

Cheers to Family!

Seven sisters are helping change the political landscape of South Africa, one bottle of wine at a time.

The wine industry can be exceptionally difficult to break into, let alone actually thrive and succeed. There's so much a winemaker has to know about science, horticulture, viticulture, and micro and macro climates, and then they have to make good wines and know how to market and sell them.

So imagine trying to launch a brand-new label in post-apartheid South Africa during the prime of the civil rights movement in a country whose wine industry earns an estimated \$3 billion annually. Oh, and now picture doing all of this as one of just two black-owned wineries in the country. That's when things get really difficult.

Well, that's exactly what the seven women behind the Seven

DRINK WELL, DO GOOD

Come out to taste and support Seven Sisters and other South African winemakers at the homecoming stop of the Drink Well, Do Good tour, a 14-city global event that makes its way to Atlanta on May 21 and 22. Drink Well, Do Good is sponsored by the International Society of Africans in Wine, an organization founded by Atlantans Stephen Satterfield and PJ Bullock. ISAW partners with black-owned and socially progressive vineyards in Africa to support the development of African farmers and their communities. Drink Well, Do Good will feature local food, wine and art exhibitions in cities all over the United States, as well as Cape Town, South Africa, and all proceeds will benefit ISAW's mission to raise \$150,000 to assist social projects in the South African wine industry. toastafrica.com or isawfoundation.org.

Sisters label have accomplished in three short years. The women are all sisters from the Brutus family—hence the name Seven Sisters—that grew up in Paternoster, South Africa, one of the country's oldest fishing villages on the West Coast just 90 minutes from Cape Town. But 25 years ago, the siblings (they also have a baby brother) were all separated when their father lost his job of 20 years with a local fishing company, forcing the Brutuses from their home and scattering the sisters all over South Africa to live with other family members.

"I was just 17 when we had to move, and I knew then I would eventually own my own business because I never wanted to be fired the way my father was," Vivian Kleynhans says. So 20 years later, Kleynhans founded Seven Sisters Wines with the help of her siblings, reuniting the family again.

"In the beginning, we had to partner with other wineries because we didn't own our own vineyard," Kleynhans says. "It was clear [people in the wine industry] didn't want us to succeed, and within two years we were bankrupt." But that didn't stop Kleynhans. She delved even deeper into learning all she could about the winemaking process, taking intensive classes on wine and oenology. That's also when she met Selena Cuffe, Harvard grad and owner of Los Angeles-based wine importer Heritage Link Brands, and everything changed.

Now the sisters own 9 hectares (about 22 acres) of land near Stellenbosch, South Africa, and import their wines to 41 states in



Photos courtesy of Heritage Link Brands and Seven Sisters winery.



The Brutus sisters own Seven Sisters winery, just one of two black-owned wineries in South Africa.

the United States through Heritage. The wines have flavor profiles matching the personalities of each of the seven sisters, a concept we think is brilliant.

For instance, the oldest sister, Carol's wine is a 100-percent cabernet sauvignon that's dry and full-bodied, but soft and easy with a long finish. "She's the oldest so she likes to boss us around," Kleynhans says. Odelia Buketraube, named for the youngest sister, Odelia, on the other hand, is made from 100-percent Buketraube grapes. It's exceptionally light, sweet and fruity, "just like the baby in the family," Kleynhans says.

Kleynhans' wine Vivian, an exceptional sauvignon blanc, has earthy notes of grass and fruit, and last year was the first-ever South African wine to be served on an American airline.

So what's next for these enterprising ladies? Currently,

they are helping their brother, John Brutus, through oenology and viticulture school in Elsenberg, South Africa, and plan to bring him on to take over the winemaking process at Seven Sisters. They also are launching a new label, John Brutus, this year in his honor.

"I feel like we are the forerunners in the transformation of the wine industry in South Africa," Kleynhans says. "It's special that we are able to be part of that." Seven Sisters is available in Atlanta at Tower Wine & Spirits, Ansley Merchants, Whole Foods Market and more, as well as several local restaurants. sevensisters.co.za. —SARAH GLEIM

