# Hermit Woods

Wine Club Release
Spring 2020

Dear Club Members,

As always, Ken, Chuck, and I are pleased to be releasing our Spring club and sharing with you our latest collection of fine wines crafted over the past two years. A lot has happened since our Fall release. We have some exciting new projects underway, new people have joined our team, and we have lots of fresh ideas to create a better future for you and our winery.

However, the most impactful change has come from the COVID 19 global pandemic. On March 17th, we closed our tasting room, one of the hardest decisions we have ever made. The crisis has affected all of us in profound ways, but we are confident that we will all get through this together.

We sincerely hope that you and your family remain healthy and safe. We want to express our most sincere appreciation to all of you for your support during this difficult time. Your kind words, curbside pickups, and mail orders have kept us alive and will ensure that we are here to serve you again when the crisis is over.

These challenging times will only serve to make us stronger. The third significant chapter in Hermit Woods's story is now under construction. We look forward to re-opening and sharing that chapter with you.

Thank you. Be well and stay safe!

Sincerely,

Bob, Chuck, and Ken

# Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

## *2018 Heirloom Crabapple*

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 333 Cases Produced – 12.7 Alc By Vol.

### A Story in Every Bottle

We discovered the delightful "Dolgo" crabapple years ago when I took a bite of one of the little red apples growing on a tree in Bob's front yard. The resulting experimental wine was outstanding, and it has quickly become our signature wine. Further research revealed that the Dolgo crabapple was brought to this country from Kazakhstan in the 1800s to add flavor to the cider being made at the time. Our biggest problem now is sourcing enough of these apples to make more of this very popular wine. Fortunately, local Stone Mountain Farm has planted many more of these trees for us and they are starting to produce.

### Wine Notes

Produced from Dolgo crabapples and wild, low-bush blueberries. Bright, fresh apple aromas precede a lively, mouth-watering, cranberry-like and apple flavored tang; reminiscent of a cranberry rosé.

### Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy this wine at all occasions, and with many different foods. This wine pairs well with just about any food and especially well with roast turkey (Thanksgiving!) or chicken.

### Farmers Notes

Three farms - Allison's Orchard, Saxton, and Stone Mtn - supplied us with Dolgo crabapples for this vintage. These farms grow a wide variety of heirloom apples and other fruit, and follow best management practices ensuring the highest quality fruit. Chuck, our partner, has developed a close relationship with the orchard managers over the years and enjoys the time of harvest. Our blueberries come from Merrill's Wild Blueberries in Ellsworth, Maine; a three generation family blueberry harvester. Todd Merrill works closely with us to ensure only the finest quality berries, harvested at maximum ripeness.

### Vinification

The fresh crabapples are crushed and added to the right amount of water and sugar in one of our new "super tanks" used as a fermenting vessel. Blueberries are added directly to the ferment in this vintage. Then, Lalvin D21 and DV-10 wine yeasts are added for primary fermentation at a temperature of 66F. The wine is then aged in stainless steel tanks, with light toast, French oak spirals suspended in the wine for 5 months, allowing for extraction of wood tannins and flavor, all while enhancing the structure. Afterwards, the wine is stabilized and filtered for a brilliant sparkle and a small amount of sugar is added for drinking balance.

pH 3.26 RS 3.5% ABV 12.7%

# Hermit Woods

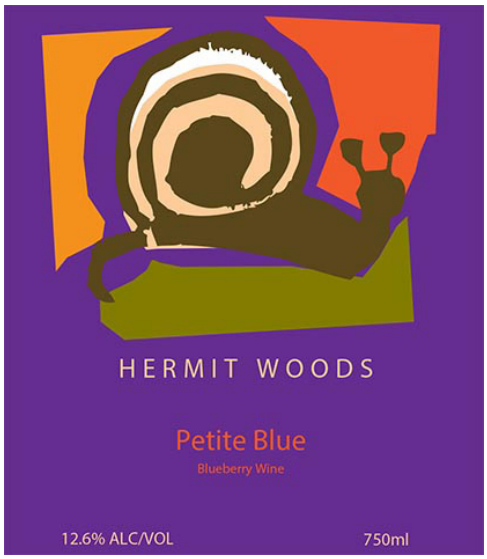
WINE TECH NOTES

## *2019 Petite Blue*

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 462 Cases Produced - 12.7 Alc By Vol.

