



**10
YEAR
OLD
WINE
AWARDS**

Compiled by Winemag.co.za

INTRODUCTION

Just how well do modern-era South African wines perform as they get older? One of the most important measures of great wine is that it should be age-worthy, that is it should become more pleasurable and more interesting to drink with time in the bottle and the annual 10 Year Old Wine Awards sets out to examine precisely this.

KEY FINDINGS

The 2008 vintage was considered a “challenging” season on account of rain and generally cooler conditions during harvest resulting in wines of variable quality and it appears producers were even less inclined to hold onto library stock than usual – this year’s tasting attracted 56 entries from 27 producers compared to 72 from 41 when the more highly regarded 2007 vintage was reviewed last year. Of the 56 entries, three were Méthode Cap Classique, 18 white wines, 32 reds, one Noble Late Harvest and two fortifieds.

So is 2008’s mediocre reputation justified? An argument could well be made that as an industry, our reaction to vintages is somewhat unconsidered – overly positive in the supposedly good years and overly negative in the bad – and the wines in this line-up were not nearly as inferior as might have been expected.

That said, the majority of the wines were merely holding up rather than having undergone some magical transformation but that’s perhaps as it always has been and always will be – time, in most instances, bringing a certain mellowness rather than real complexity and refinement.

There were, however, 15 wines to rate 90 points or more on the 100-point quality scale (five white wines, seven red wines, one Noble Late Harvest and two fortifieds) and here producers can feel justifiably proud of their efforts, in particular Neil Ellis with three wines and Tokara with four among the top performers. Mention must also be made of Remhoogte who famously employed the services of controversial super-consultant Michel Rolland during the 2000s – the Cab 2008 from this Stellenbosch property rated 91 while the Merlot 2008 and Pinotage both rated 89. Not a bad outcome at all!

When it came to the white wines, it was the six examples of Sauvignon Blanc that collectively impressed most of all – in the hands of serious producers, wines from this variety typically have the high acidities and low pHs necessary to go the distance.

As for the reds, the panel was struck by how many wines showed problematic acidities – disjointed, sour, tart. Acidification is, of course, legal in South Africa but it would appear that producers are doing it much more judiciously now than 10 years ago.

The other issue was wines that apparently had been made with the intention of capturing as much fruit power as possible – these often proved controversial with them possessing a compelling richness but this achieved at the expense of verve. Again, it would seem advances have been made with our general understanding of what constitutes “optimal ripeness” in the vineyard having evolved greatly in the last decade.

What did best overall? The two top wines of the tasting, each scoring 92 on the 100-point quality scale, were the Tokara Tokara Reserve Collection Noble Late Harvest 2008 and the Badsberg Red Muscadel 2008. SA's sweet wines. They don't get much love but they should.

JUDGING PROCEDURES

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

TASTING NOTES

CHARDONNAY

90

Neil Ellis Elgin 2008

Alc: 13.34% RS 1.2 g/l TA 6.0 g/l pH 3.3

Matured for nine months in 50% new 228-litre barrels and the balance in second-fill 500-litre barrels. Deep yellow in colour, the nose shows potpourri and spice to go with citrus and yellow peach plus some leesy character. Rich and broad with a savoury finish.

90

Tokara Reserve Collection Walker Bay 2008

Alc: 12.97% RS 1.8 g/l TA 5.5 g/l pH 3.27

Matured for 10 months in French oak, 24% new. Some burnt matchstick but also blossom and herbs as well as citrus on the nose. Pure fruit, fresh acidity and a pithy finish – still remarkably youthful.

SAUVIGNON BLANC

91

Neil Ellis Elgin 2008

Alc: 13.5% RS 1.5 g/l TA 7.0 g/l pH 3.25

A hint of reduction before notes of elderflower and blackcurrant, citrus and white peach plus some leesy complexity. Pure fruit, lively acidity and a particularly dry finish – complex and balanced.

