



KEY FINDINGS

Entries were down but quality was up – whereas last year's RisCura Red Hot Wine Awards attracted 85 entries from 64 producers, the average score being 85.3 points, this year there were 59 wines from 46 producers and the average score was 87.2.

There were 13 wines to be rated 90 or higher on the 100-point quality scale and of these, nine were from Stellenbosch, one from Constantia, one from Durbanville, one from Walker Bay (Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge) and one a multi-regional blend (Darling and Stellenbosch). The district of Stellenbosch may have become unfashionable among younger wine enthusiasts on account of it being perceived as both a bit dour and a bit haughty, once again the inherent quality of what's in the bottle can't be gainsaid.

What to make of the category based on this tasting? The average price of the 13 wines to rate 90-plus was R347.92 a bottle (ranging from R115 for the Dombeya Fenix 2011 to R1 050 for Mveme Raats MR de Compostella 2014) so there is no doubt that this remains a prestige category in the South African context.

It appeared to the panel that the fundamental issue with which producers are wrestling is how to combine power with freshness. Wines with super-concentrated fruit and less aggressive tannins are now considered the epitome of luxury drinking in many quarters (driven in part by US critic Robert Parker and his ilk) but these often come at the expense of complexity and a certain liveliness in the glass.

There was a dichotomy therefore between wines which were sweet/soft and those which were savoury/austere. In order to achieve the former, producers seemed to be inclined to pick ultra-ripe and a few of these wines appeared very rich and dense to the point of monolithic. With regards the latter, some appeared underdone – not so much “elegant” but light-weight and vegetal.

It has to be said that South Africa's top producers in this category now have a handle on generating wines showing fruit purity like never before. There are plenty of wines which are indeed very sexy on account of their luscious fruit, the fact that they involve blending arguably contributing to a more complete and less severe drinking experience than is the case with single-variety Cabernet Sauvignon.

What is perhaps a little worrying is how “international” many of the wines seem as a result. The panel tended to feel that the obsession with wines showing riper fruit with smoother tannins meant that “terroir” (for which read anything showing finesse and complexity) was being forgone. Any pyrazine-related character is now marginal rather than pervasive and, in fact, a little “green-ness” is no bad thing – green pepper, mint and eucalyptus aren't desirable but herbs and fynbos certainly can be.

It would be unfortunate, however, if the impression was created that there are no classically styled wines to be found at all. Rather what we are seeing is two stylistic schools establishing themselves, which may be divergent but ultimately are equally valid and it is up to the individual consumer to decide what he or she prefers.

JUDGING PROCEDURES

59 entries were received from 46 producers for this year's competition. The judging panel was chaired by myself and further consisted of two trusted colleagues, namely Roland Peens and James Pietersen, both of Wine Cellar, a Cape Town firm which brokers and cellars fine wine. We tasted blind, scoring done according to the 100-point system.

TASTING NOTES

94

Groot Constantia Gouverneurs Reserve Red 2013

Price: R327

Total production: 33 000 bottles

Abv: 14.4%

32% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Merlot, 28% Cabernet franc and 9% Petit Verdot. Matured for 16 months in French oak, 80% new. Red and black fruit, fresh herbs, some maritime character, pencil shavings, vanilla and spice. Dense and full yet balanced on the palate – excellent fruit concentration, fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins. A very polished offering.

93

Ernie Els Signature 2013

Price: R650

Total production: 18 000 bottles

Abv: 14.75%

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 5% Malbec, 5% Petit Verdot. Matured for 20 months in French oak, 70% new. Red and black fruit, floral perfume, vanilla and spice. A powerful, luxuriously-styled wine with luscious fruit, bright acidity and smooth tannins. Extraordinarily rich and dense but still balanced and savoury.

Mveme Raats MR de Compostella 2014

Price: R1 050

Total production: 7 200 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

41% Cabernet Franc, 19% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Malbec, 14% Merlot and 9% Petit Verdot. Each variety matured separately for 12 months in barrel, the blended wine for another 12 months, a third each first-, second- and third-fill. A complex nose showing red and black fruit, some pleasant herbal character, oyster shell and spice. Excellent fruit purity, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Focused and taut, the finish exceptionally long and dry.

92

Delaire Graff Botmaskop 2014

Price: R225

Total production: 60 000 bottles

Abv: 14.7%

63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 17% Cabernet Franc, 10% Merlot, 8% Petit Verdot and 2% Malbec. Matured for 16 months in French oak, 50% new. Red and black fruit, fresh herbs, a definite floral note plus some attractive oak character. Excellent fruit expression, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Already quite approachable now but has the fruit weight to reward maturation.

Hartenberg The Mackenzie 2012

Price: R450

Total production: 3 814 bottles

Abv: 14.65%

90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 8% Merlot and 2% Petit Verdot. Matured for 19 months in French oak, 100% new. Red and black fruit, a subtle leafy quality and a touch of vanilla. Full bodied but focused and rather stylish – good fruit expression, fresh acidity and fine tannins, the oak well judged. Super-long finish.

Spier Creative Block 5 2013

Price: R139

Total production: 81 000 bottles

Abv: 14.7%

44% Cabernet Sauvignon, 38% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc, 7% Malbec 7% and 3% Petit Verdot (combination of Stellenbosch and Darling vineyards). Matured for 18 months in French oak, 60% new. Red, black and blue fruit plus attractive oak. Rich and ripe – plenty of sweet fruit but also good freshness and fine tannins. Dense and textured with a long, austere finish.