### A Story in Every Bottle

Years before the winery started, Chuck, Bob and I - as well as a small group of friends we hung out with - would meet on a monthly basis to taste wine. At one particular evening of wine tasting, Bob brought out a bottle in a brown bag and shared it, and asked us what type of wine it was (other than red - ha!). All of us enjoyed it. Some thought it was a pinot noir, but none of us could guess that it was actually, against all odds, a dry blueberry wine! The next day, Chuck and his wife picked a whole bucket of fresh blueberries and showed up on my doorstep with them, requesting that I make wine like what we had the night before. Since then, I have been making dry blueberry wines every season, and the result - our famous "Petite Blue" and "Reserve" - have become some of our most sought-after wines. In fact, in the 2017 November edition of Food and Wine Magazine, Petite Blue was identified as THE craft beverage for the State of New Hampshire, beating out all beers, spirits and wines produced in the state.




### Wine Notes

Petite Blue is reminiscent of some pinot noirs, the Reserve a little drier and richer, more merlot-like, but both have aromas and flavors that differ from grape wines because they are crafted entirely from wild, low-bush blueberries.

### Pairing Suggestions

We have found Petite Blue to pair very well with a wide variety of foods, such as savory quiche, stuffed mushrooms, pepper chèvre, and herbed pork or chicken dishes. The wine is also delightful on its own!

### Farmers Notes

Our blueberries come from Merrill's Wild Blueberries in Ellsworth, Maine; a three generation family blueberry harvester. Todd Merrill works closely with us to ensure we use only the finest quality berries, harvested at maximum ripeness. Our blueberries are the wild berries that grow close to the ground across much of Downeast Maine; the smaller berries provide us with a concentrated flavor and higher skin-to-juice ratio which give our wines the soft tannins we enjoy.

### Vinification

To bring forth the fresh bright blueberry aromas and flavors, a number of important steps are taken during the vinification and elevage of this wine. Petite Blue is not barrel aged; instead, a specific Burgundy blend of different toast levels of French Oak staves are suspended in the wine while it is fermenting and aging, which takes place in stainless steel tanks. Fermentation occurred in our new supertanks with pumpovers for maximum extraction of fruit flavors and tannins. A special yeast strain from the Cornas area of the Rhone valley in France is used for its ability to showcase the fruit.

pH 3.44 RS 0.75% ABV 12.7

# Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

## *2017 Hermitage*

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 224 Cases Produced - 13.5 Alc By Vol.

### A Story in Every Bottle

There is a famous wine location named for a hermit called Hermitage in France, the birthplace of the Syrah grape. The famous hill on the east bank of the Rhone is named in memory of the knight "Henri Gaspard de Sterimberg", who decided, upon his return from the Albigenisan Crusades, to live as a hermit on the hill granted to him by Anne of Castille, the Queen of Spain. He replanted the vineyard that would become known as Ermitage at first, and then Hermitage. We too have history with a different hermit, Joseph Plummer, who lived back in the 1800s near where our winery originated in 2010. As enthusiasts of Syrah and all wines of the Rhone, it is wonderful to have produced a wine from the fruit that grows right around here, and that is reminiscent of the Syrah wines of France's Hermitage. Also, our federal government amazingly granted us permission to label the wine "Hermitage"!

### Wine Notes

A blend of four dark berries: blackberry, elderberry, blackcurrant, and blueberry. As with many of the great wines of the world, the four wines are vinified and aged separately, then blended before bottling. This is done because different grapes and berries become ripe at different times, and we followed this practice to give us full control over the final blend.

### Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy on its own, or with anything you would pair a fine syrah or red Rhone blend with, such as hearty meat dishes.

### Farmers Notes

Our blackberries are shipped from organic farmers in the Willamette Valley, Oregon, considered by many to have the best blackberries available. We continue to seek a local, organic producer of this fruit. The elderberries came from an organic grower in Arkansas at Dixieland Farm. The blackcurrants came from a best-practice grower in New York. Our blueberries come from Merrill's Wild Blueberries, a three generation family blueberry harvester in Ellsworth, Maine. Todd Merrill works closely with us to ensure only the finest quality berries, harvested at maximum ripeness. Our blueberries are the wild berries that grow close to the ground across much of Downeast Maine; the smaller berries provide us with a concentrated flavor and higher skin-to-juice ratio in order to equip our wines with the soft tannins we enjoy.

