

South Africa at a Cape Wine 2004 seminar on Shiraz, which some winemakers see as the future for South Africa.

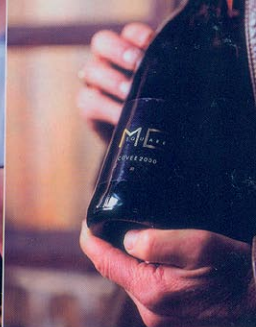
Wine is not what they traditionally make in the village where Christophe grew up, near Caen in Normandy. It's calvados, an apple spirit. But this powerfully built Norman, who looks like a rugby player, has taken to the art of the vintner with Gallic gusto. He started off importing barrels from Burgundy, Bordeaux and California, after he arrived here with his first wife, a South African, seven years ago. "Even though they're all oak, barrels from different countries have different flavours. California barrels give vanilla and coconut flavours for example."

Now he makes a small range of wine in Stellenbosch and bottles it here in his friend's shed. Two have been named after his daughters, 10-year-old Ameena, and his newborn Anais. His second wife, Sabrina, is also South African.

The bottles carry the family crest from the Middle Ages. He says d'Orrance is the medieval – maybe even noble – version of his family name Durand.

Jean-Luc is the irrepressible maverick of the trio. "He has a kind of alien character, out of space," is how Jean-Vincent puts it. "It's refreshing to be in his company."

Even after 25 years in the industry, most of Jean-Luc's South African colleagues don't know quite what to make of the 52-



**"We're all pushing limits. It's a new trend in the industry."**

year-old pixie behind the acclaimed MC Square Chardonnay. MC Square, an abbreviation of Methode Cap Classique, is typical of his offbeat style.

He arrived here as a schoolboy, with his parents from Katanga in the south of Zaire, where his father was a mechanical engineer on the mines. "When things got difficult we drove south because that was the tarred road. It took 56 hours." He ended up studying wine at Elsenburg and learning Afrikaans. "Those crazy boys used to put their military boots on the table, like this," he says putting his much classier French lace-ups on the table and checking my reaction through his glasses.

Since his grandfather was still living in France, in Grasse, he went over and discovered French wine. It was a revelation. "South Africa just didn't have the same variety, or lightness and fruitiness. You must know the South African wine industry has its roots in the old Dutch East Indian brandewijn and in the port the British gave the sailors so they wouldn't get scurvy. That's why South African wines really only started coming in at a commercial level in the eighties, when people started travelling and bringing in new varieties."

Though he's worked at Uitkyk, Spier and Avontuur, he prefers being a consultant.



"You don't get to be part of the furniture too quickly." And he enjoys the detective work. "You're there to solve their problems. Why is the wine that arrives in England not the same wine that left the cellar? Did the container sit too long in the harbour and the wine cook in the sun?"

He's had two wives so far. His best friend went off with the last one. When she kicked him out, Jean-Luc gave his friend a bed in the house he's built for himself in Somerset West, of stone, railway sleepers and quarry tiles. "You've got to be civilised about these things," he tells me with a grin and a shrug. "Anyway we could bond over the fact that she'd got tired of both of us."



Jean-Luc Sweets