulated, so it became the norm to scrutinise everything which came into contact with the wines.

Through my pregnancy and after, I became much more aware of what I wanted my children to get exposed to and just like that, my job became a lifestyle; well obviously after some analysis paralysis, reading through a myriad of articles and blogs.

■ **How do you think the role of women in winemaking has shaped the industry?**

I think women in the industry have brought on a lot of change, creativity and colour to this white male-dominated industry. Don't get me wrong, it is still very much a white boys' club, but women standing up and doing amazing work and making amazing wines, open the doors for the new generation.

Women like Wendy Appelbaum, Norma Ratcliffe, Andrea Mullineux, Cathy van Zyl; the ladies of Women in Wine, to name a few, are at the forefront of shaping the way the industry looks and changing the perception of what a woman's place in the industry is.



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One case, six leading ladies in wine

7 Aug 2017



■ **Based on your experience, what advice would you give to women pursuing a career in winemaking?**

Go for it! Be diligent and study hard. You will have to be smarter and work harder than your male counterpart (but I guess that is for any industry). Start a tasting group and get some experience under your belt. Travel if you get the opportunity. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

■ **Who has been your biggest influence and/or role model?**

Six years ago, at a family reunion, I heard that my great grandpa worked in the vineyards in McGregor. At that time, they were paid with the *dopstelsel* and he was, like many of his peers, an alcoholic and doomed to a very bleak future in this vicious cycle brought on by apartheid. Until my grandfather's sister saw their father drunk again one evening and said that she doesn't want to see him like that again.

Although he was inebriated, her words hit home. He immediately gave up drinking. That decision led to my grandfather and his siblings being educated; none of whom worked in the vineyards. My grandfather was a teacher and headmaster, and here I am today with a Master's degree in winemaking. It just made me realise, one decision can shape your life and all of the generations that follow.

It could have been so different if it wasn't for that one right decision. What do I want my children to be part of? What legacy do I want to leave behind? Will my family and generations after me be proud to call me their ancestor? Every choice and challenge I am faced with I try to channel *groot oupa* Visser.

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From the cellar to the red carpet! Our team donned their finest to collect the @theiwsc 2018 South African Producer of the Year Award in London last week. Congratulations to the team for this amazing recognition! 💎💎💎💎

#IWSCbanquet #awards #spierwine 💎💎 ~ @theiwsc

A post shared by Spier Wine Farm (@spierwinefarm) on Nov 19, 2018 at 3:57am PST



What are you currently working on and what's next for you on your journey?

Currently, I am experimenting with an organic Chenin Blanc method ancestral sparkling wine. I am also playing around with an idea involving chocolate and wine.

For more on Spier Wine Farm and the wine they produce follow them on the following social media platforms: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#). You can also follow Kleintjes-Moses on [Instagram](#).

ABOUT JUANITA PIENAAR

Juanita is the editor of the marketing & media portal on the Bizcommunity website. She is also a contributing writer.
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