

HAMILTON RUSSELL

INTERVIEW WITH TALITA
ENGELBRECHT FROM HAMILTON
RUSSELL VINEYARDS, SITUATED
AT HEMEL-EN-AARDE VALLEY,
SOUTH AFRICA.

What is your background, before
you joined the team at Hamilton
Russell Vineyards?

I worked at Anglo American as a secretary,
a teetollar without any interest in wine!

*"My cottage is truly
my happy place —
surrounded by the garden
I tend with love.."*



What made you choose to work in the wine industry, and specifically at Hamilton Russell Vineyards?

When my mother moved to Hermanus — then just a quiet fishing and retirement village — I went to visit her. During that visit, she suggested I meet Tim Hamilton Russell, who was looking for a secretary. From our very first meeting, I was struck by his drive and determination. Tim was a remarkably tenacious individual, deeply focused on creating a wine farm in a completely new and untested region, and doing so without even a quota to produce alcohol. His passion and persistence were truly inspiring. He wasn't just a pioneer in winemaking — he was also ahead of his time in his approach to social issues. Tim was a strong advocate for minimum wages for farm workers and played a leading role in ending the “dop” system, where workers were paid in wine. He firmly opposed apartheid and worked to improve both employment practices and the broader social development of his staff.

I agreed to relocate and joined the farm in June 1991. Later that same year, his son Anthony took over the property, bringing his own bold vision. He was committed to producing site-specific Pinot Noir and Chardonnay — an unusual and innovative approach in South Africa at the time. Back then, South Africa was still under international sanctions, and it wasn't until Nelson Mandela's release in 1994 that we were able to start exporting. Even so, we sent an experimental shipment to the UK as early as 1993.

Anthony also established a preschool on the farm, with 45 children and three teachers — another example of the family's long-term commitment to their community. Both Tim and Anthony were always visionaries — forward-thinking, principled, and determined to make a meaningful impact. It's because of that spirit and purpose that I'm still here today. A great and generous family. Never a dull moment!

What is your favorite place around the estate, and why? Do you go there often?

I've also been fortunate to live on Hamilton Russell Vineyards for the past 20 years or so. My cottage is truly my happy place — surrounded by the garden I tend with love, visited daily by a tame peacock, and shared with my wonderfully quirky cat. I'm an avid birder too, and the natural beauty of this place makes it the perfect setting for that passion. It's a peaceful, deeply fulfilling way of life that I cherish every day.

We know that the main focus for the production at Hamilton Russell Vineyards is Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Which of those two lovely grapes is your preferred grape and why?

This is such a difficult question, like choosing between your children. Chardonnay with its lively citrus fruit and mineral hard finish is just wonderful with our abundant seafood we have in Hermanus. But nothing can beat the ethereal qualities and depth of clay grown Pinot noir. Both the wines are exceptional in their own right — each expressing its own unique style and sense of place.

I am reading up on the company history and see that it is celebration time in the company this year. How will you be celebrating this milestone at the winery?

This year we have celebrated our 50th year!! We had a number of celebrations both on the farm, in Johannesburg and London. A milestone for us all!



HAMILTON RUSSELL VINEYARDS