

The Fine Wines of Hemel-en-Aarde

Hemel-en-Aarde. Heaven and Earth. The name paints a vivid picture of a region between mountain peaks and hectares of fynbos that contrast with the symmetry of well-tended vineyards and farmlands. There is no urban encroachment here and little industrialisation. As part of the Cape Floral Kingdom, the area is acknowledged as a global biodiversity region. In 2019, the region became South Africa's first UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy, the first on the African continent to receive this distinction.

These factors, together with a variety of ancient soils and a healthy biome, impact favourably on the wines produced in the region. Collectively, the three appellations of the Hemel-en-Aarde enjoy what is arguably the strongest maritime influence of any wine-growing area in South Africa. Winter rainfall, no hail or spring frost, ideal cool-climate conditions and slow ripening, allow the production of world-class Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

When we talk about a sense of place, there is no other place like the Hemel-en-Aarde. Here 20 small family-owned wineries craft site-specific wines with distinct regional authenticity. A third of these producers are World Wildlife Fund (WWF) champions.

To constantly improve, we need to understand nature better, so we are working with local and international scientists on climate change projects, virus mitigation and sensory analysis. Applied science brings innovation to our region, country and the world of wine. Current projects include Vititec GEN-Z, Climavin and others associated with Stellenbosch University. We enjoy collaborating across the world of wine. Our ambition, together with fellow Fine Wine producers worldwide, is to create an international wine visa for all levels of people in our industry. The knowledge exchange between hemispheres during the different growing seasons and harvest times, will elevate and create a more sustainable skill set across the industry around the world.

The benefits would be far-reaching. Our country's wine industry creates significant job opportunities. More and more local and international tourists are drawn to our area by the quality of our wines. Every visitor to our region creates 11 jobs daily, substantially contributing to local economic development and training.

Two local initiatives fulfill the vital need for learning in our rural community. The Hemel-en-Aarde Valley Pre-School comprises 45 children, three teachers and a chef. The Hemel-en-Aarde Valley Pre-School is a registered early childhood development centre, Non Profit and Public Benefit Organisation. Its nutrition programme focusses on breakfast, a freshly prepared lunch and afternoon snacks. The Pebbles Hemel-en-Aarde Education Project includes an after-school care facility, a nutrition programme, an early childhood development programme and a private school. It supports 120 children, aged one to 13. A recent addition is a skills development centre for the youngsters in our community. This will not only open new doors for them but will also provide a pool of new talent for our community.

Regular workshops and think tanks create meaningful investment opportunities in both viticulture and viniculture. Staff training is also high on our agenda and ranges from personal development programmes to viticulture, winemaking, sommelier training and internationally recognised qualifications such as WSET (Wine & Spirit Education Trust), SASA (South African Sommeliers Association) and Wine Tourism Training.

The Hemel-en-Aarde and other trendsetting wine regions in South Africa intend to elevate the country's reputation for sustainably produced Fine Wines, promoting South African wine to wine-lovers worldwide.