



THE HISTORY OF MISCHA ESTATE

The turmoil occasioned by the 2nd World War, both social and psychological, can be regarded as one of the key factors in the birth of the farming activities that culminated, some fifty years later, in the creation of Mischa Wine Estate. The farm Mischa has been in the Barns family for three generations.

In 1947, shortly after his return from active service in the 2nd World War in North Africa and Italy, "Kelpie" Barns bought a 50-hectare farm just outside the picturesque little town of Wellington in the Western Cape. Unable to settle down to a nine-to-five routine in the city and refusing to take another order from anyone, Kelpie and his wife, ballet dancer Yvonne Blake, decided to go farming! The wrench from sophisticated urban life to hectic rural chores on a run-down farm was character building, to say the least. Kelpie was a prize winning amateur photographer and champion ballroom dancer, while Yvonne's ballet career was set to take off after pre-war seasons in London and Paris with a company of "migr" Russian dancers, the Ballet Russe. She had returned to Cape Town to help Dulcie Howes run the UCT Ballet School and was making a name for herself in Cape Town as both dancer and choreographer. Kelpie and Yvonne had two small daughters when they moved to Wellington; the arrival of a baby boy shortly thereafter added to the general excitement of their new life on the farm.

One of the first things they did was to change the name of the farm to Mischa. The name can be traced back to Yvonne's time with the Ballet Russe in Paris. The farm was renamed in recognition of both Yvonne's former dance partner, Mikael, and Michael, a family friend and fighter pilot who died in the 2nd World War. Mischa, (pronounced "Meesha") is the endearing form of Mikael, and the Russian version of Michael.

The early years created a very steep learning curve for the young Barns family. Kelpie learnt to watch very carefully what his neighbouring farmers were doing from season to season! He ran a mixed farming operation which included a couple of cows, a semi-domesticated goat who loved chasing the three young children through the house, fruit trees of all kinds and some neglected vineyards. Slowly but surely, Kelpie learnt the ropes and streamlined his farm to focus on the export of fruit. He later became one of the first exporters of plums and apricots to the United Kingdom. Yvonne's reputation as a dancer followed her into the country and she was eventually badgered into starting what later became a very successful ballet school in Wellington and Paarl.

In the 1960s, daughters Rene and Sandra went back to their roots and studied at UCT where they were to meet their future husbands. On his return from a study trip to the vineyards of California, Kelpie's youngest, John, joined his father on the farm.

After working beside his father for a few years, John started to graft vines on a small scale. This was the start of what was to grow into one of the Cape's leading vine nurseries, Mischa Nursery. Around this time, the neighbouring farm of Eventide was acquired.

Father and son farming operations are always interesting? as old and new ideas gradually coalesce into something different. John's vision centred on vine cultivation; his energy and attention to detail were to stand him in good stead as he gradually took over the running of the farm and the expansion of the vine nursery. Mischa Nursery is now the 4th largest vine nursery in the Southern Hemisphere.

When Kelpie and Yvonne eventually retired to George in 1987, the second generation, John and his wife, Elizabeth, were firmly in the driver's seat. Sandra and her husband also returned to the farm in the mid-1990s to help with the administrative side of the operations and later retired in 2000. Fruit trees gradually gave way to new vineyards. Large areas were set aside for the vine nursery operations and grapes were delivered to one of the local co-ops.

However, John always harboured a secret desire to make his own wine?

As the pressure of running a successful vine nursery operation and extensive vineyards consumed his time, John's ambition to produce his own wine had to lie dormant, waiting its turn for the next generation.

Right on cue, the third Barns generation was stepping into the foreground: John and Elizabeth's three sons, Andrew, Gareth and Shaun, began to make their presence felt on the farm. Andrew, the eldest, joined the Mischa team in 1996. Inspired by his Aunt Sandra's hilarious attempts to make wine in her garage, Andrew decided to try his hand at this mysterious alchemy. His first attempt was at home, on a very small scale. Everyone agreed that he was making great wine! Andrew was then given the choice of studying viticulture and oenology at University or investing into wine production on the farm. Being the driven, self-motivated man he is, his choice was simple: he was going to follow in Kelpie's pioneering footsteps and tough it out on his own. Andrew and his family had been consulting to many wine estates in the Cape and beyond for years on how to plant the right vines to make good wine. What better way could there be to put his own advice to the test than to start bottling his own wine!



MISCHA

W I N E E S T A T E

In 1999, with some very primitive equipment, a lot of passion, and much teasing from the family, Andrew produced his first Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. He surprised everyone by producing award winning wine that sold out immediately after it was in the bottle & the die was cast! Andrew's Shiraz won 1st place in the Wine of the Month Reserve Tasting. The Wine of the Month Reserve Club takes only the top Shiraz in the country and winning 1st place meant that they regarded Andrew's Shiraz as the best in South Africa! The club bought every bottle of Shiraz he made which created a lot of demand for his Cabernet, which sold out shortly thereafter. In the light of his early success, Andrew turned a hobby into a career and launched Mischa Wines.

A new cellar was constructed for the 2000 vintage. The thrust of the newly branded Mischa Wine Estate started with the production of quality, classic reds ? Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Merlot. Mischa Estate now encompasses four farms: Mischa, Eventide, Dunedin, and Talana Hill. Production will always be limited, as will the range, to ensure the Mischa signature of consistently outstanding quality. Winemaker Andrew's stained T-shirt, baggy shorts and disarmingly casual manner belie the fact that this is a young man with a mission to put Mischa Wine Estate ?on the map?.

With this goal firmly in view, Andrew has entered and triumphed in many wine competitions and publications, including Veritas gold (Mischa Shiraz 2000); Fairbairn Gold (Mischa Cabernet 2001); Four stars in UK Decanter magazine (Eventide Cabernet 2000); SA Wine Magazine (Eventide Cabernet 2000); Platter's Wine Guide (Mischa Shiraz 1999, Mischa Shiraz 2001, Mischa Cabernet 2001 and Eventide Cabernet 2001); a 92 rating by Robert M. Parker Jr (Eventide Cabernet Sauvignon 2002), and a 90 rating by Robert M. Parker Jr (Eventide Shiraz 2002).

A new barrel cellar for the maturation of the wines was completed by the end of May 2004. Over the intervening years, the original machinery and tanks purchased to start the fledgling winery were gradually up-graded and replaced, in order to deal comfortably with increasing volumes, without compromising Mischa Wine Estate's unwavering commitment to quality. Today, Mischa Wine Estate has become a well respected boutique winery that produces unique, top quality red and white wines under two labels: Mischa and Eventide.

While all this was going on in the winery, new eyes and hands were at work in the vine nursery and in the vineyards. Gareth, Andrew's younger brother, was learning the intricacies and nuances of these two vital aspects of the wine-making process ? all under the watchful gaze of Dad. It is an on-going family debate as to which of the two took the most strain!

The early years of the new millennium have seen steady expansion on Mischa Wine Estate. Gareth now runs the vine nursery and Andrew continues his work as winemaker extraordinaire. As John's eyes sparkle ever more brightly at the prospect of retirement, the third Barns generation has taken over the reins with their own special style and flair, to lead Mischa to the next level of excellence.

All at Mischa Wine Estate value the ongoing opportunity to share our incomparable wines with you!

