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THE **CHRISTIAN EEDES**

CABERNET SAUVIGNON REPORT

- 2014 -

presented by



Private Investments

INTRODUCTION

Cabernet Sauvignon is the world's best travelled dark-skinned wine grape. In its traditional home of Bordeaux, it's a component of some of the greatest wines to be had from anywhere and it's been taken up far and wide as producers seek to emulate this. In South Africa, it's the second most widely planted variety making up a little under 12% of the national vineyard. Who's who in the zoo?

METHODOLOGY

Since inception, the tasting has been capped at 60 wines, partly consisting of examples which have fared well in recent local or international competition and partly from those producers I consider to be the best in their field even if somewhat low profile.

While other bigger tastings can have a useful talent spotting function, the intention here is very much to do good by what might be called the seeded players, the finite line-up in particular intended to avoid the perils of palate fatigue.

Even though a top 10 is generated based on the tasting, the exercise is pitched more as an in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the category in question, all wines submitted receiving a rating and a detailed tasting note. This, in addition to the fact that producers are not asked to pay an entry fee, alleviates the "competition fatigue" that exists in many quarters.

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 20-point/5 Star system. After round one, 17 wines were deemed of particular merit and these went through to a second and final round. Grant Thornton were tasting auditors.

KEY FINDINGS

In conceiving of the Cabernet Sauvignon Report, my intention was to examine whether or not a hierarchy of quality is starting to emerge in South Africa. Convene the same panel of expert tasters, keep the line-up of wines more or less controlled from year to year and hopefully at least some of the same producers would appear at the top of the rankings on a regular basis.

Out in front is Paulina's Reserve from Franschhoek cellar Rickety Bridge which has had a wine in the top 10 of this report three years running. Other wineries showing admirable consistency are Thelema and Waterford which have both had a wine in the top 10 two years running while the Family Reserve 2009 from Kleine Zalze again features this year after the 2007 vintage appeared in the top 10 of 2012.

In general, the category is looking strong. Only five wines from the challenging 2010 vintage but two of these in the top 10 – the theory that difficult years bring the best out of winemakers again seems to hold true.

What we are seeing is local winemakers displaying a far greater understanding of the wine styles being demanded by both critics and consumers is. Under-ripe, weedy, astringent wines are no longer permissible and these are hardly in evidence any more.

Winemakers are going in pursuit of fruit and less aggressive tannins and, simply put, this means picking riper and working smarter in the cellar – open up the canopy and take the fruit off the vine late and then make the appropriate acidity and pH adjustments in the cellar, perhaps even lower the alcohol by volume.

Get all of the above right and the end-result is a wine with sumptuous fruit but not short of freshness or tannic structure. Get it wrong and the wines become overdone. The warm climate growing conditions that South Africa enjoys mean there really is no reason for wines to be short of fruit but where we do seem to struggle is when it comes to tannin management, too many of the wines being over-extracted and then over-oaked to boot.

The very best wines show fruit purity, acidity which is not hard or spiky and firm but fine tannins. The wines that over-reach themselves tend to show ultra-ripe or dead fruit, appear excessively big and thick textured and have those smooth yet somehow excessively drying tannins which come from over-ambitious extraction. More gentleness of touch will see the category become even stronger.

THE TOP 10

FIVE STARS

Rustenberg Peter Barlow 2009

Price: Not yet released.

Very classy as you might expect of this label in what was generally considered a great vintage. The nose shows red and black berries plus attractive oak-derived vanilla and spice. Real depth of fruit on the palate but there's no shortage of freshness while the tannins are suitably firm. Lovely salty edge to the finish. Drink now – 2019.

Waterford 2011

Price: R175

A particularly refined offering. Red and black berries plus some tea leaf-like fragrance on the nose. Full but balanced – good concentration, lovely freshness and sleek tannins. Drink now – 2018.

FOUR AND A HALF STARS

Knorhoek Pantère 2011

Price: R130

Cassis, vanilla and some delicate tea-leaf like perfume on the nose. A seamless wine with super depth of fruit, bright acidity and fine tannins. Lovely dry finish. Drink now – 2021.

Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve 2011

Price: R195

Plenty of controlled power here although somewhat curiously more red than black berries in evidence. A distinct vanilla note also to the fore. The palate is rich and full with dense fruit, fresh acidity and chewy tannins. Drink now – 2018.

Spier Woolworths Reserve 2011

Price: R129.95

Red and black berries, earth and attractive oak. Big and bold – sweet fruit, fresh acidity, firm but fine tannins. Drink now – 2018.

Spier Woolworths The Hutton Single Vineyard 2012

Price: R129.95

Cassis and attractive oak notes – caramel and pencil shavings. Succulent fruit, fresh acidity and nice tannic grip – powerful but balanced. Drink now – 2019.

