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[Home](#) > New Wines, New Faces: Sadie Family

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First South African producer to earn a 95-point score has the passion—plus the vineyards and talent—to improve even more

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By [James Molesworth](#)



Eben Sadie is the first South African to earn a classic rating (95-100 points) from Wine Spectator

Who: Sadie Family is owned and run by Eben Sadie, 35, who got his start in the wine business as the first winemaker at Charles Back's [Spice Route](#) winery, located in the Malmesbury region of South Africa. But Back knew Sadie had bigger plans. "I always knew he would need to do his own thing," says Back about his former protégé. "He's definitely one of our best winemakers--very good at injecting passion into what he does."

What to Drink: The Sadie Family Columella Swartland 2005 (95 points, \$78) is a blend of 80 percent Syrah and 20 percent Mourvèdre. The wine, which debuted in the 2000 vintage, is the first in South Africa to garner a classic rating (95 points or more on *Wine Spectator's* 100-point scale). The 2005 Columella offers a stunning array of blue and black fruit--blackberry, boysenberry, blueberry and currant--that is pure, driven and refined, with licorice, sweet spice, vanilla, mineral and sanguine notes fluttering throughout. Despite its concentration, it's remarkably elegant, with superb length and a seamless finish.

Where: The vines grow on three different soil types--slate, granite and clay/iron. The slate soils provide fresh, pungent red fruit and mineral notes; the granite soils produce black fruit and wild, *garrigue*-like notes, while the clay/iron soils produce dark fruit that is massive and dense, with lots of

tannins. "You can't make a wine 100 percent from this," says Sadie of the wine from the clay/iron soils. "It's too big."

How He Does It: Sadie ferments the different lots in open-top wood vats before moving them to Bordeaux barrels, 80 percent of which are new. The lots are later blended together, and after 18 to 24 months in oak the wine is bottled.

Learning Along the Way: "When I first started [making wines] I put too much of myself into the wines--acid, oak," says Sadie. "Now I've learned to back off. You can't preach *terroir* in the vineyards and not carry through in the cellar."



Creative Control: Sadie owns no vineyards, and instead leases land that he planted vines on. He also leases existing old-vine vineyards (all his leases are for 25 years) and manages the vineyards himself, meaning he makes all the viticultural decisions.

A Big Gamble: Starting the winery took everything Sadie had. He sold off his retirement annuities along with much of his personal wine cellar in order to bankroll his project. But he's confident that it was the right move. "I have everything I need financially, because I have the vineyards," says Sadie. "The [winery] buildings and all the other stuff is not as important."

More Than a One-Trick Pony: Sadie also produces a white wine called Palladius. The 2006 Palladius Swartland 2005 (91, \$55) is made from a blend of Chenin Blanc, Grenache Blanc, Viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne and Chardonnay. It's bold, with lots of apricot, nectarine, peach and melon flavors all backed by racy acidity and a long, minerally finish, where hints of spice, blanched almond and white flowers chime in. Its flavor profile is unique.

What's a Columella? Columella was a Spanish agronomist who lived in the third century and wrote about grapegrowing. Palladius, for which the white wine is named, was his successor.

Where to Find It: Sadie Family wines are available at restaurants and retailers in California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, New York and Washington, D.C.