

Leading wine estate thrilled with their new JCB 3DX Plus

Francois Malan is by his own admission a top gear man. This doesn't mean that he's addicted to a popular motoring show on British television but rather that he insists that the surface condition of the roads on his family's well-known wine estate must be such to allow him to drive in any vehicle's top gear.



And for this he believes he has a JCB Backhoe Loader to thank.

Francois and his brother, Johan, own and manage the Simonsig Wine Estate near Stellenbosch, in the heart of the picturesque Cape Winelands. Francois is the viticulturist and Johan the winemaker. The estate has been in the Malan family since 1942 when Francois and Johan's late father, Frans, arrived there. Frans Malan is credited with first making the now famous Kaapse Vonkel wine in the

Méthode Cap Classique bottle-fermented style and being one of three well-known wine makers to collectively establish the Stellenbosch Wine Route.

"The majority surface area of our land is given to our vineyards on two properties," Francois says. "This implies that we have many tractors and other mechanised equipment in constant movement on the estate, but the one that sticks in my mind is our JCB Backhoe Loader."

Francois recalls that they first bought a JCB 3CX Backhoe Loader in 2002 and it soon made its mark as the most important machine on the entire estate. "This JCB Backhoe Loader was known as the 'lifesaver' on the estate as when any tractor or sprayer got stuck, especially in our wet Cape winters, the JCB Backhoe Loader would be there to pull it out of the mud."

"I must also pay homage to that machine's permanent operator,



(From left): Jan Coetzee (Van Breda Agri Sales Manager), Francois Malan (Simonsig Wine Estate Co-owner), Pieter Williams (Simonsig Backhoe Loader Operator), Joris Jacobs (Van Breda Agri Director) and Braam van Aarde (Simonsig Wine Estate Workshop Manager).

the late Vaaltyn Moos, who sadly passed away in 2022 at the age of 74. He was a real artist with the machine, and he devised ways to use the JCB Backhoe Loader to maintain our roads by bringing in fill material and compacting it, sloping the sides so that water could run off the surface."

"He found a way to efficiently extract wooden support poles by using a sling over the front bucket when we replanted vineyards and he could stack fruit crates in the narrowest of spaces using the forks on the machine."

Simonsig's JCB 3CX Backhoe Loader was eventually sold out of hand with what Francois believes to be in excess of 20 000 hours on its clock, with the search for a replacement machine having started in 2015.

"We visited the NAMPO Agricultural Show in 2015 and were somewhat overwhelmed by quotations from a variety of suppliers," he says. "The backhoe loader market is clearly a very competitive one but two main factors persuaded us to stay with the JCB brand that we knew so well."

Francois says what stood out for them was the longevity and

versatility they enjoyed from their first JCB 3CX Backhoe Loader, which clearly showed the quality of its design and build. Then there was the almost irresistible financial incentive offered by their JCB dealer, Van Breda Agri, with the backing of JCB in South Africa and a leading local banking group, which they felt they would have been foolish to ignore.

"We were pleased when our new JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader was delivered in December 2022, in good time for our harvesting season, and we were impressed with the many new and improved features on the current model," Francois says. "JCB seems to have paid particular attention to operator comfort and, as the machine is often deployed in remote areas of our estate where the operator works alone, it is particularly pleasing to know that operator fatigue can be reduced."

"Our new backhoe operator, Pieter Williams, reports that he took to the new machine quite quickly, that the controls are responsive while the visibility of the work area from the air-conditioned cab is excellent and the new JCB 3DX Plus runs much quieter."

Being used to seeing JCB Backhoe Loaders work in diverse conditions

from digging graves to backfilling pipelines, the sight of this bright yellow machine starkly contrasted against the rich plum colours of grape skins exiting the grape pressing plant was an unusual one. The ease with which the operator loaded the mass of organic skins and stalks onto a trailer for eventual use as compost was impressive as the JCB 3DX Plus has an adequately tight turning circle to work safely within areas where people move around as well.

Francois and his team also enjoy the JCB LiveLink telematics system that will in due course remind them of upcoming maintenance milestones, so ensuring that warranties stay in place, which will in turn benefit the longevity of the machine.

"We're confident that given our good experience with our first JCB Backhoe Loader, we've made the correct choice in staying with the JCB brand. Having the dealer, Van Breda Agri, with whom we already have a long relationship, right on our doorstep in Stellenbosch gives us the confidence that this JCB 3DX Plus Backhoe Loader is going to outlive the previous one and ensure that our road surfaces keep us going in top gear," he says.