



# Wines from the sporting world

Simon Halliday discusses some of the unique wines in the Sporting Wine Club

Simon Halliday and Chris Mariner have spent two decades travelling the world and sampling great wines produced by sporting personalities. Wanting to share the stories of these fantastic wines, the Sporting Wine Club was born

The Sporting Wine Club (SWC) is a members' club with a difference. There is no membership fee, instead our members accrue a sporting wine credit throughout the year. Our Membership Packages are tailored for both individuals and corporates and offer numerous benefits such as discounts, invitations to wine-tasting events with sporting legends, access to exclusive gifts and opportunities to visit our winemakers' vineyards, to name but a few.

Sport has the unique capacity to bring people together, forming unbreakable bonds through camaraderie, enterprise and the pursuit of shared goals. At the Sporting Wine Club, we have bottled



these values and created a platform where people with a passion for charity, sport and wine are brought together to enjoy good company, sporting stories and great wine.

A strong desire of the club is to help sports people – both retired and currently playing – to find a career post sport and give back to the sports community in some way. From my own experience, I know only too well the potentially dire situation sportsmen and women can find themselves in when their career is unexpectedly cut short due to injury or illness. Therefore, we are committed to supporting the sporting community at large, and profit from all tiers of membership is distributed between our winemakers' chosen sporting charities.

## Schalk Burger & Sons Welbedacht Estate

It was in 2009 when we first met Schalk Burger Senior and his family. Schalk Snr is a former rugby international and his son, Schalk Jnr, recently retired from the Springboks and is now in the UK finishing his career at the Saracens Rugby Club.

The Welbedacht Wine Farm is 40 minutes north of Cape Town and has 18 grape varieties being cultivated on some of the oldest soils in Africa's mainly decomposed granite; ideal for quality vine-growing conditions. Among their impressive portfolio of sporting wines, Cricket Pitch and No.6 stand out as two of their most iconic creations. Coupled

with their passion for the soil and for farming, Welbedacht's first release was an ode to the role that terroir plays in the ancient art of fine winemaking – and playing cricket. Cricket Pitch 2008 was carefully blended from the vines surrounding the Welbedacht Oval on their estate where many charity cricket matches are played each year. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot make up this wonderfully smooth red blend.

Meanwhile, named after the shirt that both Schalk Snr and Jnr represented their country in, the Welbedacht No.6



gives justice to celebrating the Burger family's sporting achievements. This Rhône-style blend is Syrah based with splashes of Mourvèdre, Cinsaut, Grenache, Pinotage and Viognier. The restaurant on their estate is also called No.6 and serves delicious food complemented beautifully by fantastic Welbedacht wine.



## Sumaridge Wine Estates

We met Simon Bellingham-Turner in the Wine Library next to the Tower of London, just round the corner from where he and his wife Holly run their business. After one glass of Sumaridge Maritimus we were hooked and briefly became ambassadors for it wherever we went. Over time we got to taste their full range of wines and realised that the Sumaridge Estate was a hidden jewel in South Africa's crown.

They are both big sporting fans – cricket, rugby and football (Holly is the current Vice President of Ipswich Town FC) are three of their passions. They are very generous towards sporting charities, especially those supporting player welfare, and have put their wines and lodge to work in many a charity event. They have also given part of their land in Hermanus to a township rugby team, the 'Blackbirds'.

Holly and Simon's commitment to supporting the sporting community fits with every value which we hold dear at the Sporting Wine Club. Among their stellar collection, their maritime influenced Pinot Noir sparkling wine, the Wayfarer, is a Cap Classique sparkling wine made in the traditional style of Champagne. The dominant Pinot Noir gives a light blush with a fine, persistent mousse. Maturation over three years on its lees has led it to develop rich, biscuit flavours.

## Botham Merrill Willis

Ian Botham and Bob Willis are two of England's all-time cricketing greats. Not so well known is that they sport three excellent wines from McLaren Vale in Australia, a country against which they enjoyed some of their greatest cricketing triumphs. Add to the mix international award-winning winemaker Geoff Merrill and the magical trio that is 'Botham Merrill Willis' (BMW) was born.

A love of cricket and wine drew them together during the tour of Australia in 1978. Since then a lasting friendship has developed over many bottles opened and balls bowled.

All three wines provide the perfect accompaniment to a day out, an evening in or even a day's cricket! Their Cabernet Sauvignon was 'Highly Commended' in the 2016 Wine Merchant Top 100.

Having known Ian and Bob for years, we immediately contacted them when we started out on this venture and are thrilled to be working alongside them. Their story, after all, epitomises all the values the Sporting Wine Club hold dear; three great friends, three wonderful wines all centred around one fantastic sport.

