

BROOKDALE ESTATE

# CAPE CRUSADE

A rebuilt manor house and the 27 hectares of renewed vineyards within which it sits, Brookdale—a private estate one hour from Cape Town—is set to become a Holy Land for thinking oenophiles... and their nine guests. *Nick Scott* investigates.

It's all about flirting with the birds," says Tim Rudd, owner of Brookdale—a working wine estate in the foothills of the Klein Drakenstein mountains, about 60 miles north east of Cape Town—alluding to one of life's most delicious paradoxes: the fact that much of the best wine in the world is produced from some of the poorest quality soil. "A grape wants to be tasty to a bird, so that it will

eat it and discard its seed," explains Rudd, whose family acquired the estate in 2015 and have since completely rebuilt the manor house and replanted the 27 hectares of its total 80 taken up by vineyards.

"Where the ground is more fertile, so many grapes are produced that the likelihood of a seed being reproduced is far higher so the vines don't try hard; up top over there where it's less fertile"—he

gestures to the less-arable looking parcel of land in one extreme of his estate—"the vines take a different strategy: they make grapes that taste better, richer and sweeter."

And there lies wine-making's Darwinist principle: cultivated vines struggling with agricultural adversity—the steep banks of rubble and stone in parts of the Côte-Rôtie in the Northern Rhône, for example—have to work harder, forcing their roots to ramify

(or branch off) to gather a wider range of nutrients and minerals from different soil levels, all for the delectation of discerning human consumers over the winged beasts for whom natural selection intended the fruit in question.

Darwinism has been lavishly generous here in the heart of South Africa's Cape Floral Region, a biodiversity hotspot and patchwork of microclimates influenced by two vast oceans, which is home to 8,000 indigenous species of plant—about six times the number found in the Amazon jungle. Surrounded by such a sacred terroir that took billions of years to form, it's unsurprising that winemakers here have learned to treat their surrounds with reverence.

You won't find potent pesticides or herbicides being used here—organic methods of weed-suppression such as growing wheat between the furrows in the winter then ploughing it back in as dry manure, to build worm-friendly soil structures, are the modus operandi. African wasps and ladybirds introduced to the environment "absolutely chow" through bugs which are hostile to healthy vines faster than any pesticide could, as Rudd puts it, while composting programmes reintroduce minerality to soil. The solar panelled roof of a winery set to be completed next year will eventually power the entire estate, while plans are also afoot to convert wastewater from the winery into grey water for irrigation. And nature here is a willing participant: a strong wind even sweeps away nefarious presences such as rot and fungus.

The Rudd family carried out extensive soil testing and examination of weather records before buying the estate to ensure that it would be able to produce world-class wines, and what has been planted here has been informed by meticulous research. There are several blocks of old chenin blanc vines, some 35 years old, now providing their first vintage, whilst 16 different varieties altogether are harvested and vinified on the estate—from chenin blanc to chardonnay via grenache blanc, roussanne, vermentino, marsanne and piquepoul blanc, to name just a handful (newly planted red vines include syrah, mourvèdre and grenache noir).

Coaxing the fruits to their finest expression in the glass is the responsibility of Kiara Scott—an exceptionally talented winemaker, still in her late-20s, who studied at Elsenburg Agricultural College and

worked under winemaking royalty Duncan Savage, having been compelled to learn more about wine's more edifying place in the world due to growing up in a community where alcohol was widely abused.

Since the beginning of the Rudd family's stewardship of Brookdale—which is named after the Derbyshire village Tim calls home—non-indigenous vegetation has been removed and valleys have been re-planted with 3,600 indigenous trees, and mountain slopes re-seeded with wild Cape fynbos and flowers.

The same fondness for restoration over renovation has dominated the creation of the residential building, which is based on pictures and drawings of the original Cape Manor house which was pulled down in the '50s: the layout is similar, traditional Cape Dutch, with a vast reception area cleaved in two by a staircase and the dining room continuing beyond, while the windows, gables, shutters and doors are identical.

Inside the 20,000-square-foot building, impeccably executed eclecticism sees antique furniture and contemporary pieces in walnut, yellowwood and stinkwood—many made by local cabinet maker Bennie Botha and Pierre Cronje, specialists in modern spins on traditional Cape styles—mingle with botanically flavoured paintings by local artists.

All five light-bathed, contemporary-designed bedrooms are 10m by 5m and do battle for the "Best View" gong, and you'll likely find yourself regretting not being able to spend more time in it. "The concept of the place is that, while guests are here, they are proprietors of the whole farm, and free to wander anywhere," is how Rudd explains the estate's underlying ethos. "Wander into the vineyards, enjoy the benches and shade by the lake, take a bottle of wine or a beer or a gin and tonic with you." There's also a purified fresh mountain water pool, flanked by an out-house filled with even more harmoniously eclectic furniture (including contemporary rocking chairs), plus a voluminous fridge whose contents could floor an in-his-peak Keith Moon several times over.

If you can drag yourself off the premises, it may well be to another nearby wine estate—Avondale's wine safari offers further fascinating insights into viticultural biodynamics, as well as the chance to take in the dramatic silhouette of Cape Town's Table Mountain from a big distance (be sure to try its Camissa, a blanc de noir made from grenache, muscat de frontignan and

**Opposite page:**  
The Brookdale Estate, as viewed on approach;  
**below:** winemaker Kiara Scott



mourvèdre)—while the nearby towns of Franschhoek and Stellenbosch offer a glimpse into small-town South Africa.

Six staff are on duty during a full-capacity stay, and the estate's chef will design menus to suit each group of guests, using seasonal local ingredients and vegetables and fruit from the estate's gardens. Service is observant and congenial but discreet, blissfully devoid of obsequiousness, which is all in keeping with Rudd's unique hospitality philosophy. Brookdale is, for him, a niche offering that didn't exist before—an oenophile's dream getaway—but with a level of peace and privacy which the hordes of visitors to estates in, say, Grande Provence, don't typically get to enjoy. To say his aim has been achieved with aplomb is a tepid understatement. *Brookdale Estate costs around £4,640 per night, sleeping 10, including all meals and drinks, private wine tasting, private chef and butler and daily housekeeping (brookdale-estate.com). Brookdale Estate's wines are available at Handford Wines, South Kensington (handford.net)*