### Vinification

Four separate wines were crafted, and then later combined in a specific ratio. The blackberry wine was fermented with Lalvin D254 yeast, a strain originally captured from a Rhone ferment of Syrah grapes. The blueberries and blackcurrants were fermented with Lalvin GRE yeast (also a Rhone strain), and the elderberries with Lalvin Rhone 2056. Each of the wines underwent secondary fermentation in stainless steel tanks for a few weeks, and then extended elevage in French oak barrels. Each wine was gravity-racked a few times during elevage; no fining or filtering occurred. The final blend ratio was achieved through many bench trials.

pH 3.54 RS 0% ABV 13.5

# Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

## *2019 Strawberry Rhubarb*

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 65 Cases Produced - 13 Alc By Vol.

### A Story in Every Bottle

Such a classic New England combination of a fruit and a vegetable that both grow so well here and ripen around the same time. With our focus on local ingredients, it was a no brainer to combine these two and make wine out of them. For a more complex flavor profile and better color, we also add a few wild blueberries to the mix! This wine has grown to be one of our most popular wines, so we have struggled each year to make enough. Once again we make sure to have enough to share with all of our club members. Enjoy!

### Wine Notes

A fruit-forward, complex, rose-like wine of easy drinking character, yet surprisingly complex. Drink 2020-2022.

### Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy chilled on its own or with just about any food. Especially delightful on warm summer days with lighter, summertime fare, such as soft cheese and fresh fruit or a summer salad.

### Farmers Notes

The strawberries for this batch came from two local sources, a grower in NH and one in MA. The rhubarb comes from a few local sources, including my neighbors backyard and from a special heirloom variety called Whitney. Our blueberries come from Merrill's Wild Blueberries in Ellsworth, Maine; a three generation family wild blueberry harvester. Todd Merrill works closely with us to ensure we use only the finest quality berries, harvested at maximum ripeness.

### Vinification

This, like many of our wines, is quite complicated to produce. Ripe berries are hand sorted and mostly destemmed. The natural wild yeast on the fruit initiates the fermentation. This approach was inspired by our trip to California wine country in the summer of '18, where we met the famed winemaker Gideon Beinstock, who strongly encouraged us to use the wild, autochthonous yeast. Fermentation was completed with a special strain of yeast, Lalvin DV-10, well known for clean fermentations that respect varietal character. Bench trials led to the addition of 27g/L sugar for balance. pH 3.21 RS 2.7% ABV 12.7

# Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

## *2018 Deep Red*

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 133 Cases Produced - 15 Alc By Vol.

### A Story in Every Bottle

Inspired by our popular Deep Blue wine, we experimented with red raspberries instead of blueberries and introduced honey as part of the fermentables. The first vintage of this was 2016 and it was very popular, so we scaled it up in 2018 for this vintage. As with Deep Blue, no water is added to the ferment, resulting in a highly concentrated, higher alcohol, intense and very delicious wine with ruby port-like characteristics. To showcase the delicate honey aromas along with the bold raspberry notes, the alcohol level was kept lower than that of Deep Blue.

### Wine Notes

A fruit forward, ruby port-like wine with deep rich flavors and engaging aromas. Drink 2020-2028.

### Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy lightly chilled on its own or with dessert, such as chocolate, cheesecake, or vanilla ice cream.

### Farmers Notes

The red raspberries for this vintage came from an organic grower in Washington state and also from a local sprayless grower, Great Northern Berries in Sandwich, NH. The raw, unfiltered, local honey was sourced from Hall Apiaries in western NH.

### Vinification

Four separate wines were crafted, and then later combined in a specific ratio. The blackberry wine was To preserve flavor, the organic red raspberries are carefully cleaned and then deep frozen. When we receive them, they need to thaw, which results in a nice slow cold extraction of the fruit flavors and nutrients. In fact, many grape wines start by cooling the fresh grapes so that they can go through such a 'cold soak' prior to fermentation for better fruit flavors. Once fully thawed, Lalvin DV-10 and EC1118 yeasts are used to ferment the berries, as well as added honey and sugar for greater alcohol. After pressing, a portion of the wine spent 8 months in a new French Oak barrel with the remainder aging in stainless steel. The two batches were then combined before bottling.

pH 3.44 RS 6% ABV 15

# Hermit Woods

WINE TECH NOTES

## *2017 Melange*

Winemaker: Ken Hardcastle | 67 Cases Produced - 18 Alc By Vol.

