

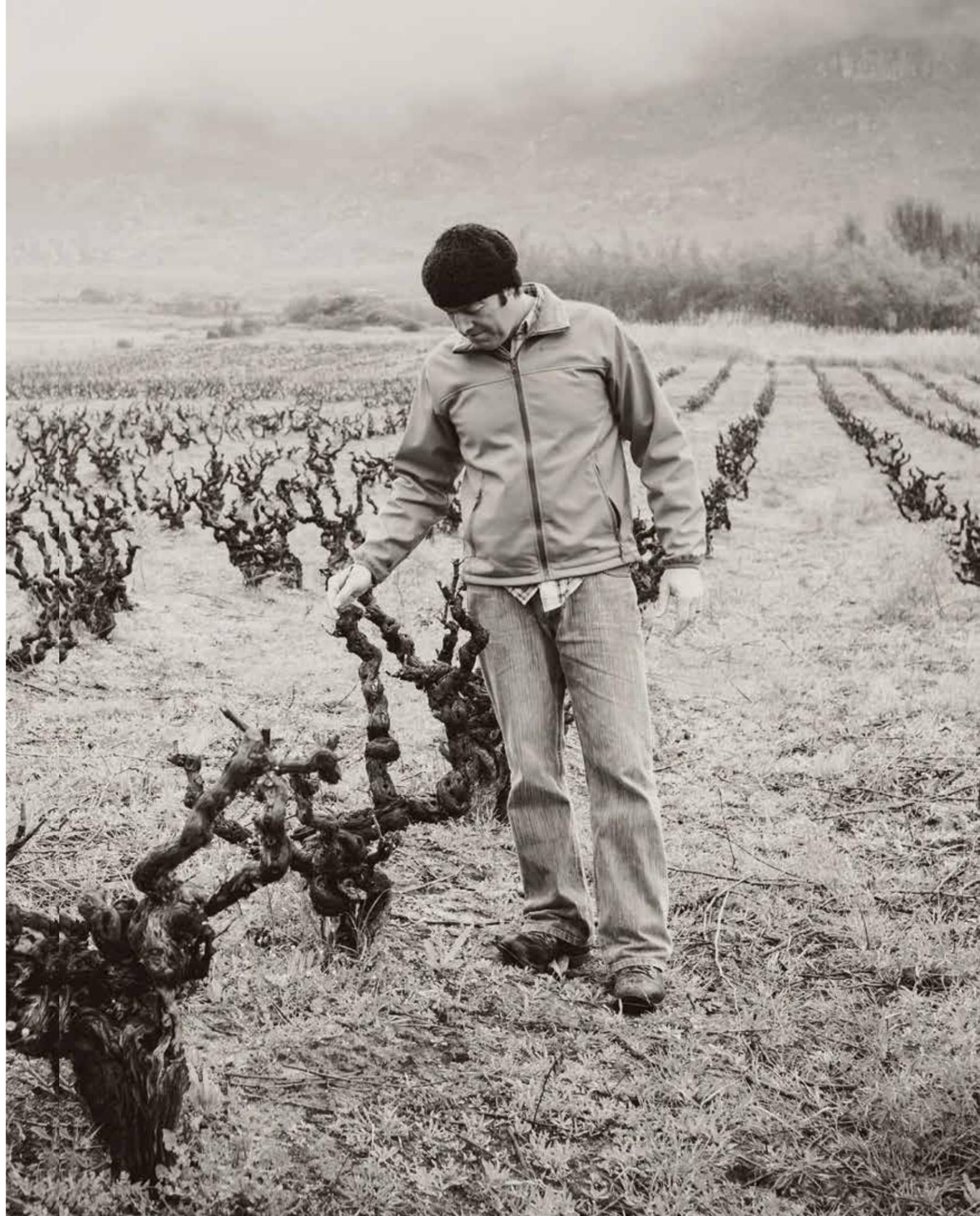
IN THE COMPLETE REALITY OF THINGS

An unswerving commitment to land and vine in his Swartland home has made Eben Sadie one of the brightest stars of the new South Africa. **Tim James** profiles a deeply dedicated visionary

In 2010 Eben Sadie came home. Doubtless it's true, as the Pablo Neruda poem has it, that "he who returns never left"—and anyway it was a process not an event, this return and this never leaving—but in that year, Sadie worked his final European harvest, at his Terroir al Limit winery in Priorat. After 15 years as a winemaker (he graduated from Elsenburg College in Stellenbosch in 1994, the year that Nelson Mandela became president of South Africa) and after 15 years of working two wine harvests a year, he returned to his home country full time.

