



**CAPE
BORDEAUX
RED BLEND
REPORT
2017**

KEY FINDINGS

Why have Bordeaux-style red blends become such a fundamental part of the South African fine wine scene? Originally, the reason they were made must have been as an attempt to gain some of the respect afforded to the classed growths of the famous French region but we now live in an time where we must stand or fall on our merits and the primary motivation for this category therefore becomes that if two or more grape varieties are to be combined, then the result should be more interesting than any of the components on their own.

And indeed the panel once again did notice that the best of these wines deliver a particularly satisfying drinking experience, less severe than is often the case with single-variety Cabernet Sauvignon and more nuanced than single-variety Merlot. More treble and bass, more light and shade in the end-result, if you will.

The corollary of this is that many of the less highly rated wines weren't necessarily of poor quality but rather just straightforward – the panel left with a sense that the end-wine wasn't much better than the individual components would've been to start with.

Genuinely characterful wines start with genuinely characterful grapes and the panel was happy to note that they were very few wines which showed over-ripe character. If anything, the opposite was in evidence with a few wines looking a bit thin and under-done. Efforts to achieve elegance are to be commended but the best wines tend to have real substance without appearing unduly sweet or alcoholic.

There were an array of vintages entered, the oldest being 2007 and 2015 which the panel found challenging – many of what turned out to be the 2012s and 2013s appeared overly advanced (both puzzling and alarming) while the 2015s on the other hand were difficult to judge on account of being excessively primary and unintegrated.

Unappealing pyrazine character, excessive acid additions and clumsy oaking were noted in a few instances but these are perennial bugbears. On the whole, this was a very good showing for the category with 25 out of the 60 wines rating 90-plus on the 100-point quality scale. There's plenty of experimentation going on in the South African winelands right now but it seems the Cape Bordeaux Red Blend will be with us a while yet.

JUDGING PROCEDURES

60 entries were received from 45 producers. The judging panel was chaired by myself and further consisted of two trusted colleagues, namely Roland Peens and James Pietersen, both of Wine Cellar, Cape Town merchants and cellarers of fine wine. We tasted blind, ratings done according to the 100-point system. Final scores were awarded on the basis of discussion that involved retasting where necessary rather than relying solely on arithmetic averaging.

Christian Eedes,
Editor, Winemag.co.za

TASING NOTES

94

Thelema Rabelais 2013

Price: R475

Total production: 6 400 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Petit Verdot. Matured for 20 months in French oak, 80% new. A gorgeous nose of red and black berries, floral perfume, some leafiness, oyster shell and pencil shavings. A supremely well balanced wine with wonderful fruit expression, freshness and length. Possesses proper detail.

93

Morgenster 2011

Price: R389

Total production: Not disclosed.

Abv: 14.5%

39% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Petit Verdot and 13% Cabernet Franc. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 60% new. Red and black berries, a slight leafy quality plus subtle notes of oak. Beautiful structure – concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Really classy.

93

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. Very expressive on the nose with notes of red and black fruit, floral perfume, tea leaf plus attractive oak character. Lovely depth, the tannins firm but fine, this is serious stuff!

93

Tokara Director's Reserve Red 2013

Price: R390

Total production: 38 000 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

67% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Merlot, 7% Petit Verdot, 5% Cabernet Franc and 5% Malbec. Matured for 22 months in French oak, 54% new. Red and black berries, an attractive herbal edge plus vanilla and spice. Excellent depth on the palate – pure and fresh with lovely supple tannins. Layered and long.

92

Holden Manz Big G 2013

Price: R225

Total production: bottles

Abv: 15%

63% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Cabernet Franc. Components matured separately for 18 months in French oak, 30% new before blending and a further five months in barrel. Red and black fruit, some earthiness, vanilla and spice. Intense but not weighty – good concentration, the oak well judged.

92

Rustenberg John X Merriman 2015

Price: R175

Total production: 127 487 bottles

Abv: 14.72%

52% Merlot, 41% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Malbec, 1% Cabernet Franc and 1% Petit Verdot. Matured for 20 months in French oak, a third new. Very primary yet precise. Red and black berries, some herbal character and a little reduction on the nose. A well-structured palate showing pure fruit and freshness to go with lovely ripe tannins. Astute use of oak.

92

Simonsig Tiara 2011

Price: R320

Total production: 18 722 bottles

Abv: 14.31%

66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 21% Merlot, 9% Petit Verdot and 4% Cabernet Franc. Matured for 16 months in 96% French and 4% American oak, 60% new. An intriguing nose of red and black fruit, dried herbs and some oyster shell. Intense but not weighty with fresh acidity and a savoury finish. Starting to show some developed character but very satisfying.

91

Allée Bleue Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2014

Price: R130

Total production: 26 500 750ml bottles and 30 1.5l bottles

Abv: 14.68%

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 42% Merlot and 8% Petit Verdot. Matured for 16 months in 97% French and 3% American oak, 50% new. A definite minty note plus flowers to go with red and black berries and pencil shavings. Full but balanced on the palate.

