

Akkedisberg farmworkers inspire hope and empowerment with wine brand, Southern Treasures

 By [Robin Fredericks](#)

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For decades, a group of employees have been cultivating land and managing vines in the award-winning Overberg wine region at the foot of Africa's southernmost mountain range. Akkedisberg Boerdery's employees are now proud owners of their own brand and story.



Source: Supplied - Members of Akkedisberg Boerdery with wine maker and mentor Josef Dreyer of Raka Wines

On the well-known wine farm Raka, between Caledon and Stanford, in the Western Cape, South Africa is where 20 members of Akkedisberg launched their first wine, Southern Treasures Pinotage 2021 on Wednesday, 10 May 2023.

The brand name Southern Treasures refers to the people who made this empowerment project possible.

The project was started by the Dreyer family, who own Raka Wines. They wanted to create an opportunity for their workers to own their own land and business. The Dreyers provided the workers with the land, training, and financial support they needed to get started.

The workers of Akkedisberg have worked hard to make the project a success. They have learned how to grow grapes, make wine, and market their product. They have also learned how to work together as a team.

We chat with Josef Dreyer, winemaker, Raka Wines and Christel Moses, director, Akkedisberg Boerdery to find out more.

■ ***Can you tell us about the story behind the launch of Southern Treasures Pinotage 2021 and how the workers of Akkedisberg Boerdery became the proud owners of their own brand?***

Dreyer: This is a story about an employer who wanted to establish a viable business for their employees. Together with their workers, they embarked on a journey to create and build a dream and a brand for the employee's trust. The story behind this new brand is a community living in harmony with what nature gave them and how there is mutual appreciation. Now, a hidden treasure from the Klein River Valley is in a bottle for everyone to enjoy and appreciate.

■ ***What is the significance of the name "Southern Treasures" for this new brand and what does it represent?***

Moses: Southern Treasures refers to the hidden jewels and treasures found in the Overberg Akkedisberg Valley. The workers and trustees are these hidden treasures (jewels) that work the land for decades and that form the backbone of the Akkedisberg organisation but also the workers of Raka Wines. They go about their daily duties, living in harmony and utter appreciation for nature and their surroundings. They feed from the energy of nature.

Southern Treasures refers to the environment, the majestic landscape, the mountains, the small animal creatures and indigenous plants found in the valley that enriches the experience when you are in these vineyards.

■ ***Can you describe the characteristics of Southern Treasures Pinotage 2021 and what makes it distinctive?***

Dreyer: Ideal factors combine for a sublime drinking experience. Hearty fruity flavours with a complex nose of ripe cherry, blackberry, plum and light hints of oak. Smooth and soft in the palette delivering beautiful berry fruits that linger. An elegant tannin structure rounds off with excellent balance and a long juicy aftertaste. Ages well.

■ ***How important were the mentorship, capital, and guidance provided by the Dreyer family, Vinpro, and SAWITU in the establishment of Akkedisberg Boerdery and the creation of Southern Treasures Pinotage 2021?***

Moses: In an initiative like this, funding is important to develop the brand and enterprise, but partnerships, collaboration and resources in terms of coaching and mentorship are vitally important. Without the funding of the Western Cape and national government, and assistance from the South African Wine Industry Transformation Unit (Sawitu) and the Dreyer Family, we would not be able to produce the wine, not even mention the bottle of wine from our own grapes.

The workers in the Akkedisberg structure understand the vineyard and what it takes to produce a productive and sustainable vineyard. Technical know-how mentorship is required but even more mentorship in terms of business development and coaching, market access, corporate governance, financial management and literacy is even more important to drive business success. Vinpro and the Dreyers provided a lot of hours of input and guidance, and we are grateful to all involved in making the Southern Treasures Pinotage a reality.

Working closely with the strategic mentor, industry and government will ensure that all parties with various expertise support the organisation to become developed and sustainable in its full right.