He got a dog. (It became ill, and he must keep it regularly supplied with fresh spleen from the local abattoir, but it's doing fine.) His passport lapsed. For the next three years, this indefatigable wine traveler and searcher after international experience stayed put. A dozen years earlier, he was quoted as saying, "Someday I'm going to take a holiday that doesn't involve wine, just go surfing in Indonesia"; and yes, the first time he left South Africa after 2010 was to surf the Grajagan in Java, one of the world's great waves. Surfing is the only activity that Sadie might just choose over farming and winemaking as a way of spending his days—now he fits it in as well as he can, but sometimes cellar or vineyard makes implacable demands, and he must hear ruefully of fine wave breaks on the Atlantic coast, a few hours distant from his cellar. I asked him once if he sees a connection between winemaking and surfing, and he had a ready answer. (It's seldom that he's confronted with a question about his life and his work that he hasn't already considered.) The essence of the reply was the connection between the effect of terroir on a vine and the final shaping of a wave by unseen forces beneath the sea surface, and the need to learn to understand both.

All photography courtesy of Sadie Family Wines



Home, then, he came. Recently, while driving with Eben on an inspection visit to some of the far-flung vineyards that provide grapes for his wines, I asked what the concept of home means to him. I wasn't surprised when he responded in Afrikaans, his mother tongue, even though we'd been speaking in English till then, as we do more often than not. (Once before, on a similar trip around the hinterland of the Cape's west coast, I'd been struck how increasingly often he slipped into Afrikaans the closer we moved toward the place of his birth and childhood. Later, when speaking to the local farmers, his Afrikaans articulation would become more elaborately respectful, as though he were a child again in a stern, Calvinist culture, even if the farmer were only ten or 15 years older than his 40.) His reply to my question about "home" was succinct but emphatic and immediate in the language that is part of his home: "*Die kusstreek in Swartland*"—the coastal area of the Swartland, that is.

Home to the Swartland's magic mountains

How many internationally known New World winemakers, I wonder, are making wines in the delimited area in which they were born? Sadie has undoubtedly introduced more wine-loving foreigners—and probably more South Africans—to the name of this large region stretching north of Cape Town than anyone or anything else. The Swartland is South Africa's great wheatland but also hosts scattered areas of vineyard—most notably, in terms of quality if not volume, on the slopes of the area's magic mountains: Paardeberg, Riebeeckberg, Porseleinberg.

It was to the Swartland he returned (for the first time) in 1998, after a postgraduation stint at a large cooperative winery, where his skills had attracted well-informed attention. He was offered the winemaking job at Spice Route, the winery established by Charles Back and partners in the Swartland as the first significant move into an area with comparatively little reputation for its wines: With few exceptions, it was being farmed for high yields, for wines made in cooperative cellars, yet Back came here because he remembered, from his own early days as a tyro winemaker in the area, "how easily quality came."

Sadie did well for Spice Route in his three vintages there, but—especially since he'd been allowed to make a few barrels of a Syrah-based blend for himself—a split (a fairly amicable one it proved to be) was inevitable. Eben is not the sort of person whose dream (his word) of great Swartland wine, once he'd looked around and become convinced of the possibilities, could ever be subject to the sort of controls that a commercially minded wine magnate, or anyone, could impose on the exercise of his vision or on his huge ambition to make that great wine. So, by the time that 2000 Columella, the Sadie Family Wines maiden release, was on sale, his Swartland winemaking was centered on what he with proud diffidence called "a little shack." The shack (actually two small edifices) that he rented was on the large Lammershoek farm on the slopes of the sprawling granitic Paardeberg, and here he made his 2002 wines. The old, thick-walled, heavily buttressed little building is still there, the spiritual focus of the larger winery that has developed alongside it over the past decade. It now holds the barrels of maturing Columella; I don't doubt that it always will. Palladius, the Sadie Family white wine, is made and matured, in cement eggs and

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Above: Eben Sadie with bottles of the family's two Signature blends, Columella and Palladius, and several of the wines in the Ouwingerdreeks (Old Vineyard Series).

clay amphorae, in the revamped outbuilding in which the maiden 2002 was fermented in old oak. Eben determinedly claims and inhabits history, including his own.

