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### **BIOGRAPHY OF ALASTAIR RIMMER, CELLARMASTER OF KLEINE ZALZE WINES, SEPTEMBER 2014**

Originally from Gauteng, Alastair's wine journey began when his parents purchased a property in Somerset West and he began to visit wineries during weekends. After school, he was intending to study horticulture at Stellenbosch University when he was inspired to change his future studies to viticulture by a chance meeting with the legendary Professor Eben Archer. Alastair describes chatting to an unknown stranger on the steps of the Neethling Building. "He spoke passionately about 'growing' wine, a concept that really sparked an interest. It's amazing to think that a chance meeting on the steps outside the Viticulture and Oenology building was in fact the catalyst, not just for a career, but a passion for wine and the industry around it."



### **2000 – 2003 Work in South Africa and the US**

Following his studies, Alastair worked at Overgaauw Wine Estate and then at Agusta Wines in his first senior winemaking position. During his time in the Franschoek valley, he gained great insight into the region's winegrowing potential and received the award for Best Chardonnay at the prestigious SA Trophy Wine Show. His first foray into international winemaking came with a short stint at Bookwalter Wines in Washington, USA where he worked closely with owner John Bookwalter and consultant winemaker, Zelma Long.

## **2004 – 2008 Work in New Zealand, Spain and the US**

In 2004 Alastair was invited by internationally renowned winemaker Andre van Rensburg of Vergelegen in South Africa to work directly with him during the 2004 harvest with particular focus on processing of grapes and fermentation methods. After this vintage, he decided to continue expanding his overseas experience and headed off firstly to Marlborough, New Zealand where he worked at Spy Valley Wines, and then onto Spain where he took up the position of consultant to Bodegas Juan Gil in Jumilla. Here, a key aspect of his responsibilities was developing and making wines specifically designed for the American markets. Both the wines created under his auspices are now distributed in the US and have received great acclaim including high praise from Robert Parker Jr.

Following this success he was recruited as winemaker and vineyard manager for Diablo Grande Winery & Vineyards, a boutique winery producing limited amounts of handcrafted wines from vineyards in its own appellation in the Diablo Ranges west of the San Joaquin valley, California. The position included all aspects of production from the 20 hectares of vineyards to final bottling of the 4,000 cases annual production. During this time, Alastair also acted as technical director for the company's Chateau Elan Winery in Atlanta, Georgia.

## **2008 – 2011 Working with Chris Ringland, Belvidere Estate and The Grateful Palate/R-Wines**

But it is his time spent with cult-winemaker Chris Ringland of Belvidere Estate in South Australia which has been the biggest influence on his career to date. In 2008, Alastair worked a vintage with Ringland, widely-regarded as one of the most dynamic figures in the wine world today. Following the harvest, Alastair was entrusted by Chris with management of all the US operations of The Grateful Palate, a high-end operation creating top-quality wines for exclusive local markets. He also worked alongside Chris on his Australian operations, producing much larger volumes of more accessible wines, enabling him to get a good understanding of both boutique and commercial ventures.

## **2011 – 2012 Work in Jumilla and Alicante, Spain**

Whilst working with Chris Ringland, Alastair was able to return to Jumilla to work the 2010 vintage with another winery connected to the Gil family – Bodegas el Nido. After this he was approached to become Winemaker/ Technical Director at a new winery project in Alicante, setting up the facility and business from scratch. Bodegas Tarima is a project focusing on making high quality Monastrell (Mouvedre) from entry level up to super premium and Alastair was directly responsible for all aspects of production of the super- premium wines as well as giving technical assistance for the rest of the project.

## **2012 – 2014 Return to South Africa**

Alastair finally returned to South Africa on a permanent basis when he was head-hunted for the position of head winemaker at Darling Cellars at the end of 2012. This large quality-focused operation required him to oversee the production and style of all wines from vineyard to bottle, using fruit from the cellars' 22 different producers, working 1350 hectares of vineyard. Working closely with the marketing team, he helped devise and ensure a cohesive strategy and growth of sales of the wines

Alastair believes his time working in such varied conditions has helped him to focus on the 'important' elements, irrespective of the area or style of wines he was making. "In my opinion, balance is the single most important factor in winemaking. Popular wine styles in the modern wine world are for ever changing, but balance never goes out of fashion!!" He is also a big fan of diversity of terroir, and believes that it is crucial that winemakers take into account the conditions within which they are given to work. His commercial experience means he tempers this respect for regionality with a clear-sighted view of the varying needs of different sectors, citing his experiences in the US as teaching him the concept of successfully producing specific wines for specific markets.

Looking ahead, Alastair says he is very excited at the opportunities and challenges offered in his new role. "Moving to Kleine Zalze is personally very exciting for me as my career has now come full circle back to Stellenbosch, where my love for winemaking first began. I think Kleine Zalze has come a long way in a very short space of time and the future looks bright for this ambitious winery. I would like to consolidate on what has been achieved so far and will try to build on that, contribute to Kleine Zalze's identity both locally and internationally and hopefully have it recognized as one of South Africa's 'First Growths.'"

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