### A Story in Every Bottle

The first vintage of this was in 2011 and was an attempt to fuse the deep, rich, high alcohol Deep Blue wine concept, with the complex components of Red Scare. (Some of you may recall the exceptional 2012 vintage...). Since then there have been a few vintages, all with slightly different formulations, but all with the same goal in mind: craft a deep, rich, complex, high alcohol dessert wine. This vintage is a first on two fronts: 1) we are using a unique and highly regarded healthy fruit called an aronia berry, and, 2) only club members will have access to this wine. This is a very special vintage and we wanted to make sure our club members got a bottle and exclusive option to purchase the few additional bottles if desired.

### Wine Notes

A fruit forward, ruby port-like wine with deep rich flavors and engaging aromas. The aronia berry has created an exotic, daylily-like aromatic component we have not found in any other ferment ever. Drink 2020-2028.

### Pairing Suggestions

Enjoy lightly chilled on its own or with dessert, such as dark chocolate or a rich chocolate cake.

### Farmers Notes

Two key fruits for this vintage came from an organic grower in Washington state: aronia and black raspberry. In addition, there are local wild foraged elderberries and blackberries, wild blueberries from Maine, and Great Northern sprayless red raspberries. For complexity, we also added some local autumn berries, as well as hysop crabapples and peaches from my trees. The raw, unfiltered, local honey was sourced from Hall Apiaries in western NH. During barrel aging, some of the 2017 Elderberry wine was used to top off the barrel and add yet another layer of complexity to the wine.

### Vinification

All the different fruit was previously frozen and then thawed to enable co-fermentation of fruit that ripens at different times, and to get better extraction of nutrients and color from the fruit provided by the freeze-thaw process. Both Lalvin GRE and EC-1118 yeasts were used to ferment the wine as well as some inputs from the wild yeast on the fruit. After an early press event to keep a fruit forward character to the wine, we racked the wine into a French Oak barrel for extended aging. Bench trials led us to back sweeten the wine for an RS of 10%.

pH 3.44 RS 10% ABV 18

HERMIT WOODS SOJOURN TO

# SOUTH AFRICA

## First, a little background

What do you do when your three-week sailing trip across the Atlantic on a 43' sailboat gets canceled? You plan another adventure, and that is where our story begins.

Ken, Chuck, and I had been planning for months to crew our friend's sailboat home from Europe in January 2020. Chuck scheduled a month off, and Ken and I were rearranging our January schedules for this long journey when the trip got canceled.

Having been anticipating this grand adventure and arranging our lives around it for months, we now had a big hole in our schedule and nowhere to go. We decided to craft an experience of a different kind.

As a pilot, Chuck gets to bring friends and family along with him on "Buddy Passes" when he travels. Chuck's buddy passes would prove to be our ticket to the perfect adventure to replace our transatlantic crossing. The only problem was that you cannot book buddy passes in advance. You must use these passes by flying standby, and you don't know if there will be seats on the plane until only a short time before the flight departs.

We decided that we would travel someplace warm, out of the country, and where wine is made. That destination was left entirely to chance. We packed the smallest bags we could with clothes chosen for a warm climate and began our trip by driving to Newark airport armed only with our cell phones and a sense of adventure.

As we made the five-hour journey to Newark, Chuck began to review the flights departing in the next 24 hours that fit our criteria. The first plane that had three open seats and fit our criteria was a nonstop flight leaving that evening for Cape Town, South Africa. We would not know for sure that we could board that plane until the final hour before departure, a chance we decided to take. Should this flight not pan out, we hedged our bets with an opportunity to fly to Buenos Aires the next day.

We arrived at the airport in plenty of time to make the flight and enjoy a Martini at the airport bar while awaiting our fate. As boarding time grew ever closer, the realization that we were about to travel to South Africa, a place none of us had ever been, started to become a reality.

At 8:30 pm on Sunday, January 12th, 2020, Ken, Chuck, and I boarded a nonstop flight to Africa. Our adventure begins!

Before going any further, let me first explain how important this trip is for us and the future of Hermit Wood Winery & Deli. As our business has grown from something slightly more than a hobby to what it has become today, our time together has grown ever more precious. In the early days, the only way anything got done resulted from the three of us spending all our free time, days and nights, making wine, sharing it with you, and planning our future. We were attached at the hip.