91

Beyerskloof Field Blend 2013

Price: R250

Total production: 9 000 bottles

Abv: 14.25%

82% Cabernet Sauvignon and 18% Merlot. Matured for 24 months in French oak, 100% new. A complex nose showing red and black fruit, earth, milk chocolate and spice. Dense and powerful yet well balanced – concentrated and fresh with nicely grippy tannins.

91

Groot Constantia Gouverneurs Reserve 2014

Price: R367

Total production: 26 000 bottles

Abv: 14.25%

57% Cabernet Sauvignon, 28% Cabernet Franc, 8% Merlot, 7% Petit Verdot. Matured for 14 months in French oak, 72% new. A brooding nose of red and black berries, fresh herbs and attractive oak. Full yet balanced with pure fruit, racy acidity and suitably firm tannins. Appears particularly ageworthy.

91

Laibach The Ladybird 2015

Price: R100

Total production: 90 400 750ml bottles and 1 088 1.5l bottles

Abv: 14.33%

33% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Merlot, 18% Petit Verdot, 15% Cabernet Franc and 7% Malbec. Matured for 12 months in mainly older French oak with 20% entirely unwooded. Plenty of red and black fruit, some attractive herbal character and a little vanilla and oak spice. Rich and full on the palate – has a real plushness about it, the tannins already quite soft and smooth.

91

Longridge Ekliptika 2014

Price: R480

Total production: 4 840 bottles

Abv: 14%

Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 24 months in a combination of new and mature French oak. Red and black fruit, some leafiness plus plenty of attractive oak character. Juicy and fresh – great depth of fruit, relatively soft tannins.

91

Morgenster 2012

Price: R389

Total production: Not disclosed

Abv: 14.51%

72% Merlot, 16% Petit Verdot and 12% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 60% new. A complex nose showing red and black fruit, forest floor, boot polish and spice. Medium bodied yet intensely flavoured, the finish long and savoury. Serious and demanding.

91

Mulderbosch Faithful Hound 2014

Price: R150

Total production: 100 000 bottles

Abv: 14.21%

32% Cabernet Franc, 26% Cabernet Sauvignon, 19% Merlot, 16% Malbec and 7% Petit Verdot. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 30% new. An enticing nose with top notes of violets and herbs before red and black fruit plus attractive oak. The palate is full yet balanced – dense fruit, fresh acidity and nicely grippy tannins making for a pleasantly austere finish.

91

Muratie Ansela van de Caab 2013

Price: R325

Total production: 1 968 bottles

Abv: 14.26%

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Merlot and 15% Cabernet Franc. Components matured separately for 16 months in French oak, 48% new before blending and a further six months in barrel. Red and black fruit, some tobacco and a little earthiness. Full but possessing lovely composure – concentrated fruit, bright acidity, the tannins suitably firm. The finish, meanwhile, is long and savoury.

91

Rustenberg John X Merriman 2014

Price: R175

Total production: 136 491 bottles

Abv: 14.54%

56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 38% Merlot, 3% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot and 1% Malbec. Matured for 20 months in French oak, a third new. Red fruit, some herbal lift and a little milk chocolate on the nose. The palate is full bodied with bright acidity with firm but fine tannins, a slight salty quality to the finish.

91

Spier Creative Block 5 2014

Price: R149

Total production: bottles

Abv: 14.47%

59% Cabernet Sauvignon, 26% Merlot, 6% Cabernet Franc, 5% Malbec and 4% Petit Verdot. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 60% new. Red and black berries plus some floral fragrance and fresh herbs. Fruit driven with fresh acidity and fine tannins – big and satisfying.

91

Zorgvliet Richelle 2015

Price: R270

Total production: 3 894 bottles

Abv: 14.96%

53% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Cabernet Franc, 7% Merlot and 7% Petit Verdot. Components matured separately for 14 months in French oak, 60% new before blending and a further four months in barrel. Red and black fruit, some leafiness plus attractive oak. Sweet, rich and ripe on the palate – powerful and thick textured. Modern but well done in this style.

90

Allée Bleue L'Amour Toujours 2013

Price: R200

Total production: 5 777 bottles

Abv: 14.86%

40% Cabernet Franc, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot and 5% Petit Verdot. Components matured separately for 16 months in French oak, 55% new before blending and a further two months in barrel. Red fruit and a hint of mint on the nose. Relatively full bodied with good fruit concentration, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Nicely judged.

90

Creation Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot Petit Verdot 2015

Price: R190

Total production: 10 000 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot and 10% Petit Verdot. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 31% new. The nose displays a definite herbal note before red fruit. The palate shows good depth but is currently quite austere, the tannins particularly firm – needs time to unfurl.

90

Knorhoek Pantère 2014

Price: R190

Total production: bottles

Abv: 14.5%

52% Cabernet Sauvignon, 24% Cabernet Franc and 24% Merlot. Components matured separately for 19 months in French oak, 20% new before blending and a further three months in barrel. Red and black fruit, fresh herbs, vanilla and spice. Full yet fresh, the tannins already quite mellow, the finish long and savoury. Perhaps not the most refined offering but plenty of interest.