91

Shannon 2008

Alc: 13.14% RS 1.2 g/l TA 6.9 g/l pH 3.22

85% Sauvignon Blanc, 15% Semillon. Blossom and sea breeze notes before white peach, tropical fruit and some leesy complexity. Pure fruit with fresh acidity before a pithy finish - lovely poise. Holding up extremely well.

90

Domaine des Dieux 2008

Alc: 13.67% RS 2.2 g/l TA 6.5 g/l pH 3.02

Citrus, stone fruit and some intriguing leesy character on the nose. Rich and full on the palate with lively acidity before a long, dry finish.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

91

Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2008

Alc: 14.5% RS 3.8 g/l TA 7.0 g/l pH 3.3

Matured for 20 months in French oak, 100% new. A complex nose of red and black fruit, violets and a certain leafy quality plus more base notes of meat stock and earth. Dense fruit, fresh acidity and tannins which are still pleasantly firm. Rich but balanced – appears sweet on entry but finishes dry.

91

Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2008

Alc: 14.0% RS 1.54 g/l TA 5.91 g/l pH 3.64

Matured for 17 months in French oak, 35% new. Red and black fruit, oak spice and some earthy notes on the nose. Good fruit density, fresh acidity and fine tannins – has an elegance about it.

91

Remhoogte 2008

Alc: 14.3% RS 2.05 g/l TA 5.6 g/l pH 3.74

Matured for 18 months in French oak, 80% new. Red and black fruit, some tea leaf-like fragrance plus a little earthiness. Medium bodied with good fruit definition, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Complex and balanced.

90

La Bri 2008

Alc: 14.2% RS 1.7 g/l TA 5.7 g/l pH 3.75

Matured for 24 months in French oak, 30% new. Red and black fruit plus a not unpleasant dank quality. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins, the finish pleasantly austere. Understated and still holding up well.

RED BLENDS

91

Fleur Du Cap Laszlo 2008

Alc: 14.21% RS 1.64 g/l TA 6.07 g/l pH 3.54

35% Merlot, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Petit Verdot and 11% Malbec. Matured for 22 months in French oak, 100% new. Red and black fruit, cigar box and undergrowth on the nose. Rich but balanced – pure fruit, bright acidity and a savoury finish.

90

Tokara Director's Reserve Red 2008

Alc: 14.95% RS 1.4 g/l TA 6.1 g/l pH 3.76

73% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Petit Verdot, 6% Merlot, 4% Malbec and 2% Cabernet Franc. Matured for 20 months in French oak, 83% new. Black and blue berries, a subtle leafiness plus pencil shavings and oak spice on the nose. Plenty of ripe fruit but not short of freshness, the finish long and dry.

PINOTAGE

90

Tokara 2008

Alc: 14.83% RS 1.9 g/l TA 5.5 g/l pH 3.5

Matured for 20 months in French oak, 100% new. Red and black cherries, cocoa and spice plus a little earthiness on the nose. The palate is plush with sweet, dense fruit offset by fresh acidity and fine tannins.

NOBLE LATE HARVEST

92

Tokara Reserve Collection Sauvignon Blanc 2008

Alc: 10.92% RS 150.9 g/l TA 9.0 g/l pH 3.73

Made from a combination of Elgin and Walker Bay Sauvignon Blanc, each batch vinified separately. Fermented and matured for five months in French oak, 50% new. The nose shows citrus, stone fruit and caramelized sugar plus a slight herbal quality in the background. Super-rich with driving acidity, a mushroom-like quality to the finish lending interest.

MUSCADEL

92

Badsberg Red 2008

Alc: 16.45% RS 305 g/l TA 6.4 g/l pH 3.7

Brown in colour with a green rim. A complex nose of raisins, dates, menthol, toffee and spice. The palate has massive structure but equally is very well balanced – dense fruit and fresh acidity before a dry finish. Layered and long.