Sadie had made some good wines at Spice Route; Gérard Chave of Hermitage, on a visit to the Cape in 2001, was impressed, and spoke of a "fine expression of Syrah." But the 5,000-odd bottles of Columella 2000 announced something new, partly the then-rare "naturalness" of its vinification: no yeast inoculation, fining, or filtration. It was made from Syrah with some 18 percent Mourvèdre—it had to have more than 15 percent to satisfy Sadie's determination that no one could invoke the "85 percent rule" and consider it a varietal wine. I tasted the maiden wines for the *Platter Guide to South African Wines* (2003 edition) and remember telephoning the editor, Philip van Zyl, to say with some excitement that I'd been drinking the best modern Cape red wine I knew. (It was an objective response, but this is as good a place as any to allow that, 15 years later, the present account cannot be entirely disinterested, since my attraction to Sadie's wines was to lead not only to an absorption in the Swartland, which at that early stage I don't think I had ever even visited, but also to a personal friendship with their maker.)

Palladius was also a blend, based on old-vine Chenin Blanc. Startlingly, although Chenin, the South African industry workhorse, was already being regarded with a new respect, no one had realized its potential as the basis for a serious white blend unique to the Cape, emerging from its history and terroir. The maiden vintage later started refermenting in bottle, an embarrassing but no doubt useful lesson that successfully making "natural" wines is not entirely a natural process and needs both rigorous scientific underpinning and meticulous care. Largely forgotten, incidentally, is that the Palladius name had been used briefly for a second red blend, designed to accord more with prevailing tastes for big, ripe oaky reds—a fragment of semi-cynicism that couldn't and didn't survive. Further development of Sadie's project followed in 2003, with the first vintage of another red blend, called Sequillo—a joint venture with the owner of Anura Vineyards in Paarl, and made in that winery, and not under the Sadie Family Wines label. With no new oak and from less expensively farmed vineyards, it was intended as a different, perhaps less ambitious, expression of the Swartland. A white version joined it, but the owning partnership soon changed to one rather more sympathetic.

An important element of the Sequillo venture (which never achieved commercial success to match its critical reception and was finally dropped in 2015, when Sadie could afford to indulge himself and buy out his partner) was that it helped finance the building of a winery alongside the "old shack." From 2006, Eben had leased the 17ha (42-acre) subdivision of Lammershoek that he was later to buy. This was a significant point in the extraordinarily rapid development of Sadie Family Wines from nothing, with virtually no outside financial support. That growth testified to extremely hard work above all; I remember late-night phone calls when he was at his computer resolutely doing the paperwork that threatens to put iron into every young winemaker's soul. "For the most part, there was a 16-hour day," he says. "Practically, for a decade I worked a double shift every day!" It was work made meaningful by his resolve to make great Swartland wine and focused by a compelling aesthetic, a vision based on a firm understanding of wine, and an intelligence and

capacity that also comprehended the bureaucratic and business aspects of establishing the necessary infrastructure for his growing reputation. (Not all of today's ardent young Cape winemakers, however admiring, have any conception of the sheer hard work that went into Sadie's success; passion was only a part of the equation.)

The revolution gathers pace

Crucially, too, it must be said, the timing was right. South African wine had completed the first phase of its post-1994 revolution: on the one hand, raising winemaking at all levels to international standards and lifting the ambitions, and widening the horizons, of winemakers and (nascently) viticulturists; on the other, after decades of strict controls, opening up new regions to viticulture and starting to rediscover the potential of older ones—including the Swartland. South Africa was ready for—needed, indeed—this kind and quality of wine at a relatively elevated price point; and the international market was willing to accept it, too. Before the early 20th century, Sadie says, what he did would have been impossible, and later it would have been more difficult. Columella and Palladius fitted well into the emerging international interest in more authentic, terroir-driven New World wine made with minimal intervention. Getting the support of Roy Richards of the prestigious British importers Richards Walford (since acquired by Berry Bros & Rudd) was a symptom of this—beyond the vitally supportive generosity of Richards in paying in advance for the first imports.

