



NEIL ELLIS

In 1986 Neil Ellis took a calculated leap of faith into the wine-negotiant arena, buying and vinifying grapes from selected vineyards and marketing these hand-reared wines under his own label. Mindful that exceptional terroir and assiduous vineyard cultivation form the bedrock of great wine, Neil forged long-term supply partnerships with top grape-growers in premium areas. Today the same philosophy—sourcing superior grapes from low-yielding, hand-selected vineyard lots in the Cape’s top terroirs—remains the mainstay of the Neil Ellis wines.

In the very year Neil Ellis set out as a negotiant, his future partner Hans Peter Schroder purchased the Stellenbosch wine estate, Oude Nektar, in the spectacular, viticulturally-ideal Jonkershoek Valley. This coincidence gained fresh resonance some years later when Neil and Hans finally met. Neil, recipient of many accolades since flying solo, had outgrown his leased cellar; Hans, in search of a like-minded partner for a quality-focused winery, had extensive cellar facilities (and, moreover, prime-quality grapes). From this synergy emerged a unique joint venture: Neil Ellis Wines.

Neil Ellis, partner and winemaker



Invariably thought of as an individualist wine-entrepreneur, Neil in fact launched his career in the corporate environment (with KWV, then South Africa’s biggest wine co-operative) before taking up residency at the historic Groot constantia Estate. Neil then migrated to Zevenwacht, rapidly putting that newly-built cellar on the wine-map. Neil then went freelance, leasing cellar space near Stellenbosch until 1993.



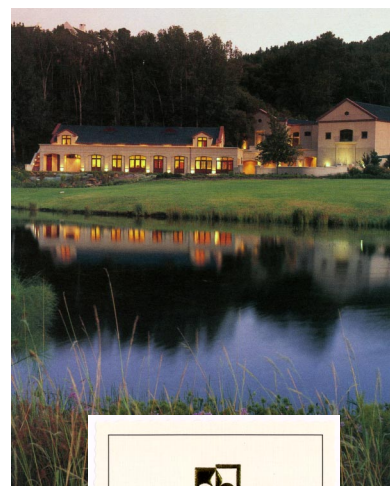
Hans Peter Schroder, partner

Hans returned to his home-town of Stellenbosch in the late 1980s after an extended sojourn in the Far East. His great passion for wine propelled him to acquire an estate of his own. With characteristic prescience Hans singled out a property in one of Stellenbosch’s premier wine areas—Jonkershoek Valley—where conducive soils and climate all but guarantee superior-quality fruit. Believing that a joint-venture with an established front-rank winemaker was the route to follow, Hans and Neil formed the partnership, Neil Ellis Wines, in 1993.

Neil Ellis Wines differs from most South African wineries in that instead of owning vineyards they have focused on producing the best wine possible and sourcing the grapes from top quality growers. Recognizing that different grape varieties thrive under different soil and climate conditions which are not likely to be found on a single estate, from the company’s start their philosophy has been to locate those areas that produce a distinctive grape quality and work closely with quality-minded growers in those areas. Today the grapes come from three main vineyard sites: Oude Nektar Farm in Jonkershoek, Stellenbosch; Contreberg Farm in Groenekloof, Darling; the Whitehall farm in Elgin.

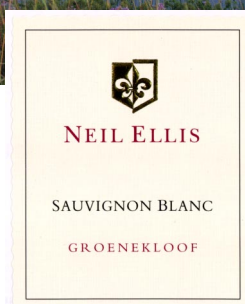
Oude Nektar Farm, Jonkershoek, Stellenbosch

The 40ha of vines on Oude Nektar are the primary source for the red wines. Most of Jonkershoek Valley is a nature reserve, well-known for its fynbos, hiking trails and waterfalls, but at the mouth of the valley sit a few farms privileged to its unique micro-climate. The inner valley is known to have the highest rainfall in South Africa and in an average year Oude Nektar receives about 1200mm (although in the last three years of drought the rainfall been closer to 900mm). The soils are mostly deep, red, clay soils. A complete replanting program was initiated in 1989 which was completed in 2003 with a final 3-hectare block of shiraz.



Contreberg Farm, Groenekloof, Darling

Recognizing the unique quality of the grapes from the Groenekloof ward, in 1996 Neil Ellis Wines entered into a partnership with Alex Versveld to farm the 120ha Contreberg farm which is the source of our Groenekloof Sauvignon Blanc. Groenekloof is situated near Darling on the West Coast and here the hills rise to 385 metres above sea level. The vineyards are only 8 km from the cold Southern Atlantic with its cool prevailing southwesterly winds. Soils are deep, red, decomposed granite and produce lively, complex Sauvignon Blanc wines. This area has particularly consistent weather.



Whitehall Farm, Elgin

Elgin is the Cape’s coolest viticultural area (Region I-II on the Winkler system) and has a unique climate and topography, consisting of an upland basin plateau, surrounded by mountain ranges on all sides. This region shows climatic similarities to Burgundy, only slightly cooler by comparison. Elgin tends to show more vintage difference than most other South African viticultural areas.

