

ADAM NEILL PRODUCTIONS

Introduction

One of the great South African products and businesses is wine and the industry that surrounds it. South African wine has an international reputation that places its product in the top tier of global wine producers, and South Africans at home and abroad are justifiably proud of this South African success story.

That pride in South African wine translates and is manifest in the number of individuals both in the country and outside of it who maintain and nourish private cellars holding a wealth of South African wines. These private cellar owners are often deeply passionate about their wines and have a unique insight and response to the wines they hold and why they feel those wines are important to them.

The cellars themselves, be they in private homes or on the estates of our world renowned wine farms, have a unique history that reflects and celebrates their South African heritage.

Many of these individuals are leaders in their particular fields; captains of industry, members of parliament, or even simply eccentric collectors of their common passion – South African wine.

Concept

‘Private Cellars’ is a documentary/talk show that visits and reveals the pride and passion behind these collections of fine wine.

Each episode centres around the visit to explore these collections with the owner of the cellar (the ‘host’) in attendance to guide the viewer through their collection, to share with us some of the best wines that they have in the cellar and to use that informal space to discuss their lives, their views on the world and their opinions on the future.

Each owner of the collection will be asked whether they would like to have friends or family (the ‘guests’) to join them and us on the show, so that we create as informal a space as possible for discussion as well as sharing the wine and broadening range of reaction to its value.

Concurrent to the display of wine, each episode will invite a local or renowned South African restaurateur or chef to provide, with due acknowledgment on the show, products that they feel support the emphasis on fine South African product. So, for example, whilst discussing the wine, our host and his guests will be provided with a selection of fine cheese, a distinctly South African meal or even, very simply, a range of fruits that compliment the wine.

The ‘flavour’ of the show each week will naturally change with the character of each cellar visited and the character of each different ‘host’, providing a sense of variety balanced on the construct and purpose of the series.

Style

The show will have a very intimate style. The presenter (and by declension the crew) are guests in the house of the host. We are being given the privilege, and through us, our viewers, of seeing a little part of someone's life and having them share their views and opinions with us. We are also getting to learn a little more about the great wines of this country.

Part of that intimacy will rest on the informality of the show. We are not asking guests into a studio environment with which they are unfamiliar. Similarly we are not setting up a formal interview at someone's office or home. The nature of the questions and the run of the discussion will be informal and, whilst the natural run of conversation may take in some serious topics, the over-riding mood will be light and, above all, inquisitive into the character and nature of the wine being tasted.

Presenter

The presenter need not actually have a vast knowledge of wine in this country. The purpose of the series is to explore the wines and the presenter would act like a guide for the viewer, learning and discovering alongside the viewer rather than preaching and being all-knowing.

Naturally the presenter would need to have a certain passion for wine and a small level of understanding would be constructive, this can be amply supplied by descent research. It would not be out of bounds for the presenter to carry with them in each episode a copy of a reputable wine guide to which they, the 'host' and the guests can refer in the program. This gives the audience a sympathy with the presenter and can also provide leverage for discussion throughout the episode.

Above all else the presenter would be warm, chatty and with an intelligence and presence of mind to be able to stimulate and guide discussion amongst the host, the guests and himself.

Episode Outline

The show opens with the arrival at the house or estate at which the cellar is housed. We move with our presenter. The host for the evening greets the presenter and they may pause briefly to discuss the estate, the sunset, the state of the world etc. A warm introduction by the presenter of the host leads us into the host taking us to his cellar or the tasting area (should the actual cellar be too small for a gathering). The host might, for example, opt to rather have us in their dining room, or on their patio.

If the gathering is not actually in the cellar, this would be the point at which the host took our presenter down to the cellar where they could discuss the history of the cellar, the history of the collection and any initial revelations from the host about his passion for South African wine.

Whether in the cellar or a separate tasting area, the host introduces the guests that he has invited for the evening, and we perhaps ask one of them what they think of the host's cellar. The presenter is always encouraging discussion and contribution.

The host will then introduce the wines that they have selected for the evening, with a brief introduction of each if they feel like it.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

We return to the gathering and the presenter, or the host (or even one of the guests for that matter) pours the first wine. As it is poured and first sips are taken, the presenter asks the host what it is about the wine that they like? Why they purchased it? Where did they first taste it? Where is it from? Any range of questions. Where in South Africa is it? How many bottles he has? The point is to get the discussion around the wine going. The presenter may read an excerpt from the wine guide and see if the gathering agrees with the guide in terms of taste, quality and the like.

The presenter may choose this moment to broaden the discussion by introducing a topical subject. It seems important to stress that this need not be solely around the weighty issues of the day. It could be simply a quirky piece of news that is enjoying popular currency. It may involve some point of interest taken from what one of the guests does in life; maybe they are artists or scientists amongst the guests and discussion can be created around their work.

Mixing in with this discussion we move on to the next wine. The host again tells us of his relationship to the wine; why they like it, where it came from etc. Again the presenter guides and stimulates discussion and re-action from the host and the guests as well as chipping in with their own opinion.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

As we return to the final segment, the food or produce is brought in. The presenter gives an introduction to the food, explaining where it has come from, what makes it special and allows the guests to sample it. The food can be as elaborate as a meal presented by a caterer from a restaurant, in which case the presenter, hosts and guests can be seated at table and served, or it can simply be a platter of selections from a producer, for example of cheeses, of fine meat cuts or hors d'oeuvre.

In this section the presenter can move the discussion towards more weighty issues of the day. This allows us to capitalise on the position that our host and their guests have in the country. Many of both guests and hosts will be leaders in their field and as such it would seem a shame to have this intimate time with them and not allow them the opportunity to express themselves. It should be noted that this does not imply that the discussion or questions from the presenter should be combative or purposefully controversial. At all times we are creating an informal and congenial mood.

As the show runs to time we leave the 'party' and the viewer is left with the sensation that the wine and the discussion will go on long into the night. The viewer has shared an intimate experience of taste, talk and above all fine wine. Each show should linger on the viewer palate, drawing them back for the next episode to share the taste, talk, fine wine and intimacy of the next Private Cellar.

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