So, in many ways Sadie had the advantage, as well as the obvious disadvantage, of being a pioneer; there was a challenging terrain that, if he proved up to the task of breaking the new ground, was open to his gaze. Speaking now of the increased international acceptance of Cape winemaking ambitions at a high level, which he crucially helped produce, he points out that a younger generation of wine growers "in some ways have it easier; in some ways, harder." The place for fine Cape wine has been created, but it is much more competitive now, in a more difficult market, than it was in the early years of the century.

The transformation of the Swartland's reputation was a direct consequence of the success of Sadie Family Wines, as well as of the charisma of the winemaker; Eben's influence rapidly eclipsed that of the pioneering Spice Route. Alert wineries elsewhere in the Cape started seeking out Swartland fruit for their own ranges with greater ambition than previously. More importantly, along with Sadie's eloquent demonstration of the quality of the area for viticulture, other elements also attracted young, eager wine avant-gardists, Adi Badenhorst and Chris and Andrea Mullineux among the first. Comparatively inexpensive land and production space; a treasure house of mature, dryland-farmed and bushvine Chenin Blanc; and the commitment to the land and lack of pretension of the local farmers all made for an atmosphere very different from that of, say, Stellenbosch. In French terms, the Swartland is culturally less Bordeaux and more Burgundy. More important still, the open-mindedness, comradeship, and above all the excitingly adventurous wine culture of the revolutionary Swartland were unprecedented in South Africa. Sadie was important in establishing Swartland solidarity, welcoming and encouraging newcomers, seeing them as comrades rather than competitors: "He's never once," says Chris Mullineux, "not jumped to help us if we needed it." And many more could make that claim.

Beyond the Swartland—though partly through the increasing fame of the Swartland—Sadie’s influence has also been substantial, with his generous willingness to help and mentor younger winemakers a crucial element. The influence goes as apparently far distant, for example, as a man vinifying Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the Hemel-en-Aarde. Peter-Allan Finlayson of Crystallum Wines, a leader of the next generation of Cape winemakers, says that “within about ten minutes of meeting Eben, he convinced me that most of what I knew about winemaking was wrong and that I would need to spend much more of a very small salary on drinking international wines. Pretty much every young winemaker who has started their own brand in South Africa in the past ten years has worked with Eben. His views on wine are sometimes controversial, but no one can argue that his influence on the current South African wine landscape is evident in pretty much every significant wine made in South Africa today.”

The vision to match site with wine

Sadie’s place at the imaginative and practical forefront of Cape winemaking was confirmed in 2010—that significant year again!—with the launch of the Old Vineyard Series (Ouwingerdreeks in Afrikaans, the only language used on the labels, the comparison with the Latin of Columella surely signifying a more mature and confident orientation to home). One of the wines, Mrs Kirsten (now Mev. Kirsten), had been made in tiny quantities since 2006 from a century-old Stellenbosch Chenin vineyard that Sadie had been rehabilitating; with the 2009 vintage, it was joined by five other wines from old single vineyards in the Swartland and Olifants River regions. One of these, the Eselshoek sweet wine from Muscat d’Alexandrie was later abandoned; three more wines joined the collection in the 2010 vintage. A crucial role-player in the Old Vineyard Series was Eben’s friend Rosa Kruger, the viticulturist who had been making extensive searches for old vineyards—most of whose fruit was destined for the anonymous huge tanks of the cooperative and merchant wineries—on behalf of her then employer Anthonij Rupert Wines. But she also wanted to demonstrate the quality of these old vines by having some of their fruit vinified by a winemaker she respected. “I knew,” she says, “that Eben understood the significance of old vineyards, and I knew he wouldn’t mess them up.” She took him on some of her exploratory trips. Rosa tells of arriving at a vineyard of old red and white Semillon in the Citrusdal Mountain ward of the Olifants River region: “I said to him, ‘This is magical—please make wine from this vineyard!’ He immediately replied, ‘Sign it for me!’” (The wine he makes from the vineyard is called Kokerboom, referring to the characteristic and rather weirdly humanoid trees alongside.) Kruger adds that Sadie “has that uncanny ability to match what he sees in a vineyard with what you taste. He understands, and so he has this vision of matching site with wine.”

With great éclat, the Ouwingerdreeks first vintage appeared in a mixed case, the number of cases limited to the 280 half-bottles of Eselshoek; the labels featured artworks specially created by South Africa’s foremost artist, William Kentridge, whose inspiring trip up the West Coast with Sadie was brokered by a mutual friend. (The visit was reciprocated later when Sadie spent some hours in the Kentridge studio in Johannesburg.) The wines of the second vintage, the 2010s, were offered

individually, with a set of new labels (without any illustrations) that have been used for all subsequent releases as well.