Today, things look a lot different. Today, we seem to go days or even weeks without seeing each other at all. Not because we want it that way, but as our obligations to the business grow, we find ourselves dividing and conquering, doing the things we each do best for the health of the company. Ken focuses ever more on the over 4,000 cases of wine he is parenting in the cellar; I focus on managing the day to day operations of the tasting room and Deli, and Chuck, of course, is usually flying around the globe.

## Day One

Ok, back to our adventure. It was a 14-hour direct flight to Cape Town, South Africa. We landed around 5:00 pm on Monday,

January 13th, South Africa time. The first order of business was to make sure we had access to wifi and cellular services. As we had no idea we were going to be in South Africa just 24 hours earlier, we had no place to go and no way to get there. Thanks to modern communication, we settled this issue rather quickly and began our search for the night's lodging.

Over a beer in the airport, we made reservations at the Mountain Manor in downtown Cape Town and were soon in a taxi heading that way. Thirty minutes later, we arrived at what would be our home for the next five days.

The Mountain Manor is a late 1800's Manor located in the heart of Cape Town. I am not sure we could have planned a better destination if we had been planning for months. Michelle, the owner, turned out to be an exceptional host. Michelle and her team prepared an excellent breakfast every morning, and she invited us to attend a previously scheduled wine tasting with a premier winery in the region. She also provided excellent guidance as to how to get the most out of our time in the city.

From our base at the Manor, we ventured off each day in pursuit of sightseeing, wineries, and restaurants. With only 12 days to work with, we needed to be judicious with our time. We filled every moment. To recount all the details of our grand adventure would take a book. So, I will attempt to capture the highlights for you.

One of our favorite discoveries was the "Hop-On Hop-Off" bus that was accessible from just a few hundred yards from the Manor. From this bus, we had access to all the major attractions and local wineries in Cape Town. We used this bus liberally during our stay. An especially nice feature of this bus was that it was topless and came with headphones and a recorded tour that played along with the ride.

## Day Two

Thanks to the bus, we were able to cover much ground and learn a great deal about South Africa and its history. On our first

day, we rode around Table Mountain, a famous Cape Town landmark referred to as one of the wonders of the world. It rises to almost 3,500 feet above the city and dominates its landscape. On the way around, we stopped for a quick visit to Beau Constantia, a winery in the Constantia Wine Region. The winery had a

Upon returning from Table Mountain, we headed back to the V&A waterfront, where we spent the afternoon visiting the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art. We toured four floors of art, much of it depicting the history and challenges that have faced the country over the past several hundred years. In addition to a vast collection of

beautiful tasting room enclosed entirely in glass with spectacular views of the valley and surrounding vineyards, not to mention excellent wine.

We ventured on from there with stops at the World of Birds Wildlife Sanctuary & Monkey Park, then proceeded the rest of the way around the mountain to Camps Bay, a beautiful beach town just south of Cape Town that reminded us of the French Riviera. After drinks and a walk on the beach, we hopped back on the bus for our return to Cape Town and the V&A waterfront.

The V&A waterfront is a cosmopolitan waterfront with shops, restaurants, street performers, sculptures, and much more. It reminded me of Pier 49 in San Francisco, only larger. We wandered the waterfront looking for a place to dine for the evening; the choices were numerous. Before dinner, we took advantage of the free harbor tour afforded us by the purchase of our Hop on Hop off ticket.

