

# Never say never

By Johannes Richter

Alice Verburg (29) grew up in the vineyards and cellar but was never pushed into the wine industry. It drew her in anyway.

Alice Verburg's parents, Niels and Penny, started Luddite from scratch in 2000. "My mom jokes that when her three children had to pick careers, I was the one least interested in wine, but now I'm the only one involved," Alice says.

She initially enrolled at the Silwood School of Cookery in Cape Town. But after graduating with a Cordon Bleu certificate she decided being a chef was not for her. "I asked my dad if I could join the farm in 2016, but he said, 'No, I have interns and farming isn't easy.'" He told her to find work on other farms to see if it's something she really likes.

She also worked at Publik Wine Bar and spent time as a wine steward in Constantia before she completed her first vintage at Luddite in 2017. Over the following years she did several harvests in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, but since 2023 she's been fully committed to the family farm. She also has a WSET level 3 under her belt.

She makes good use of her freedom to experiment in the cellar and wants to look at new ways to reduce the amount of waste and packaging produced by the wine industry.

"I'm proud to see how far I've come and how much I've learnt," she says. "I started making wine when I was 21 and also doing the marketing, so I was always about 15 years younger than most people around me. That could be very intimidating. I was also not great at speaking in front of a large crowd, but now I can confidently do it without even rehearsing because I'm speaking about something I love."

Despite having a lot on her plate, especially during the harvest season, she still manages to finish each day with a smile. "My weeks are divided among cellar work, picking olives, working the tasting room and getting some vineyard work done late in the evening."

Another big source of pride is when she releases a wine



that sells out the same year. "It means the wine has a good following and must taste great, and that makes me very proud." She loves the variety working on a farm offers because there's never a dull moment. "My job is always changing and I get to work outside," she says. "I love having the opportunity to travel and meet people from around the world. The wine industry is full of amazing people willing to help and share their knowledge, which I greatly appreciate."

But there's room for improvement in the industry, she says. "I think the SAWIS tasting panel needs to be updated. I'm not even sure why the

wines need to be tasted. It often feels like you're being told how to make wine." Like so many producers, she would also appreciate a little more government support and funding for the industry to help alleviate all those output costs.

It's often said that if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life and for Alice this rings true. "Farming isn't easy and it can't be paused for more than three days, but it's very rewarding," she says.

The highlight of her career? "The quiet mornings of every harvest, when the sky is pink and purple. You start the morning calm, then it gets super busy. By the evening, everything is calm again and you can taste wine with the people you enjoy." ■

## RAPID FIRE Q&A

- **If you could share a glass of wine with any historical figure, who would you choose?** I would love to attend the 1985 Live Aid concert, glass of wine in hand, to hear Freddie Mercury perform.
- **What's the most unexpected food and wine pairing you swear by?** White anchovies and our Saboteur white blend. For fun, NikNaks and rosé.
- **If your life had a theme song, what would it be?** I love music too much to choose one song.
- **What's your go-to power move before a big meeting or event?** Making sure I'm on time!
- **What wine varietal best describes you and why?** Chenin Blanc. It's versatile, grows in many different climates and ages well.

**ALICE VERBURG**, Winemaker, Luddite

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