The Ouwingerdreeks was the most important new range of wines yet produced in modern South Africa. Producers other than Sadie had offered one or two wines from old vineyards (notably Chenin Blanc), but never with this focus or variety; never with this devotion to the expression of vineyard sites untrammelled by intrusive winemaking or such sheer quality. Apart from the (admittedly important) facts that most of the vineyards are not organically farmed, and a little sulfur dioxide is added at bottling, these wines are certainly “natural” enough for most people—as, indeed, are Columella and Palladius. If the “Signature range” blends had epitomized an earlier stage in the modern Cape wine revolution, the Ouwingerdreeks signaled the revolution’s arrival at a new level, one concerned with a more detailed exploration of terroir via individual (and preferably old) vineyards, but also asserting locality in other ways, respecting the local past and recovering in new guise earlier traditions of South African winemaking. A signal example of this is the rediscovery of Cinsaut, the workhorse variety of the middle decades of the 20th century, just as Chenin Blanc was in later decades, and widely treated with similar disdain. Sadie’s Cinsaut, called Pofadder, was the first serious modern Cape wine from this variety. As a model, it has been even more significant than the “rediscovery” of the local red mutation of Semillon, once widespread in the Cape, in the Kokerboom field blend with the now more standard white.

Pushing terroir and family to the limit

There are few knowledgeable people who would dispute the place of Sadie Family Wines as (at least) among the leading few South African wineries. To have reached that place so rapidly is remarkable enough, but the achievement of Terroir al Limit, the Priorat cellar that Eben Sadie concurrently developed, along with partners Dominik Huber and local vigneron Jaime Sabate, is equivalent. Leading Spanish wine critic Victor de la Serna has placed it in the highest position of his list of “Top 10 Post-2000 Priorat Producers.”

Sadie worked the 2000 harvest at Mas Martinet, one of the early producers in the pioneering Gratallops project in Priorat. He was desperately keen to make wines from old black-grape vines in “this amazing place.” (Old-vine whites he knew he could do in South Africa.) The next year he managed to find some grapes and produced his first wine under the Dits del Terra label. By 2003, he had acquired a vineyard and started establishing a production cellar in an old building in the village of Torroja. (I carelessly mistimed a visit there that year and ended up spending a few days in the fairly chaotic space, my hands horribly sticky from triaging Carignena and Garnacha grapes into plastic buckets, alongside Moroccan harvest workers.) The amalgamation with Huber’s business took place in 2005, and they shared their vineyards to create Terroir al Limit. But Sadie was not working in Spain for financial reasons—nor for ego, he says—and he always felt free to leave it. A number of factors combined to prompt him to do just that—paradoxically, perhaps, at the time the winery was getting real recognition; since 2010, the first time Sadie returned to Priorat was in late 2015, to at last (the long delay wasn’t at his insistence) sign the papers for the sale to Huber of his interest in the winery.

There was, of course, a great deal to do with wine both



Spanish and South African in Sadie’s decision to return home—and certainly he’s not the sort of person who’d be willing to remain a sleeping partner in a winery, even one he’d helped build. There was also, I’d guess, the wish to have more time for surfing... But probably, in the aggregation of motives, family reasons were primary.

Family means an enormous amount to Eben Sadie (as does the fundamentalist Christianity in which he was brought up). It’s not for nothing that his was the first producer name in South Africa to include “Family Wines,” and the characterization is no idle claim. “The whole thing doesn’t make sense outside family,” he says. His half-sister Delana is crucial to running the business, and brother Nico is a right-hand man in the cellar. But his wife and children had inevitably paid a price during the decade when he was building wineries on two continents and working two harvests a year. “Maria is a bullet-proof wife,” he says emphatically, and speaks with emotional force of their shared vision and of her “never, ever putting herself first.” Clearly, and unsurprisingly, his achievements of that decade depended to a great extent on Maria Sadie’s support and ability to sustain the family during his frequent exhaustions and absences. When I once remarked on the achievement of building two wine businesses in a decade, he said soberly: “For me, the fact that the family stayed intact is the biggest wonder of all, for it was put under the ultimate pressure.”

