

Young graduates launch their own wine brand

What started as a learning project has now become the development of a brand by a team of young Pinotage Youth Development Academy (PYDA) graduates, the first of its kind called uLutsha wine brand.



Source: Supplied

Ulutsha is an isiXhosa word for "the youth".

During 2021, Delheim Estate, Stellenbosch partnered with PYDA to enable graduates to create their own wine product, start to finish. Commencing with that year's harvest, the group of nine got a basic introduction from business plans to harvest, vinification, maturation and eventual own-brand wine release. Lockdown resulted in less exposure to actual winemaking, so the concept was born to provide a comprehensive understanding of the wine value chain and to get graduates hands-on in the industry.

The project is part of a long-term initiative that will see graduates create a commercial product from one barrel per year. The second group of five graduates has come on board in February 2022 for their immersive learning experience. They then make the wine for the next group and will bottle the wine made by the previous group, bringing a legacy element to the process.

Both intakes have also received input from award-winning winemaker Ntsiki Biyela, who has made Delheim Estate her

home base for her Aslina brand and is part of the project. Ntsiki also serves on the board of the PYDA.



Source: Supplied

Ziyanda Njalo, one of the original nine, who has co-ordinated the project on a full-time basis says of her experience and the brand: "Choosing to continue with the uLutsha Wine Project has expanded my knowledge and skills of the wine business.

"My confidence has grown and I have a deeper appreciation of the work and people it takes to produce a bottle of wine. In the uLutsha Wine Project, everyone that I have met has taught me that you must know your 'whys' and always have a plan. Ulutsha is a wine brand that inspires young people who want to create their own brands and be employers of tomorrow."

Growing niche product

The first group collaboratively developed the brand uLutsha. It is intended that the brand will expand going forward to include other niche wine products and services. The initial 230 limited edition bottles of uLutsha Pinotage 2019 will be sold for R1,000 per bottle specifically as an investment into youth development within the wine industry; the uLutsha brand, and its next phase of business development.

First to sip on this new Pinotage was a prestigious panel of wine experts including Victor Sperling (Delheim Executive Director), Nomonde Kubheka (Winemaker turned Wine Educator), Denzel Swarts (vice chairperson Black Cellar Club), Cathy Marston (owner of the International Wine Education Centre, Wine Educator, MW student), Ntsiki Biyela (owner Aslina Wine and PYDA Board Member), and Tuanni Price (wine educator and owner of Zuri Wine Tasting).



Source: Supplied

Nora Thiel, Delheim executive director says the estate has always been involved in education programmes and has been a long-time employer of PYDA graduates since the training organisation's establishment in 2012. "They have never been exposed to actual winemaking, so the concept was born to provide comprehensive understanding of wine realisation."

Developing talent

"This project was launched as part of developing talent, and we will continue working on a model that can enhance the learning curve for the PYDA students. Our aim is to develop an all-inclusive structured learnership where students get to work across all departments in a company."

Not only did the graduates learn about the vineyards, winemaking, and bottling but we also provided marketing and sales; social media, and financial mentoring and training sessions to them. "The aim was to give them an in-depth and complete understanding of how a company works; a seamless grasp of the inter-connectedness of everything. From root to bottle and everything in between," explains Nora.

Nikki Munro, PYDA executive director says: "It is extremely exciting to see what is possible when young energy, passion and commitment meets opportunity. Young talent and skills can bring added value and economic outcomes within a short space of time. There are serious limits to available jobs in the current economy and as such this innovative partnership gives focus to other economic possibilities."

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