



PRESCIENT
CHARDONNAY
~ REPORT 2017 ~

JUDGING PROCEDURES

The judging panel was chaired by myself and further consisted of two trusted colleagues, namely Hennie Coetzee, taster for Platter's South African Wine Guide, and James Pietersen of Wine Cellar, a Cape Town firm which brokers and cellars 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

KEY FINDINGS

This is the seventh annual Chardonnay Report but the first time that participation in the tasting was not by invitation only. Instead, it was open to all prepared to pay an entry fee and while the line-up was previously capped at 60 wines, we now had 91 to review with 42 wines rating 90 points or more on the 100-point quality scale, the average score being 89.5.

Perhaps the biggest talking point of this tasting was how much strategic intervention on the part of the winemaker to tolerate. Chardonnay is extraordinarily malleable in the cellar – it will happily respond to a far wider range of techniques than most other white varieties – and there were all manner of styles on display.

As in previous years, the wines which the panel tended to reward were those showing the clearest fruit definition. Local Chardonnay seems to do best when made in a more elegant style – grapes picked ripe but not over-ripe and winemaking technique applied with restraint.

There were wines which in striving for elegance, came up short appearing excessively primary and rather insubstantial but these were few and far between. More in evidence were wines which seemed over-worked and rather imprecise as a result. Here producers seem to be laboring under the impression that in order to justify a premium price tag, they are compelled to make something more brazen. In an effort to achieve weight and power, grapes are picked later, the danger here being that the resulting wine has a-typical tropical fruit flavours, the impression of sweetness and alcoholic heat on the finish. Combine this with heavy batonnage (lees stirring) which imparts an unduly thick texture to a wine plus overly ambitious oak and everything does not come together for good. It was notable that in many instances producers' second-label wines outperformed their top-of-the-range offerings.

Another point of debate was the issue of wines made in a deliberately reductive style versus wines made in a deliberately oxidative style. Wines made reductively often have a little bit of "burnt match" or "flinty" character on the nose and this is definitely a point of interest but such an approach can lead to the wine appearing "pinched" on the palate and this is unfortunate. Wines made oxidatively, meanwhile, show plenty of secondary character (cut-apple, nuts, honey and a certain maltiness) which again can add to complexity at a low level but obscures fruit when not done well.

Generally, though, the category displays an extraordinary high standard of quality – the wines possessing not only great fruit purity but presenting as subtle and complex thanks to winemaking that seems ever more deft and considered.

TASTING NOTES

95

Delaire Graff Banghoek Reserve 2016

Price: R200

Total production: 21 000 bottles

Abv: 13.4%

Fermented and matured for 10 months in 225-litre French oak barrels, 40% new. A complex nose of pear, white peach and citrus plus fresh herbs, earth and attractive oak. A very well balanced palate with pure fruit, vibrant acidity and a pithy finish.

95

Eikendal 2016

Price: R163

Total production: 14 000 bottles

Abv: 13.11%

Fermentation started in tank and finished in barrel. Matured for 14 months in 500-litre barrels, 15% new. Intriguing aromatics of citrus, green apple, fynbos and earth. The palate displays excellent composure – pure, fresh and pithy. An elegant and wonderfully detailed wine.

95

Rustenberg Stellenbosch 2016

Price: R175

Total production: 82 268 bottles

Abv: 14%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in 300-litre French oak, 25% new. The nose shows a hint of reduction before pear, white peach and citrus. Lovely fruit definition, fresh acidity and a long, dry finish. Very focused.

94

Dabar 2016

Price: R97

Total production: 3 577 bottles

Abv: 12.53%

Fermentation started in tank and finished in barrel. Matured for nine months in oak, 25% new. A subtle yet complex nose of burnt match, citrus, vanilla, wet wool and sea breeze. Pure fruit and electrifying acidity before a saline finish – has a real steeliness about it.

93

Evidence 2016 (Sophie & Julien Schaal)

Price: R250

Total production: 3 607 bottles

Abv: 13.3%

Matured for 12 months in 300-litre barrels, 25% new. Citrus and apple, some yeasty complexity and attractive oak on the nose. The palate is rich and full with a creamy texture and a savoury finish. Layers of flavour before a long, dry finish.