Thelema 2010

Price: R185

Cassis and a hint of fresh herbs. Full but balanced with pure fruit, fresh acidity and nice firm tannins. Classically styled with a long finish. Drink now – 2017.

Warwick Blue Lady 2010

Price: R215

Red and black fruit as well as tea leaf, cocoa powder and wood spice on the nose. Medium bodied and smooth textured – sweet upfront but ends savoury. Very good in a modern idiom. Drink now – 2017.

FOUR STARS

Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2009

Price: Not yet released.

Red and black berries, cigar box and subtle vanilla on the nose. Rich and full but carefully crafted and not without balance – pure fruit, fresh acidity, smooth tannins. Drink now – 2019.

Oldenburg Vineyards 2011

Price: Not yet released.

Red and black berries, graphite and vanilla on the nose. Concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins – overall impression is savoury rather than sweet. Drink now – 2018.

REST OF LINE-UP

FOUR STARS

Bartinney 2011

Red fruit, some tea leaf-like fragrance and vanilla – still very primary. Classically styled being medium bodied with fresh acidity and pleasantly firm tannins. Drink 2015 – 2018.

Cathedral Cellar 2011 (KWV)

Red and black berries plus subtle vanilla. Very likeable being fruit driven, not too full or over-extracted. Drink now – 2016.

Cederberg 2011

Technically correct and particularly accessible being fruit driven with moderate acidity and relatively soft tannins. Drink now – 2016.

David Finlayson GS 2011

Cassis and pencil shavings on the nose. Full bodied and rich but balanced – good fruit expression, fresh acidity and appropriate tannic grip. Serious and age-worthy. Drink now – 2021.

Edgebaston 2011

Red and black fruit plus attractive oak. Really nice balance with good fruit concentration, bright acidity and firm but fine tannins. Drink 2015 – 2018.

Eikendal 2012

Red and black fruit, some fynbos perfume and attractive oak. Properly elegant – relatively light and fresh with fine tannins. Drink 2015 – 2019.

Flagstone Music Room 2011

Cassis, attractive oak and some reduction. Clean and correct with optimally ripe fruit, bright acidity and firm but fine tannins. Drink now – 2018.

Guardian Peak Lapa 2011

Red and black berries plus plenty of oak-derived notes – vanilla, chocolate, tar. Big and bold with a rich core of fruit, vibrant acidity and firm tannins. Drink 2015 – 2018.

La Petite Vigne The Daniel Collection Amazing Grace 2012

Dark berries and a hint of tea leaf. Big but balanced with good fruit concentration, fresh acidity and smooth tannins. Drink 2015 – 2019.

Le Riche 2011

Red fruit, tobacco and cocoa powder on the nose. Plenty of sweet fruit on entry but the finish is long and dry tending to salty. Very appealing. Drink now – 2018.

Meerlust 2010

Dark fruit, toasty oak and a slight herbal note on the nose. Full bodied but balanced with concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and firm tannins. Drink 2015 – 2017.

Neil Ellis 2011

Red and black fruit plus attractive oak. Deftly made with good fruit expression, bright acidity and smooth tannins. Drink 2015 – 2018.

Rust en Vrede 2012

An opulent , thick textured wine with plenty of fruit weight offset by fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins. Drink 2015 – 2019.

Stark-Condé 2011

Dark berries, pencil shavings and some reduction on the nose. Youthful and a bit unresolved but has good underlying structure – pure fruit, fresh acidity, firm tannins. Drink 2015 – 2018.

Stony Brook Ghost Gum 2009

Red and black berries, an attractive herbal edge and some more evolved notes. Full bodied with good fruit concentration and smooth tannins. Drink now – 2016.

The Hutton Spier Woolworths 2011

Cassis, tobacco and attractive oak. In a modern style with concentrated sweet fruit, bright acidity and firm tannins. Rich and full but just about balanced. Drink now – 2016.

Tokara 2012

Red berries and some reduction on the nose. Juicy and fresh with fine tannins. Clean, correct and entirely likeable. Drink 2015 – 2019.

Vergelegen V 2009

Subtle nose showing attractive oak, crushed herbs and some maritime character. The palate is understated with red fruit, fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins. A demanding wine with a long, dry finish. Drink now – 2019.

Webersburg 2008

Red berries and appealing tea leaf and tobacco notes. Medium bodied with good freshness and a pleasantly austere finish. Drink now – 2015.

THREE AND A HALF STARS

Cederberg Five Generations 2011

Ultra-ripe dark fruit and plenty of oak. Big and super-rich. A blockbuster. Drink now – 2018.

Dalla Cia 2012

A pretty wine with lifted red fruit and tobacco on the nose and a relatively light palate with tangy acidity and fine tannins. Drink 2015 – 2017.

Delaire Graff Reserve 2012

Herbal top note to go with dark fruit on the nose. The palate meanwhile is lean and currently rather angular. Will it mellow into something more pleasing? Drink 2015 – 2019.