PORT-STYLE

91

De Krans Cape Vintage Reserve Port 2008

Alc: 19% RS 92 g/l TA 5.0 g/l

60% Touriga Nacional, 35% Tinta Barocca, 5% Souzã. Matured for 20 months in 4000-litre vats. Dark fruit, chocolate, fresh herbs, spice and earth on the nose. Rich and broad, the spirit addition well handled, already quite mellow.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z: WHITE WINES

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
MCC		
Domaine des Dieux Claudia Brut 2008	Walker Bay	89
Lourensford 2008	Stellenbosch	87
Simonsig Kaapse Vonkel Brut 2008	Western Cape	86
CHARDONNAY		
Bergsig 2008	Breedekloof	86
Domaine des Dieux 2008	Walker Bay	89
Neil Ellis Elgin 2008	Elgin	90
Simonsig 2008	Stellenbosch	86
Tokara Reserve Collection Stellenbosch 2008	Stellenbosch	88
Tokara Reserve Collection Walker Bay 2008	Walker Bay	90
CHENIN BLANC		
Lula 2008		89
	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	87
Remhoogte No. 6 2008	Stellenbosch	84
Rudera De Tradisie 2008	Stellenbosch	89
Rudera Robusto 2008	Stellenbosch	89
SAUVIGNON BLANC		
Domaine des Dieux 2008	Walker Bay	90
Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2008	Western Cape	87
Neil Ellis Elgin 2008	Elgin	91
Shannon 2008	Elgin	91
Tokara Elgin 2008	Elgin	89
Tokara Walker Bay 2008	Walker Bay	89
WHITE BLENDS		
Cape Point Vineyards Isliedh 2008	Cape Point	89
Tokara Directors Reserve White 2008	Stellenbosch	89
CABERNET SAUVIGNON		
Alto 2008	Stellenbosch	88
Bergsig 2008	Breedekloof	88
De Trafford 2008	Stellenbosch	87
Haut Espoir 2008	Franschhoek	89
Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2008	Stellenbosch	91
La Bri 2008	Franschhoek	90
Nederburg II Centuries 2008	Western Cape	86
Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2008	Stellenbosch	91
Simonsig The Garland 2008	Stellenbosch	88
Remhoogte 2008	Stellenbosch	91

CABERNET SAUVIGNON		
Webersburg 2008	Stellenbosch	88
MERLOT		
Remhoogte 2008	Stellenbosch	89
PINOTAGE		
Grangehurst 2008	Stellenbosch	87
Neil Ellis Vineyard Selection 2008	Jonkershoek Valley	85
Remhoogte 2008	Stellenbosch	89
Simonsig Redhill 2008	Stellenbosch	83
Tokara 2008	Stellenbosch	90
RED BLENDS		
Bergsig Icarus 2008	Breedekloof	89
Fleur Du Cap Laszlo 2008	Coastal Region	91
Grangehurst 2008	Stellenbosch	89
Ken Forrester The Gypsy 2008	Western Cape	87
Lourens River Valley 2008 (Morgenster)	Stellenbosch	83
Marianne Floreal 2008	Stellenbosch	89
Ormonde Vernon Basson 2008	Darling	88
Plaisir De Merle Grand Plaisir 2008	Paarl	85
Simonsig Tiara 2008	Stellenbosch	84
Tokara Director's Reserve Red 2008	Stellenbosch	90
SHIRAZ/SYRAH		
Alto 2008	Stellenbosch	89
Haut Espoir 2008	Franschhoek	78
Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2008	Stellenbosch	89
La Bri 2008	Franschhoek	87
Zonnebloem Limited Edition 2008	Stellenbosch	88
FORTIFIED		
Badsberg Red Muscadel 2008	Breedekloof	92
PORT-STYLE FORTIFIED		
De Krans Cape Vintage Reserve Port 2008	Calitzdorp	91
NOBLE LATE HARVEST		
Tokara Reserve Collection 2008	Stellenbosch	92