93

Hartenberg The Eleanor 2015

Price: R325

Total production: 9 000 bottles plus 200 magnums

Abv: 13.74%

Matured for 12 months in 225-litre French oak barrels, 50% new. Subtle reduction and fresh herbs before white peach and citrus. A weightless intensity to the palate – concentrated fruit and fresh acidity, the finish long and dry. Classically styled and utterly delicious!

93

Holden Manz Barrel Fermented 2016

Price: R225

Total production: 6 292 bottles

Abv: 14.37%

Fermented and matured for eight months in 225-litre French oak, 50% new. The nose shows citrus, stone fruit, vanilla and spice. Big and broad on the palate with layers of flavour and a savoury finish. A powerful wine.

93

Longridge Organic 2015

Price: R165

Total production: 10 974 bottles

Abv: 13.56%

Spontaneous fermentation and maturation lasting 12 months in barrel, 20% new. A top note of white flowers before citrus and green apple plus some intriguing wet wool character on the nose. Light bodied with plenty of verve and a savoury finish.

93

Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2016

Price: R550

Total production: 4 300 bottles

Abv: 13.6%

Spontaneous fermentation and maturation lasting nine months in French oak, 28% new. A compelling nose of potpourri, lemon and orange, vanilla and spice plus some leesy character. Excellent fruit concentration, nicely coated acidity and a savoury finish. Power-packed and very flavourful.

93

Tokara Reserve Collection Stellenbosch 2016

Price: R180

Total production: 22 230 bottles

Abv: 13.79%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in 228-litre French oak barrels, 34% new. An exotic nose of citrus, yellow peach and melon plus a hint of reduction and toasty oak. The palate has great fruit expression and is pleasantly thick textured – very sexy.

93

Uva Mira 2016

Price: TBC

Total production: 900 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Matured for nine months in French oak barrels, 50% new. Flowers and fynbos before pear, white peach and citrus plus attractive oak. Exquisite fruit expression, driving acidity and a saline finish – very tight and focused.

BUYING GUIDE: CELLAR-DOOR PRICES FOR WINES RATED 90 - 92

92

Delaire Graff Terraced Block Reserve 2015

Price: R650

GlenWood Vigneron's Selection 2016

Price: R240

La Motte 2016

Price: R120

Lourensford The Dome 2015

Price: R110

Neil Ellis Whitehall 2016

Price: R225

Stellenrust Barrel Fermented 2016

Price: R150

Thelema 2015

Price: R145

Uva Mira The Mira 2016

Price: R195

91

Bartinney Hourglass 2016

Price: R620

Edgebaston 2016 (Finlayson Family Wines)

Price: R95

Hartenberg 2015

Price: R115

Jordan Barrel Fermented 2016

Price: R160

Journey's End 2016

Price: R150

Stellenbosch Vineyards Credo 2016

Price: R149

91

Julien Schaal Mountain Vineyards 2016

Price: R175

90

Bergsig Barrel Fermented 2016

Price: R89

DeMorgenzon Reserve 2016

Price: R350

Domaine des Dieux 2012

Price: R200

Dombeya 2015 (Haskell Vineyards)