Delheim Reserve 2009

Ultra-ripe dark fruit and plenty of toasty oak. Huge in structure – dense fruit and firm tannins. Will it ever come around?

Ernie Els Proprietor's 2011

Very flamboyant with ultra-ripe dark fruit and prominent oak. Rich and full but sweet on entry and arguably lacks freshness. Drink now – 2018.

Fleur du Cap Unfiltered 2011

Dark fruit, some oyster shell and tar. Good flavour profile but a bit lean and hard. Drink now – 2016.

Graham Beck The Coffeestone 2012

Red and black fruit, violets and pencil shavings on the nose. Pleasantly lean and austere – a good line of acidity and nicely grippy tannins. Needs time to settle so drink 2015 – 2019.

Hartenberg 2009

Enticing nose of red fruit, tobacco and attractive oak. The palate is already quite mellow, the overall impression savoury rather than sweet. Drink now – 2016.

Jordan 2011

Red fruit, some attractive herbal character and a hint of vanilla. Medium bodied with good freshness and fine tannins. Admirably unpretentious. Drink now – 2018.

Kaapzicht 2010

Cassis and toasty oak on the nose and palate. Ultra-ripe and somewhat lacking in freshness. Drink now.

Kanonkop 2011

Currently rather gawky showing prominent oak and a touch of reduction. Very big with no shortage of fruit so it should come around. Drink 2016 onwards.

KWV The Mentors 2012

Ultra-ripe dark fruit plus earthy, tarry notes. Full and a bit too smooth textured – lacks finesse. Drink 2015 – 2017.

Landskroon Paul de Villiers 2011

Red and black fruit, some herbal lift and attractive vanilla. Nicely restrained and well balanced – should only improve with time. Drink 2015 – 2018.

Le Riche Reserve 2011

Ultra-ripe black fruit and tarry oak. Rich and full but perhaps a bit short of balance and finesse – quite hot on the finish. Drink now – 2016.

Mount Vernon Deborah's Selection 2010

Cassis, subtle vanilla and a definite note of mint. Approachable with juicy fruit, good freshness and fine tannins. Drink now – 2015.

Restless River 2009

Very modern in style with ultra-ripe blue and black fruit plus a touch of liquorice. Dense fruit, smooth tannins and a slightly hot finish. Drink now.

Spier 21 Gables 2011

Hints of red fruit and black fruit plus cocoa powder on a generally shy nose. Appears sweet and soft – somewhat lacking in concentration and structure. Drink now – 2016.

Stark-Condé Three Pines 2011

Red and black fruit plus notable vanilla. Rich and broad with sweet fruit, moderate acidity and soft tannins. A crowd-pleaser. Drink now – 2018.

Thelema The Mint 2011

Unmistakably minty plus dark fruit and chocolate. Good concentration, fresh acidity and smooth tannins – rather modern in style. Drink now – 2016.

Vergenoegd 2007

Red and black fruit, a hint of tea leaf, some earthiness. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Drink now.

THREE STARS

Boekenhoutskloof 2011

Red fruit, attractive oak plus notes of flowers and herbs. Good fruit expression, fresh acidity and nicely round tannins. Overall impression is savoury rather than sweet. Somewhat atypical. Drink now – 2018.

De Trafford 2011

Very ripe dark fruit, vanilla and some spice. Appears sweet and rather too rustic. Drink now – 2016.

Glen Carlou 2012

Cassis plus mint on the nose and palate. Fresh and easy. Drink now.

Glenelly Lady May 2011

Appears very young and unresolved - oak currently dominates the nose and palate. Bracing acidity and a very dry finish. Drink 2016 onwards.

Neil Ellis Vineyard Selection 2011

Notes of vanilla, toffee and milk chocolate to the fore on the nose and palate. Broad in the mouth but appears rather too sweet and soft. Drink now – 2016.

Rust en Vrede Single Vineyard 2011

Blue and black fruit plus lots of toasty oak. Big and bold – very concentrated, tannic and hot on the finish. Drink now – 2018.

Saxenburg Private Collection 2009

Overt “green” notes plus dark fruit and pencil shavings. An old-school offering with rather sharp acidity and firm but fine tannins. Drink now.

Springfield Méthode Ancienne 2008

Ripe dark fruit and some evolved character. Sweet ‘n sour with relatively soft tannins. Drink now.

Vergelegen 2008

Red and black fruit, mint and toasty oak. A bit awkward and old-fashioned with sweet fruit, tart acidity and a slightly astringent finish. Drink now.

TWO AND A HALF STARS

Teddy Hall Hercùles van Loon 2009

A big, bold wine currently dominated by oak. There’s a core of ripe dark fruit present so may well come around with time.

TWO STARS

Dieu Donné 2011

An awkward wine showing very ripe red fruit, oak-derived vanilla and tart acidity. Concerns about oxidation.