

REWRITING THE NARRATIVE

Kiara Scott Farmer – 2024 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year

In the heart of South Africa's wine country, Kiara Scott Farmer's journey is rewriting history. As the youngest female head winemaker in South Africa and the 2024 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year, her story is a compelling mix of resilience, ambition, and exceptional talent. Born and raised in Mitchells Plain, a township on the Cape Flats, Kiara's rise to prominence is a testament to the power of determination.

Mitchells Plain is not where one would expect to find the beginnings of a winemaking career. Growing up amidst the socio-economic challenges of gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence, Kiara was determined to break free from the cycles that entrapped so many in her community.

Her curiosity about wine emerged in a most unlikely environment. "While growing up, I didn't want to be like some of the people I was used to seeing – impoverished, aimlessly hanging around on street corners, intoxicated. It was in this environment

that I became curious about wine – how it was made, what it could represent," Kiara recalls.

Despite initial resistance from her family, who struggled to understand her career choice, Kiara pursued her passion, enrolling at Elsenburg Agricultural Training Institute to study Oenology and Viticulture. Later, she augmented her knowledge with business studies at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business.

Her entry into the wine world was anything but typical, but her tenacity and refusal to conform to societal expectations set her on the path to greatness.







MAKING OF A VISIONARY WINEMAKER

While at Elsenburg, Kiara's talent was recognised by the prestigious Cape Winemakers Guild (CWG) Protégé Programme. This opportunity provided her with unparalleled mentorship, connecting her with some of South Africa's most accomplished winemakers. Among them was Duncan Savage, who saw in Kiara not only immense potential but also an unrelenting passion for the craft.

Under Duncan's guidance, Kiara joined Brookdale Estate as an assistant winemaker, where they collaborated on the estate's maiden vintage, the 2017 Brookdale Chenin Blanc. This wine set a new benchmark for elegance and terroir-driven complexity, establishing Brookdale as a rising star in South Africa's wine scene.

By 2019, Kiara had taken over as Brookdale's sole winemaker at just 26, becoming the youngest head female winemaker in the country. This milestone was celebrated widely, and in 2022, the Western Cape Provincial Parliament formally congratulated

her achievements, stating she serves as an inspiration for young women everywhere.

CRAFTING AN AWARD-WINNING CHENIN BLANC

Kiara's dedication to minimal intervention winemaking and her meticulous attention to detail culminated in the creation of the 2022 Brookdale Old Vine Chenin Blanc, the wine that secured her the Diners Club Winemaker of the Year Award. The Chenin Blanc was crafted from old vines planted in 1985 on decomposed shale and granite soils, showcasing a terroir that Kiara describes as "stony and resilient."

The grapes were hand-picked in stages to optimise ripeness, then aged for 22 months in a combination of 500-litre barrels and 2,000-litre Austrian oak foudres. Despite the challenges posed by the warmer 2022 vintage, the wine retained remarkable elegance, concentration, and acidity.

Tasting notes describe the wine as "subtly keyed, with restrained aromatics of pear skin, honeycomb, and golden





citrus. The palate is deep, concentrated, and layered, with yellow apples, kumquat, and peaches balanced by a savoury finish.” For Kiara, the wine reflects the unique story of the vines, the vintage, and her team’s unwavering dedication.

For Kiara, winemaking is about more than just crafting exceptional wines. It’s about storytelling, showcasing a specific site and vintage, and working with a passionate team to bring the vision to life.

“One of the most rewarding elements of my job is watching and guiding grapes turn into wine, expressing their unique character,” Kiara shares. She takes equal pride in mentoring her team and witnessing their growth, knowing that her leadership extends far beyond the cellar.

CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS

As a young woman in a male-dominated industry, Kiara has faced her share of challenges. However, she sees her achievements as a way to break stereotypes and inspire others. “When I decided on my career, my family wasn’t too pleased. They wondered where I even came up with this idea,”

she recalls with a laugh. But their initial doubts were no match for Kiara's determination to defy expectations.

Her journey has also reshaped perceptions of South African winemaking, bringing diversity to an industry steeped in tradition.

CULTIVATING A LEGACY

Kiara's ambitions for the future

are as bold as her achievements. "An important goal for me is acquiring my own farm," she reveals, envisioning a space where she can continue to innovate and inspire others.

She is also deeply committed to sustainability, both in her winemaking practices and in the industry's growth as a whole. By focusing on the unique characteristics of South African terroir,

Kiara aims to elevate the country's reputation on the global stage.

RECOGNITION AND INSPIRATION

Winning the Diners Club Winemaker of the Year Award is not only a personal milestone for Kiara but also a reflection of the industry's progress. Her success proves that talent and hard work can overcome even the most daunting





barriers, and it serves as a rallying cry for the next generation of winemakers, especially young women from underrepresented backgrounds.

Kiara's story is one of triumph against the odds, and her journey continues to inspire. From her beginnings in Mitchells Plain to her rise as one of South Africa's most celebrated winemakers, she is a beacon of hope, proving that the power of vision and perseverance can transform challenges into achievements.

As Brookdale Estate continues to thrive under her leadership, and as Kiara pursues her goal of owning her own farm, one thing is clear: her legacy is just beginning. With every bottle of wine she crafts, Kiara Scott Farmer tells a story of resilience, passion, and the enduring beauty of South African wine. 🍷

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