90

La Vierge Nymphomane 2015

Price: R137

Total production: 14 100 bottles

Abv: 14.39%

56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Merlot, 8.5% Cabernet Franc and 8.5% Malbec. Matured for 15 months in French oak, 25% new. A rather particular nose with overt herbal, leafy notes as well as red and black fruit plus some smokiness. Medium bodied with vibrant acidity and a persistent finish.

90

Villiera Monro Red 2013

Price: R70

Total production: 2 500 bottles

Abv: 14.31%

46% Cabernet Sauvignon, 31% Cabernet Franc and 23% Merlot. Matured for 24 months in French oak, mostly new. A complex nose of red and black fruit, floral perfume, tobacco and boot polish. Medium bodied and fresh, this will appeal to the classicists.

90

Vriesenhof Kallista 2011

Price: R285

Total production: 14 500 750ml bottles and 1 200 1.5l bottles

Abv: 14.26%

40% Cabernet Sauvignon, 35% Merlot and 25% Cabernet Franc. Separate components matured for 12 months in fourth-fill oak barrels. After blending, the wine was returned to barrel for a further period of maturation, mainly second- and third-fill barrels used. Red and black fruit, some floral fragrance, tobacco, a hint of vanilla plus a little reduction. Medium bodied with bright acidity and firm but fine tannins, the finish long and savoury. Classically styled.

90

Vondeling Philosophie 2015

Price: R695

Total production: 1 875 750ml bottles and 130 1.5l bottles

Abv: 14.3%

85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Cabernet Franc, 6% Merlot and 2% Malbec. Matured for 18 months in French oak, two-thirds new. Dark fruit and some attractive herbal character to go with toasty oak and some reduction. Rich and full with fresh acidity and firm tannins – needs time.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Allée Bleue Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2014	Banghoek	91
Allée Bleue L'Amour Toujours 2013	Banghoek	90
Beyerskloof Field Blend 2013	Stellenbosch	91
Catherine Marshall Wines Peter's Vision 2015	Elgin	87
Chamonix Troika Reserve 2015	Franschhoek	88
Conradie Penhill Saw Edge Peak 2014	Western Cape	86
Constantia Glen FIVE 2012	Constantia	88
Creation Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot Petit Verdot 2015	Walker Bay	90
Delaire Graff Botmaskop 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Diemersdal Private Collection 2011	Durbanville	89
Diemersdal Private Collection 2012	Durbanville	89
Diemersdal Private Collection 2015	Durbanville	87
Diemersdal MM Louw 2014	Durbanville	86
Edgebaston The Berry Box 2014	Coastal Region	87
Gabriëlskloof Five Arches 2013	Bot River	87
Gabriëlskloof The Blend 2015	Bot River	88
Glen Carlou Grand Classique 2013	Paarl	89
Groot Constantia Gouverneurs Reserve 2014	Constantia	91
Hartenberg The Mackenzie 2013	Stellenbosch	89
Hermanuspietersfontein Die Arnoldus 2012	Sondagskloof	88
Hermanuspietersfontein Kleinboet 2014	Sondagskloof	86
Holden Manz Big G 2013	Franschhoek	92
Jordan Cobblers Hill 2014	Stellenbosch	89
Kaapzicht Bin 3 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Keet First Verse 2012	Stellenbosch	87
Knorhoek Pantère 2014	Stellenbosch	90
La Bri Affinity 2014	Franschhoek	87
Laibach The Ladybird 2015	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	91
La Vierge Nymphomane 2015	Hemel-en- Aarde Ridge	90
Leipzig Grand Master 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Longridge Ekliptika 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Marvelous Blue 2015	Western Cape	88
Morgenster 2011	Stellenbosch	93
Morgenster 2012	Stellenbosch	91
Morgenster 2013	Stellenbosch	89
Mulderbosch Faithful Hound 2014	Western Cape	91
Muratie Ansela van de Caab 2013	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	91
Mveme Raats MR de Compostella 2014	Stellenbosch	93
Nitida Calligraphy 2014	Durbanville	87
Nitida Calligraphy 2015	Durbanville	86

Raats Red Jasper 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Rietvallei Estéanna 2009	Robertson	87
Rustenberg John X Merriman 2014	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	91
Rustenberg John X Merriman 2015	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	92
Simonsig Tiara 2011	Stellenbosch	92
Simonsig Tiara 2012	Stellenbosch	88
Spier Creative Block 5 2014	Coastal Region	91
Stark-Condé Oude Nektar 2014	Jonkershoek Valley	87
Thelema Rabelais 2013	Stellenbosch	94
Tokara Director's Reserve Red 2013	Stellenbosch	93
fUva Mira O.T.V. 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Villiera Monro Red 2013	Stellenbosch	90
Vondeling Philosophie 2014	Voor Paardeberg	87
Vondeling Philosophie 2015	Voor Paardeberg	90
Vriesenhof Kallista 2007	Stellenbosch	89
Vriesenhof Kallista 2009	Stellenbosch	88
Vriesenhof Kallista 2011	Stellenbosch	90
Warwick Trilogy 2014	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	89
Zevenwacht Reserve 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Zorgvliet Richelle 2015	Banghoek	91