In 2010, it was time to stop pushing his luck. His two sons, Markus and Xander, were growing up, the older boy close to adolescence. Since his return, he spends much time with them—including surfing together, since they’ve grown to share a love for riding the ocean, as well as, it seems, for winemaking. The Sadies’ young daughter, Lisa-Marie, a tyro surfer, too, seems at present more interested in becoming Taylor Swift, says her father, than a winemaker. We’ll see.

As for motives around wine, there were factors that let him leave Europe, and factors that demanded he spend more time on his South African wines. Priorat had become, he says, “my

Above: Eben Sadie with the family dog he bought in 2010 after returning from Spain to spend more time with his wife Maria and their children Markus, Xander, and Lisa-Marie.

foothold in Europe,” and every year he would travel widely, always learning from both the classic and modern models he admired. Perhaps above all, spending time in a little village in Priorat, he experienced a culture in which continual contact with vines is a way of life. But, he says, “My life is in South Africa—here I’m in the complete reality of things.” The vines he wanted to “get close to” were in the Swartland; the wines he wanted to make—to learn to make—were, as he says, African. He was ready to take home the lessons he had learned in Europe.

A coherent aesthetic and infinite respect for detail

At first, back home, Sadie “felt pretty useless, doing only one vintage”—although making ten wines, and many experimental vinifications, from several widely spread vineyards in whose management he is deeply involved throughout the year, as well as developing his own small farm, is not everyone’s idea of an egregiously soft life. But he undoubtedly does have more time to spend on his wines, now that it’s a “full-on commitment.” Partly, he says, it’s a matter of thinking continually about them—“and then doing the thing that comes between dreaming and actuality. More meditation, restructuring, regrouping... I taste my wines much more now than ever before and realize they’re not good enough. It only matters what I, not others, think, and I know there’s always room for a vast improvement in all areas.” But most others agree that the past half-decade or so has seen a growth in quality in Sadie’s wines—perhaps especially in the two Signature blends, which are fresher, more nuanced and profound. Some of the changes that have happened are obvious, even apart from the physical cellar space, which has evolved. The makeup of the blends has altered, even radically—Columella, for example, now also includes Grenache, Cinsaut, and Carignan; and its alcohol level is lower: The current 2013 is well under 14% ABV. I ask him what else it is that he has done differently and he laughs: “There’s almost not a single thing that’s not changed. I’m constantly refining; there are millions of details.” The single-origin wines in the Old Vineyard Series, too, show development; they are increasingly diverging from one another, as Eben comes to understand the vineyards better, expressing his interventions less and the vineyard more.

Many factors that can be identified and scrutinized go into making a good winemaker, but it is more difficult to locate the essence of what a very good one brings to his or her wines. It’s also difficult, and not necessarily desirable, to disentangle the wines from the way they are offered, and Sadie’s personal charisma, occasionally quirky eloquence, and personal warmth have their effect (which is not to say that nobody is ever irritated!). I’ve suggested that he is a thinker (and highly intelligent, though certainly not a typical intellectual; he claims, only slightly shamefacedly, never to have read a whole book, for example), and he seems to have, as Rosa Kruger has noted, both a vision of the wine he wants to make to express a particular vineyard (or larger terroir) and the imaginative and technical capacity to see how to get there. Two aspects of this capacity seem crucial to me: a coherent aesthetic, and an infinite respect for detail. What links the two (apart from hard work) is that they are all-encompassing and serve the same end. Symbolizing this for me as much as anything is an image of something not obviously important but that remains with me, despite many intervening visits to his cellar. On a barrel in the heavy little building that contains the maturing Columella, I noticed a small



spirit level. I asked about it, and Eben told me that he'd been checking that the crossbars on the heads of the barrels were all perfectly level; furthermore, he pointed out unblushingly, the barrels were perfectly lined up. I squinted down the row of barrels from one end to the other, and indeed they were.