Price: R115

Glen Carlou 2016

Price: R108

Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2016

Price: R395

Haute Cabrière Reserve 2016

Price: R190

KWV Cathedral Cellars 2016

Price: R90

La Bri 2016

Price: R130

Lanzerac Limited Release Mrs English 2016

Price: R450

Longridge Organic 2016

Price: R165

Môreson Dr Reason Why Unwooded 2016

Price: R125

Oak Valley Beneath The Clouds 2016

Price: R110

Oak Valley Groenlandberg 2016

Price: R190

90

Rickety Bridge 2016

Price: R120

Rustenberg Five Soldiers 2015

Price: R400

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Almenkerk 2015	Elgin	89
Almenkerk 2016	Elgin	89
Babylonstoren 2016	Simonsberg-Paarl	88
Bartinney 2016	Banghoek	89
Bartinney Hourglass 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Benguela Cove 2015	Walker Bay	87
Bergsig Barrel Fermented 2016	Breedekloof	90
Bloemendal Single Vineyard 2014	Durbanville	86
Botha Kelder Barrel Fermented 2015	Breedekloof	87
Buitenverwachting 2016	Constantia	87
Cape Point Vineyards 2016	Western Cape	89
Capensis 2015	Western Cape	89
Capensis Fijnbosch 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Creation 2016	Cape South Coast	88
Creation Reserve 2016	Walker Bay	89
Creation The Art of Chardonnay 2016	Walker Bay	89
Dabar 2016	Napier	94
Delaire Graff Banghoek Reserve 2016	Banghoek	95
Delaire Graff Terraced Block Reserve 2015	Banghoek	92
DeMorgenzon Reserve 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Domaine des Dieux 2012	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	90
Domaine des Dieux 2013	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	88
Dombeya 2016 (Haskell Vineyards)	Stellenbosch	90
Edgebaston 2016 (Finlayson Family Wines)	Stellenbosch	91
Eikendal 2016	Western Cape	95
Eikendal Unwooded Janina 2016	Western Cape	88
Esona Single Vineyard 2014	Robertson	86
Evidence 2016 (Sophie & Julien Schaal)	Elgin	93
Glen Carlou 2016	Paarl	90
Glen Carlou Quartz Stone 2016	Paarl	81
Glen Carlou The Curator's Collection 2015	Paarl	86
GlenWood Grand Duc 2015	Franschhoek	88
GlenWood Vigneron's Selection 2016	Franschhoek	92
Groot Constantia 2016	Constantia	89
Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2016	Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	90
Hartenberg 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Hartenberg The Eleanor 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Haskell Anvil 2016	Stellenbosch	87

Haut Cabrière Reserve 2016	Franschhoek	90
Haut Espoir 2016	Franschhoek	88
Holden Manz Barrel Fermented 2016	Western Cape	93
Iona 2016	Elgin	88
Jordan Barrel Fermented 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Journey's End 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Journey's End Destination 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Julien Schaal Mountain Vineyards 2016	Elgin	91
Kruger Family Wines Sans Chêne 2017	Piekeniers- kloof	89
KWV Cathedral Cellars 2016	Western Cape	90
La Bri 2016	Franschhoek	90
La Bri Barrel Select 2016	Franschhoek	87
La Motte 2016	Franschhoek	92
La Petite Ferme Barrel Fermented 2016	Western Cape	89
Laarman Cluster Series 2016	Western Cape	89
Laibach Woolworths The Ladybird 2016	Western Cape	89
Lanzerac Limited Release Mrs English 2016	Jonkershoek Valley	90
Longridge Organic 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Longridge Organic 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Lourensford Limited Release 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Lourensford The Dome 2015	Stellenbosch	92
Mellasat Barrel Reserve 2013	Paarl	86
Mont Blois Hoog en Laag 2016	Robertson	88
Mont Blois Kweekamp 2016	Robertson	87
Môreson Dr Reason Why Unwooded 2016	Franschhoek	90
Mulderbosch 2017	Stellenbosch	86
Neil Ellis Whitehall 2016	Elgin	92
Nitida 2016	Durbanville	88
Oak Valley Beneath The Clouds 2016	Elgin	90
Oak Valley Groenlandberg 2016	Elgin	90
Paul Cluver Estate 2016	Elgin	89
Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2016	Elgin	93
Rickety Bridge 2016	Franschhoek	90
Rustenberg Five Soldiers 2015	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	90
Rustenberg Stellenbosch 2016	Stellenbosch	95
Stellenbosch Vineyards Credo 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Stellenbosch Vineyards Credo 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Stellenrust Barrel Fermented 2016	Stellenbosch	92
Sutherland 2016 (Thelema)	Elgin	89
Thelema 2015	Stellenbosch	92
Thelema Ed's Reserve 2015	Stellenbosch	85
Tokara Reserve Collection Stellenbosch 2016	Stellenbosch	93
Uva Mira 2016	Stellenbosch	93

Uva Mira The Mira 2016	Stellenbosch	92
Uva Mira The Single Tree 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Villion 2016	Elgin	88
Vondeling 2015	Voor Paardeberg	89
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range 2016	Elgin	89
Vrede end Lust Marguerite 2016	Simonsberg- Paarl	86
Warwick White Lady 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Waverley Hills 2016	Tulbagh	89
Yardstick 2015	Western Cape	88
Zevenwacht Barrel Fermented 2016	Stellenbosch	89