

# Through the grapevine

A focus on South Africa's finest winemasters

**what** makes a good winemaker an extraordinary winemaker? After all, the country's wines are among the best in the world. So you need to have the skills, vision and natural ability to create the perfect taste for the wine connoisseur. Each month, *Skyways* focuses on a top South African winemaker. This month, we turn our attention to Irene Waller of La Bri.



*Read more about South Africa's top winemakers on [www.skywaysmagazine.com](http://www.skywaysmagazine.com)*

Irene joined La Bri as winemaker and general manager in October 2010. After completing her BCom, she taught mathematics and accounting for about six years before giving it all up to follow a life in wine. She gained experience in Australia and France before returning to South Africa to study a BSc in Oenology and Viticulture. Graduating cum laude, she started her career at Graham Beck Wines in Robertson where she was the winemaker until she took over the reins at La Bri. Besides overseeing the day-to-day operations at La Bri, Irene is also the Chairman of the Vignerons de Franschhoek.

La Bri, given to the De Villiers family in 1694, is one of the original nine farms given to the Huguenots. The name 'La Bri' is probably derived from the word for 'the refuge', a perfect name for this property, as it is safely nestled in the imposing amphitheatre of the Franschhoek valley.

Robin Hamilton bought the farm in 1997. At that time, the wines were being made from La Bri grapes at the Franschhoek Wine Co-Operative. From 2006 onwards vineyards were gradually replanted, a new cellar was built, and the labels were redesigned. The labels feature indigenous Cape flowers and herbs, playing on the symbiotic relationship between wine and fynbos, so apparent in the Cape.

While boasting one of the more modern cellars in the valley, La Bri still has the old tasting room, filled with cobwebs and old machinery. Predominantly red wine



grapes are planted at La Bri, namely Merlot, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz. Viognier and Chardonnay make up the white wine contingent.