Absurd? Neurotic attention to irrelevant detail? Or a vital aspect of an aesthetic of precision? Enter the main Sadie winery, and you see a larger expression of this character, where you might suspect that the aesthetic dimension is as important as the precision. I daresay Eben Sadie could make decent wines if he were obliged to ferment them in plastic tubs (as many do), but I believe the attempt would dismay his soul, to the extent that the wines would inevitably fall even shorter of his vision of them. Half a dozen years ago, as part of his obsession to find the right fermentation and storage vessels (he works with small oak barrels, large *foudres*, cement eggs, and clay amphorae, depending on the wine), he imported from France, at great expense, two large rectangular cement tanks. Early in 2015, on a visit to the cellar, I saw that they'd been removed (Adi Badenhorst just down the road was delighted to take them, I later learned); now there were four beautifully curved cement tanks, from Italy this time, each shaped like the bowl of a wine glass. Later in the year seven more arrived, so that one side of the room is now lined with these, the other with oval and cylindrical oak *foudres*. Sadie can explain practical advantages of the new curvaceous cement tanks—but I suspect that their sheer beauty is crucial, a beauty that is not merely decorative but, for him, an essential part of the process of making a beautiful wine. A part of integrity.

Planting for the future

Earlier this year, on a lovely early winter morning, with the green cover crops between the vine rows brilliant in the sunshine, I drove up the rutted gravel road into the Paardeberg foothills, to check a few facts with Eben and to speak to him about the future—his future, his wine's future. The road curved sharply and climbed alongside a tract of freshly turned earth sloping down from the "old shack" and the cellar. Some of the answer was there. I'd seen this piece of land change over the years, from when it was planted with Cabernet Sauvignon (ripping out these vines, which Eben considered an affront to the Swartland terroir, was almost his first action on taking over his small farm), through removal of rocks and stone, through plantings of different crops to help prepare the soil, to now, when drainage had been installed and the ground was dotted with short canes indicating, according to some abstruse system that even Eben didn't understand, where the young vines were soon to be planted by the nursery.

"To have a future, you must plant," says Sadie, and he means it—literally, symbolically, even spiritually. "You realize, there's nothing else. This is it. If it's not going to happen here, now, it won't happen." He has money these days and is looking also at establishing "a whole new thing" up the Atlantic coast, farther north in the Swartland. That planned farming project—"very different from what we have here"—should happen over the next seven to ten years, in time for when one of his boys is ready, graduated and with some hard-work and exploratory experience, to take it on.

Opposite: What Eben Sadie calls the "old shack," still the spiritual focus of the larger Paardeberg winery and home to meticulously arranged barrels of maturing Columella.

Earlier this year, I drove up into the Paardeberg foothills to speak to Eben about the future. The road climbed alongside a tract of freshly turned earth. Some of the answer was there. "To have a future, you must plant," says Sadie, and he means it—literally, symbolically, even spiritually. "You realize, there's nothing else. This is it."

Back at the home farm, where he has also just moved into the house he built for himself (the first non-rented house he and Maria have occupied), some 9ha (22 acres) of vineyard will be planted in different sites over the next few years. Black and white varieties will be destined, with any luck, for eventual inclusion in the two Signature blends; there is no intention to expand the range of Sadie Family Wines, and the Old Vineyard Series must continue to come from leased vineyards. So, too, of course, will Columella and Palladius, at least for a while, but increasingly supplemented, and hopefully expanded in terms of volume, by grapes from the home farm. The vineyards will be mixed (all bushvine, all unirrigated), with a number of varieties, as the planting is to an extent experimental and developmental, with some cultivars untested in the Swartland but offering promise, and some new clones of more settled varieties. Black grapes are going into the vineyard near the cellar, the first to be planted: approximately half the area with three selections of Grenache, and the rest with four selections of Cinsaut and two of Carignan, as well as Alicante Bouschet and Counoise. The infant vines are clean, free of virus, and will serve as "mother blocks" for the vine nursery in conjunction with which they are being established.

I wondered if Eben would prefer the different varieties to be mixed up in the vineyard rather than planted in blocks. He might have, but given the larger purpose of the vineyard, they couldn't be, of course; the varieties must, for some time anyway, be separately vinified in order for their success to be assessed. Perhaps one day, he says, his sons might decide to pull them out and replant them randomly, replacing the less successful varieties with other experiments, if that seems a good idea.

And I realize again, as we stand in the Swartland sunshine, that all this effort, this building, is not about now but about a larger, wider work and achievement that Sadie eagerly but serenely contemplates as progressing without him. The lessons of old Europe, of the long labor of achieving the Côte d'Or, have been taken to heart. Many years ago, he told me that "building a great wine is not the work of one generation," and I recall this as I stoop to let a handful of the soil of the vineyard he is planting trickle through my fingers. ■