

# SIMON AND THE HUGUENOTS

## Sauvignon Blanc · Semillon

Simon van der Stel was the first Governor of the Dutch Cape Colony, holding office from 1691 until 1699. The town of Stellenbosch, founded in 1679, was named after him. Widely considered as father of the Cape wine industry, van der Stel was also the first Governor to be of mixed race-origin. His mother, Maria, was the daughter of an emancipated Indian slave - a fact largely unacknowledged by the previous regime.

The Huguenots were *French Protestants* who were members of the *Reformed Church*, established in 1550 by the reformer John Calvin. They were habitually persecuted for their religious beliefs. In 1598, Henry IV signed the *Edict of Nantes* which brought to an end the Wars of Religion. But after Henry IV was murdered in 1610, the discrimination of the "heretics" resumed under the guidance of Cardinal Richelieu, whose sole objective was the extermination of all Huguenots.

In 1685, Louis XIV renounced the *Edict* and declared Protestantism illegal, dictating that all Protestants should convert to Catholicism. At least 250,000 Huguenots fled the country in order that they could enjoy religious freedom. Between 1688 and 1689, the Dutch East India Company organised large-scale emigration to the Cape, since the Huguenots shared the same religious beliefs. Most were also highly skilled tradesmen or farmers - some bringing experience in viticulture – giving the Dutch another more commercial motive in helping to develop their fledgling colony.

Simon van der Stel set aside land for the Huguenots along the Berg River valley, which included Franschhoek ('French corner') and present-day Paarl. He gave orders for the French to be interspersed with the other burghers, reasoning that this assimilation would allow them *'to learn our language and morals, and be integrated with the Dutch nation'*. By 1692, some 201 French Huguenots had settled in the Cape.

The initial years of settlement were difficult. The French had to accustom themselves to a land and climate different to what they knew. They had to cultivate virgin land and fight off lions, leopards and elephants. As time progressed, they increased their vineyards and orchards and became part of their new fatherland, quickly proving their conscientious and industrious nature, with their efforts leading to a marked improvement in the quality of Cape wines. Within just two generations French ceased to exist as their home language and, after 1707, it was banned altogether in official communications with the Dutch authorities. Though their native tongue was lost after only a short time, the contribution these refugees made is firmly written into South African history. Today, some 40 Huguenot surnames survive, with many farms still bearing their original French names.

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**Wine of Origin: Stellenbosch**

**Alcohol: 13.5% vol**

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*"The first-named monarch feared them, and the latter loved them; but I neither fear nor love them."  
Louis XIII*