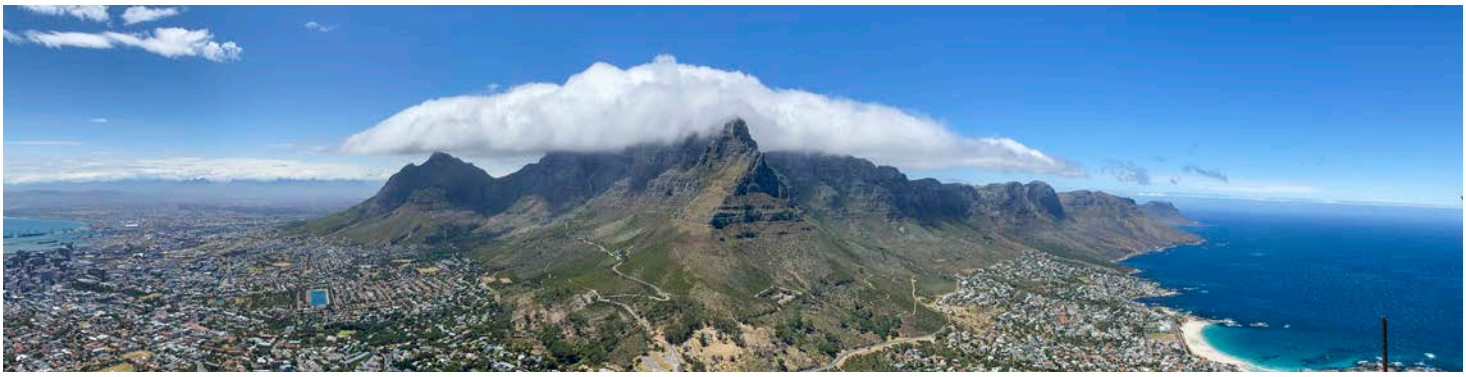
## Day Three

We spent the next day exploring Table Mountain. We took the Hop-On Hop-Off bus to the Aerial Tramway that takes you to the summit of Table Mountain. You can hike it in about 1.5 to 2 hours, but given our limited time, we choose the tram. It was a spectacular bluebird day. We wandered along the flat summit for a few hours before enjoying a cold one at the tram restaurant and returning down the mountain. This is a must-do when visiting Cape Town. It was simply breathtaking. Fortunately for us, our visit was timely. Due to high winds, the tram was closed for the remainder of our time in Cape Town.

art, the building the museum resides in is a piece of art itself. The museum was housed in a former grain silo that was carved out for the building's new purpose. We finished our evening with dinner and drinks on the pier

## Day Four

Thursday, we again boarded the Hop-On Hop-Off bus for a tour of The Cape of Good Hope, the South West corner of Africa. It was about an hour and a half bus ride. Peter Van Wyk, our host, proved a most excellent guide. This trip included hiking the cliffs surrounding the famous lighthouse and down to the southern point. We had numerous sightings of wildlife, including a group of baboons. There were spectacular views in all directions. On our return ride, we stopped to visit the South African penguins - who knew there were warm climate penguins.



Upon returning to the Manor, we cleaned up and joined the wine tasting that Michelle, the owner, had scheduled with a local winery. Nick Plummer was our host along with the winemaker from Landskroon Wines. We sampled nine wines along with some excellent appetizers prepared by the Manor. We met some great people, including one who invited us to enjoy one of the best steak houses in the area, Nelson's Eye. We closed the place with steaks, wine, and scotch to top it off.

## Day Five

Our host and guide, Nick Plummer, from the previous evening's event, organized a winery tour of three wineries in Stellenbosch and Franschhoek. Our first stop was Remhoogte. Chris, owner, and winemaker, spent the next couple of hours sharing wine, winemaking ideas, and stories with us, followed by a tour of the winery. It was a beautiful place that crafts superb wines. Chris was a generous host and an excellent winemaker. We look forward to sharing our wine with Chris someday.

Our second stop was Stony Brook Vineyards. Another excellent choice by our guide, Nick. Again, Craig McNaught, owner, and winemaker was a most generous host. Craig regaled us with stories and winemaking ideas as he poured over a dozen of his finest wines. We spent three hours enjoying Craig's time and wine. Again, some outstanding South African wines are being produced here in a storybook setting.

Having spent so much time at our first two stops, we missed the opportunity to visit the third winery. Instead, we stopped at a local wine shop and stocked up on additional beverages, cheese, and bread for an afternoon snack.

Nick was an outstanding host who understood what we had come to South Africa to learn and guided us to wineries that would best serve that purpose. Every place we visited was spot on and spoke the same language as us as we talked about what was important to us in the wine industry.

## Day Six

Our last day at the Manor. We packed our bags and made arrangements for a rental car at the airport. Before leaving the city, we tackled Lion's Head. This breathtaking mountain forms a dramatic peak of 2,200 feet above the city of Cape Town. The hike to the summit was approximately 1.5 miles, and the latter part was achieved literally by ladders and

chains. It was breathtaking. You can't visit this city without taking this hike. We hope on our return to do the famous full moon version of this hike.

Upon returning from the hike, we hailed an Uber ride back to the Manor to pack and say goodbye to our new friend, Michelle, the Manor owner. Our Uber driver delivered us to the airport, where the next half of our adventure ensued.

