



FRANS K Smit



WINEMAKER

Frans K. Smit

ORIGIN

Stellenbosch (Helderberg)

PEAK DRINKING

5 - 10 years after harvest



2017

Frans K. Smit Red Blend

61% Cabernet Sauvignon

25% Merlot

7% Cabernet Franc

7% Malbec

WINE ANALYSIS

Alc: 14.78 % vol TA: 6.0 g/L

RS: 3.3 g/L pH: 3.57

EAT & DRINK

‘To complement the flavours, I’d go with tender, flavourful meat and a red wine sauce, perhaps with delicate wild mushrooms as a side. A good beef fillet, simply prepared, or matured kudu loin marinated in buttermilk, rolled in biltong spices and seared on a hot fire, would be wonderful.’

THE WINE & THE MAKER

Frans Smit and his team have harnessed 3 centuries of winemaking history, to transform Spier into an internationally acclaimed Stellenbosch wine farm. Crafting blends of distinction, and identifying regional vineyards that are some of the Cape’s best kept secrets His philosophy: ‘Respect what the vineyard hands you.’

‘This vintage will go down as one of our most remarkable on record. The vines were planted between 2000-2003, so we were picking in the prime of the vineyards’ life, at 15-17 years. The wine is 100% Helderberg - what extraordinary terroir! - and without question one of the best years ever, for Helderberg Cabernet Sauvignon. So we upped its dominance in the blend to a hefty 61%, then in the final blend added Cabernet Franc from a younger vintage to stir in freshness and an element of surprise. The balance between sugar and natural acidity is quite something. A big, impressionable mouthfeel and a long, gripping finish. Never known ageing potential like this promises to be.’

- Frans K. Smit, Spier



SOIL & TERROIR

‘All varietals in the blend are of Helderberg origin, grown in pockets close to one another but at different altitudes and aspects. The Helderberg’s ‘golden triangle’, within whistling distance from the cool Atlantic ocean, has soils known for yielding Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot of unmatched ageing potential. This consistency of terroir shows up in the taste profile. The first vineyard is about 160m above sea level and it goes all the way up to about 280m above sea level, in the case of the Cabernet Franc.

Then we went even higher, up to about 290m, to dip into a small, very special pocket of Malbec. The decomposed granite soils and clay subsoils are something special, adding to the minerality. And then there’s also the cooling sea breeze, which also allows the fruit to develop full flavour complexity.’

THE CRAFTING

‘Of course, all picking, sorting and destemming is done by hand and eye. But with this wine, we doubled down on detail, doing the first sorting the old school way and then using machine sorting to check our homework. We set the machine to select berries that are perfectly ripe - no raisins, no stems, no greenness. Only the best of the bunch made it into the fermentation. Several fermentation vessels were used so one could serve to top up another, allowing us to ramp up the juice-to-skin ratio, before filling up the tank for post-fermentation maturation.’

MATURATION

‘The wine went straight into the barrel for malolactic fermentation. About 80% was fermented in new French oak barrels, and the balance in second fill barrels. This was a remarkable year so there was little need to soften tannins. There’s no recipe for producing a Bordeaux-style wine such as this, with such big mouthfeel and bright acidity. Six grams of natural acidity! Beyond all expectations. (A pH of 3.57-3.6 is textbook for Bordeaux-style red blends.) Blending began at 18 months and the final blend took about two weeks. It takes time to constantly reconsider the components, using different batches from the different vineyard blocks, until you find the sweet spot. I feel this wine reflects the true terroir history and vintage for each of the 4 varietals. At 61%, Cabernet Sauvignon has a major presence in this blend. The small injection of a younger vintage Cabernet Franc gives the wine its lovely character.’

COLOUR

‘Intense, vibrant red with an even brighter red on the rim.’

NOSE & PALATE

‘At first, cigar box comes through but also intense red fruit on the nose, followed by sprigs of violet, minty chocolate and chalkiness. When you pick up the glass, initially you’ll be struck by dark fruit but then the aromas swing back to violets, cigar box and pencil shavings - the distinctive chalkiness that’s the ‘rememberage’ of this very special Helderberg terroir. There’s complexity to this wine - much more than just pencil shavings and cassis - with Cabernet Franc bringing in fresh florals and Malbec adding brightness and perfumed notes. I’m excited to see where it goes from here, knowing it’ll age extremely extremely well.

The profile of the granite soils makes this blend full-hearted, with polished, integrated, firm tannins.

A gigantic mouthfeel!’

PEAK DRINKING

‘This is a relatively young wine so it’ll be even more exciting after another year in the bottle. Ideally, I’d give it another 5 years in the bottle. With ageing potential like this, I expect it’ll be a complete gem at 10 years and well beyond.’
