

Oak Valley wines world class

Have a fine time by exploring Elgin's informal wine route and taste for yourself why it is fast gaining popularity

MYRNA
ROBINS

tabletop



FROM apples and pears to wine and fynbos routes – such is the shifting scene of attractions in this beautiful highland valley.

Of course one still finds the best apples in Elgin. Along with pears, roses and some truly gorgeous gardens. But today's visitors are focusing on hospitable cellars, and the chance to explore pristine mountain fynbos in a region that stars the most diverse floral kingdom on the planet.

Looking up Elgin in my 1998 Platter guide, I find just four wineries featured, while the current edition lists more than a dozen names.

There can be few more magnificent sites than the sauvignon blanc vineyard some 520m above sea level

in the foothills of the Groenlandberg on Oak Valley farm. It is fringed with dense fynbos, much of which was in full bloom when we visited recently. Behind us the mountain loomed, below stretched an inspiring panorama, Oak Valley occupying centre spread, with verdant pastures, clusters of buildings, dams, vineyards, orchards and more.

To say that Oak Valley vines are cosseted is an understatement. Science and expertise, sophisticated management practices and TLC combine to ensure the best results.

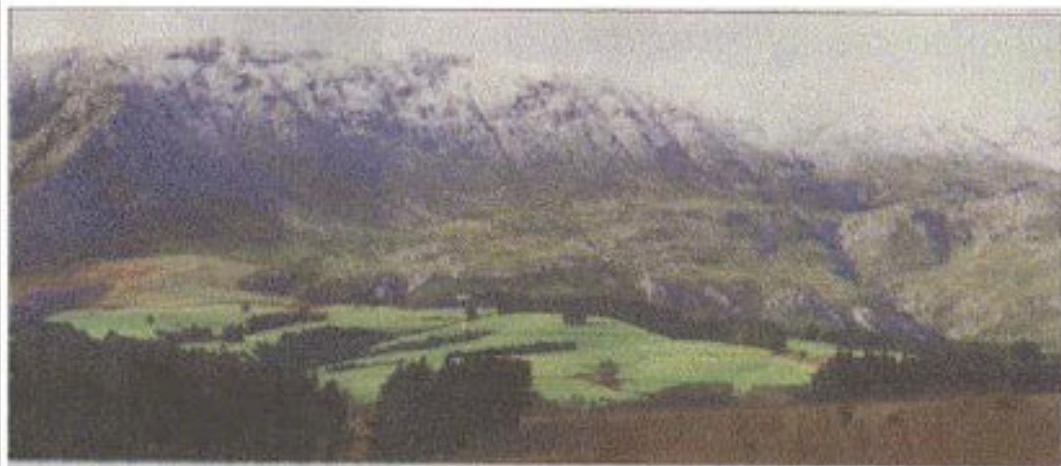
Although owner Anthony Rawbone-Viljoen and winemaker Pieter Visser have not figured out how to prevent the indigenous antelope from breakfasting on the new shoots on the outer rows, they have tackled the problem of mountain baboons who invade when the grapes ripen. Guards do two-day vineyard shifts, waving off the invaders until darkness falls.

Oak Valley is a recent addition

to the informal Elgin wine route, and sauvignon blanc is likely to remain the flagship cultivar – with good reason – their 2005 Mountain Reserve offers a superb balance of flinty minerality and elegant fruitiness. This world-class limited release has attracted gold in the UK Decanter World awards, and is available only from the farm at R100. Their standard 2005 sauvignon blanc, available at wine outlets, offers an invigorating example of Elgin terroir at around R65.

Proving that Elgin is not limited to whites, Oak Valley also offers an extraordinary 2005 pinot noir. I cannot remember tasting any other that offers such freshness along with an abundance of fruit. There is also an agreeable wooded chardonnay and a Bordeaux-style blend, due for release soon.

What is certain is that Oak Valley will contribute to establishing this highland ward as a New World area of global importance.



■ Breathtakingly beautiful, Oak Valley farm in Elgin lies at the foot of the Groenland mountains and is part of the increasingly popular informal Elgin wine route. Farmer Anthony Rawbone-Viljoen and winemaker Pieter Visser debate the finer points of their latest vintage.