If you were not aware, they drive on the (wrong) left side of the road in South Africa. After picking up our rental car, it took us two trips around the airport to figure out how to get out safely. I never knew it would take three people to drive a car, but pleased that we had the numbers. With me (Bob) driving, Ken navigating, and Chuck and Ken both yelling out the correct lane to turn into and the right way to go around roundabouts, we eventually made our way. A bit of humor interjected every time I applied the blinker, and the windshield wipers came on. The blinker switch is on the opposite side of the steering wheel than on vehicles in the US.

The remainder of our trip took place amongst the wine regions of South Africa, where we stayed in two Airbnb's. The first Airbnb was located in the middle of hundreds of acres of grapevines and a wild animal sanctuary. We had two nights here. On our first night, we ate in and enjoyed some African beer, wine, and gin. The rest of the night is history.

## Day Seven

This day we ventured into the Wellington wine region where we explored a couple of wineries, including Fairview, known widely in the states for their Goats do Roam wine. Fairview turned out to be a highlight for us. As this winery also kept goats and produced cheese, their tastings were all wine and cheese centered. Their wine was outstanding, only to be matched by their cheese and quality service. We left with many bottles and several kinds of cheese.

We concluded the day at the Cattle Baron restaurant. We splurged on some of the finest cuts of beef and sumptuous amounts of wine (did I mention gin). Service was outstanding, and we learned of a popular South African tradition of the braai, preparing your steaks over an open wood-fired flame. We vowed to pursue this tradition before departing from our vacation.

## Day Eight

When we arrived in South Africa, the first thing we did was reach out to some of our international friends in the wine industry for recommendations. Our good friend Clark Smith promptly replied that we must visit Upland Organic Estate. Dr. Edmund Oettlé and his wife Elsie, run this fantastic place. They produce some of the most excellent wines and spirits we had on our entire stay in South Africa. Edmund generously spent several hours with us exploring his property and sampling many of his superb wines and spirits. If there ever was truth to the

statement that the best wines are found within a few miles of where they are produced, Edmund proves this point. You will be hard-pressed to sample Edmund's wines anywhere else.

From Upland, we ventured into the mountains and crossed the famous BainsKloof Pass, a windy mountain pass that was built in 1884 and rises nearly 2,000 feet above the plain. With a breathtaking view, waterfalls, and mountain fauna, this made for a great way to head toward our next destination, the southern seacoast, and the Walker Bay Wine Region.

We spent the evening in the most enchanting Airbnb I have ever had the pleasure of staying in, Berseba Cottage, which is situated several hundred feet up the side of a mountain with 180-degree views of the South African plain below. From the expansive veranda, you could see for miles. Our home for the next three nights included a braai, a wood-fired hot tub, and comfortable accommodations for the three of us, a perfect way to conclude our stay in this beautiful country.

## Day Nine

We spent the day visiting small wineries, breweries, and exploring the town of Hermanus. We visited Honingklip Brewery

and the Hermanus Brewery. Our bartender at Hermanus Brewery had just returned from a several-year journey around Africa guided only by the bartenders he met along the way. Fascinating character. We walked the famous Hermanus Cliff Path Biodiversity Walk along the sea coast.

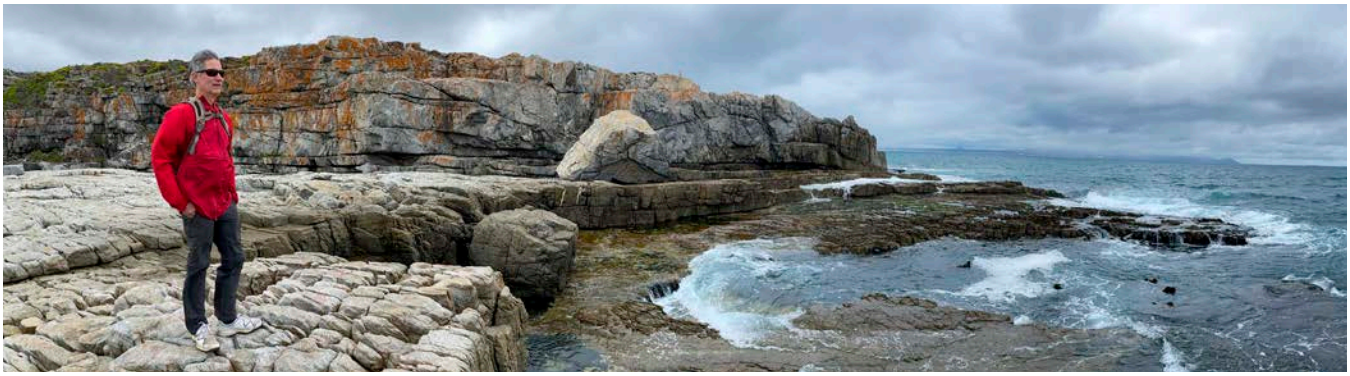
We concluded our day at a well-known butcher shop where we acquired several cuts of excellent steaks and ostrich personally selected by the owner. Our mission was to experience our first braai at our Airbnb.