■ ***How did Akkedisberg Boerdery become involved in the wine industry, and what was the process of establishing their own label like?***

Moses: The Dreyer's fishing vessels are all transformed, and they wanted to give the farm workers something else than being a farm worker! Akkedisberg were an idea to give the farmworkers some equity of their own. Akkedisberg as the organisation has been the producer of top quality grapes for wines for a decade, delivering their product into Raka wines.

Raka wines have premium super premium wine offerings in the local market.

When the trustees of Akkedisberg, decided that they wanted to enter the market with their own product offering and tell their own story, the mentor (Josef Dreyer) provided guidance but empowered them to develop, design and make the decision on the creatives for their own product. This included the story that they wanted on their label and the important aspects of this brand they wanted the consumer to experience. The design agency and the Sawitu were involved in this process but only to provide guidance, support and advice on techniques.

■ ***What is the main aim of the Akkedisberg Boerdery project, and how does it aim to empower workers by transferring skills to them?***

Dreyer: The key objective of this initiative is for Akkedisberg to have a product to sell and generate enough income from the sale of wine to support their farming operations and expand. Akkedisberg Boerdery is owned by a trust and the beneficiaries of the trust are farmworkers.

Another fundamental objective is to ensure that the youth and the children of the trustees in the organisation become part of the business and develop their skills in various aspects to sell and promote the product and lead the organisation in future. The wine industry is committed to assisting with skills development, to ensure that the fundamentals of running a sustainable business are created.

The beneficiaries are all well acquainted with vineyard work, however, a lot of skill transfer is needed in the marketing and general business practices, as almost all beneficiaries only attended school to grade 8. The ultimate goal is to empower the workers and to transfer skills.

■ ***How does the environmental impact of Southern Treasures Pinotage 2021 reflect care, and how does the sale of this wine support a better life for the families of Akkedisberg?***

Moses: Akkedisberg is IPW certified and therefore cautious of its impact on the environment. Southern Treasures, as a brand aims to conduct business with the highest level of care to the environment and ensure that sustainability of the environment remains a high priority.

The proceeds of the sale of Southern Treasures will support the families of the organisation to improve livelihoods, create hope for the families and also to fund opportunities for the families in order to create a healthy community.

■ ***How has the community responded to the launch of Southern Treasures Pinotage 2021, and what are the future plans for the brand and the Akkedisberg Boerdery project?***

Moses: The community has accepted the launch as a beacon of hope, inspiration, and aspiration. We started to talk about the initiative and the launch of the first product line in 2022. The trustees were involved in this conversation and sitting a year later with the product dressed in a bottle, is truly a remarkable achievement. This was something that they never thought would become a reality and here it is.

Everyone was quite surprised, but also excited and supportive and can't wait to see our product on the shelves. Our future plans are to produce our own wines, develop our name, logo and to identify our clients, but also to develop our website. Because our business is still quite new we would like to receive more experience and training, we would like to grow with the business and take on additional responsibilities.

We also talked about how they will promote and market the product, and we have a good giggle. The dream and farfetched thought is now a reality and this creates hope for the youth of these families, that dreams that can be achieved if you partner with the correct partners.

■ ***What are some of the challenges that Akkedisberg Boerdery has faced in establishing their own label, and how have they overcome them?***

Moses: Challenges in creating the brand and the product was financial challenges but this was addressed through funding that was provided by Sawitu and the Western Cape and national government.

Akkedisberg managed to get loans for the shortfall or paid for it from grape sales. The brand development and creatives were a challenge but this was addressed by getting a well-respected agency involved. Just Design was helpful and guided the beneficiaries with the brand development process. We are very proud of our final product.

An agreement on what the story and the brand would need to reflect on was addressed by a deep conversation between the trustees and a consensus was reached on what they mutually wanted on the bottle to represent all of them.

The Southern Treasures Pinotage 2021 is a limited-edition wine that is available for purchase at Raka Wine Estate.

ABOUT ROBIN FREDERICKS

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