Vriesenhof Kallista 2010

Price: R240/750ml bottle and R500/1.5l bottle

Total production: 12 244 750ml bottles and 1 208 1.5l bottles

Abv: 14.18%

35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Merlot, 24% Cabernet Franc and 8% Malbec. 24 months in French oak barrels and another 24 months in 4 000l vats. A complex nose of red and black fruit plus fynbos, oyster shell, earthiness and pencil shavings. Medium bodied with bright acidity and fine, spicy tannins – one for the classicists.

91

Dombeya Fenix 2011

Price: R115

Total production: 6 000 bottles

Abv: 14.36%

56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Merlot and 7% Malbec. Matured for 12 months in mainly older French oak. A brooding nose showing dark fruit, some leafiness, tar and earth. Dense and full bodied with firm tannins but not without freshness. Old school but pleasingly so.

Eikendal Classique 2014

Price: Not yet released.

Total production: 15 000 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

50% Merlot, 33% Cabernet Sauvignon, 13% Cabernet Franc and 4% Petit Verdot. A different oaking regime for each component, maturation lasting between 16 and 18 months. Red and black berries, violets and a little graphite. Sweet fruit upfront offset by fresh acidity, the tannins firm but fine. Great poise and length.

Uva Mira O.T.V. 2014

Price: R600

Total production: 1 576 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

60% Cabernet Franc, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon, the former matured for 17 months, the latter for 18 months in French oak, 100% new. Black and blue berries plus an attractive cigar-box note. Rich and full bodied with plenty of sweet, ripe fruit, fresh acidity and firm tannins. Dead sexy.

90

Creation Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon Petit Verdot 2014

Price: R175

Total production: 5 600 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

53% Merlot, 31% Cabernet Sauvignon and 16% Petit Verdot. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 31% new. Red fruit, some herbal character and attractive oak-derived character on the nose. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins, the finish gently savoury. Possesses real detail.

90

Diemersdal Private Collection 2014

Price: R132

Total production: 48 000 bottles

Abv: 14.46%

59% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Merlot, 6% Petit Verdot, 2% Malbec and 1% Cabernet Franc. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 20% new. Very fragrant on the nose with top notes of violets and fynbos before red berries and a touch of vanilla. Medium bodied with lively acidity and fine tannins. Flavourful without being weighty, this wine stands out for its prettiness.

Rustenberg John X Merriman 2013

Price: R170

Total production: 138 500 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

52% Merlot, 38% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Malbec, 4% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot. Matured for 20 months in French oak, 35% new. A little reduction on the nose but also red and black fruit. Rich and full but balanced – pure fruit, bright acidity and smooth tannins.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Allee Bleue Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2013	Banghoek	84
Allee Bleue L'Amour Toujours 2012	Banghoek	87
Bartinney Élevage 2010	Stellenbosch	84
Beaumont Ariane 2014	Bot River	83
Buitenverwachting Christine 2011	Constantia	87
Constantia Glen Three 2013	Constantia	84
Creation Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon Petit Verdot 2014	Walker Bay	90
Delaire Graff Botmaskop 2014	Stellenbosch	92
Deux Frères Liberté 2012	Stellenbosch	86
Diemersdal M.M. Louw 2014	Durbanville	86
Diemersdal Private Collection 2011	Durbanville	87
Diemersdal Private Collection 2013	Durbanville	87
Diemersdal Private Collection 2014	Durbanville	90
Dombeya Fenix 2011	Stellenbosch	91
Eikendal Classique 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Ernie Els Signature 2012	Stellenbosch	89
Ernie Els Signature 2013	Stellenbosch	93
Ernie Els Meritage Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	85
Gabriëlskloof Five Arches 2012	Bot River	85
Gabriëlskloof The Blend 2013	Bot River	87
Glen Carlou Grand Classique 2012	Paarl	86
Groot Constantia Gouverneurs Reserve Red 2013	Constantia	94
Hartenberg The Mackenzie 2012	Stellenbosch	92
Holden Manz Big G 2012	Franschhoek	85
Idiom Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot Petit Verdot 2010	Stellenbosch	84
Idiom 2012	Stellenbosch	87
Jordan Cobblers Hill 2013	Stellenbosch	88
Kaapzicht Bin 3 2013	Stellenbosch	86
Kaapzicht Steytler Pentagon 2012	Stellenbosch	85
La Bri Affinity 2013	Franschhoek	87
Laibach Fredrich Laibach 2014	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	88
Laibach The Ladybird 2014		84
La Vierge Nymphomane 2014	Cape South Coast	87
Longridge Eliptika 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Marianne Desirade 2012	Simonsberg-Paarl	87
Marianne Desirade 2013	Simonsberg-Paarl	82
Marvelous Blue 2014	Western Cape	87
Morgenster 2012	Stellenbosch	88
Mulderbosch Faithful Hound 2014	Western Cape	88

Muratie Ansela van de Caab 2012	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	85
Mveme Raats MR de Compostella 2014	Stellenbosch	93
Overgaauw Tria Corda 2013	Stellenbosch	85
Nitida Calligraphy 2014	Durbanville	87
Paserene Marathon 2014	Western Cape	87
Raats Red Jasper 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Rustenberg John X Merriman 2013	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	90
Simonsig Tiara 2011	Stellenbosch	88
Simonsig Tiara 2012	Stellenbosch	87
Spier Creative Block 5 2013	Coastal Region	92
Steenberg Echo Red Blend 2013	Coastal Region	85
Stellenrust Timeless 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Thelema Rabelais 2012	Stellenbosch	88
Vergelegen GVB 2012	Stellenbosch	84
Uva Mira O.T.V. 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Vilafonté Series C 2013	Paarl	84
Vilafonté Series M 2013	Paarl	85
Vriesenhof Kallista 2010	Stellenbosch	92
Waverley Hills Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2014	Tulbagh	82
Warwick Trilogy 2012	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	87