Chuck took on the task of mastering the braai, and mastered it, he did. As the number one rule in braaing is "no backseat braaiers," Ken and I left braaing to Chuck's good hands. Since returning to the States, Chuck has continued to develop his braaing skills to great results. Ken and I remain appropriately silent as he does.

Thanks to Chuck tackling the braai, we had the most outstanding evening on the veranda. We enjoyed excellent food and drank several bottles of fine wine that we had acquired along the way. We finished the night in the wood-fired hot tub.

## Day Ten

We ventured off to discover the beautiful wineries of the Walker Bay wine trail. We started with Benguela Cove Lagoon Wine Estate. This spectacular estate winery had one of the most impressive collections of



sculptures. Sadly, their main focus was to sell property, not wine, and their wine reflected this. Indeed, nothing to scoff at, but we made no purchases.

From there, we visited Creation Wines, which was quite the opposite of our first choice. Our tasting was over the top, including a well versed knowledgeable host, foods to sample along with our wine, and an education of the local terroir that produced these excellent wines. We followed our tasting with an exceptional light lunch, including abalone. The winery was surrounded by beautiful sculptures as well.

Our last stop was Hamilton Russell Vineyards, one of the area's oldest wineries. Our visit here was short but well worth it. The place was spectacularly beautiful, and as the only guests, we had a private tasting of some outstanding wines.

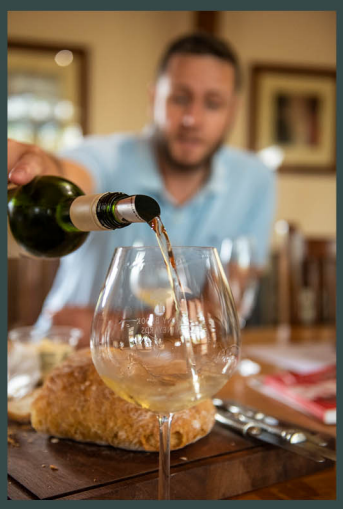
Before returning home, we visited a fresh fish market in Hermanus. We acquired several cuts of local fish for a second night of braaing on our Airbnb's veranda. We enjoyed another fantastic evening with excellent food and wine, a spectacular sunset, and our wood-fired hot tub.

## Day Eleven

For our final day in South Africa, we ventured along the beautiful sea coast cliff drive from Betty's bay to Gordons Bay. This 25 mile stretch of highway runs along the cliffs with spectacular views across False Bay to the Cape of Good Hope, where we had been just a few days earlier.

Upon arriving in Gordons Bay, we sought out a shipping store to help us pack our three dozen bottles of wine for the return home. After acquiring our boxes, we had a couple of hours to kill before our plane departed. We chose, as you might guess, to spend that time at a local brewery.

We spent our final moments in South Africa at the Triggerfish Brewery. This was a great way to conclude an excellent vacation. The brewery was decorated with several relics from the Mad Max movies along with an eclectic collection of sculptures and paintings. While enjoying our beer, we had the good fortune of meeting the brewery manager. She proceeded to offer us a grand tour of the brewery, distillery, and a sampling of some of their many great products. We spent the next two hours there before heading to the airport in time to drop our car and board our plane home.

In conclusion, our 12 days in South Africa turned out to be one of the most inspiring, invigorating, and educational trips my partners and I have been on together. Combined with the impromptu nature of our travels, the spectacular places we visited, and most importantly, the people we met, our journey surpassed all our expectations. I have merely scratched the surface in the telling of this story. There were so many special moments shared by the three of us during our time together; it would take a book to tell the whole story.

Most important of all, the experience we had was made most special through the quality time we got to spend together. In truth, I don't know that it would have mattered where we ended up. Getting to spend twelve days together made for a journey of a lifetime. However, I am glad we got to spend it in South Africa.