



Life begins at

40
Karena du Plessis, 43, of Cape Town, had her first wine made when she was 42.

My experience with wine before I turned 40 was pretty much limited to drinking a glass now and then! I only started thinking about making wine when I read a newspaper article about small vineyards in Cape Town. My father-in-law owns a small plot of land behind the Olympia Café in Kalk Bay and I asked Jean-Vincent Ridon from Signal Hill Winery to evaluate the plot's potential for a small vineyard – he gave it the go-ahead. I then presented the idea to my husband, Alex Bassios, and Kenneth McClarty, the owner of the Olympia, and they agreed to give it a go.

I didn't know the first thing about vineyards, so I started by doing research and asking people in the industry tons of questions. Everyone I approached was fantastic and generous with their time and expertise.

We cleared the plot and had a planting party in September 2002. We spent the day digging holes, planting vines and partying. Then the hard work started. I manage the project with the help of a gardener and input from my dad. There's always plenty to do – spraying for disease in summer, watering when it's really hot and pruning in autumn. It all comes together when we pick the grapes in February or March, depending on when the sugar levels are right.

In February 2006, the vineyard was finally ready for harvest but the sugar levels in the fruit rose suddenly, which meant we needed to pick everything in one day. I panicked but Kenneth e-mailed all his Olympia customers and invited them to a harvest breakfast. Loads of people turned up and brought along their pruning shears and scissors. It was brilliant!

The grapes were turned into wine at Jean-Vincent's winery. Holding that first bottle in my hands was a wonderful feeling. I love seeing the wine, Signal Hill Kalk Bay Vineyards Cabernet Franc, at the Olympia Café and we've just been awarded 3½ stars in the 2008 *John Platter South African Wine Guide*.

I didn't mind admitting that I knew nothing about vineyards when I set out. I was open to learning. That maturity only comes with age.' – *Lenina Rassool*