

THE RISCURA
WHITE
HOT
WINE AWARDS

2015

INTRODUCTION

The Graves sub-region of Bordeaux excels at understated, oak-aged dry whites from Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon, even if production is limited – fewer than one bottle in four from here containing white wine.

In simple terms, Sauvignon Blanc provides freshness and Semillon palate weight but when it comes to the best examples, it's a case of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.

A few local producers have been inclined to adopt the Graves model in recent times – the maiden 2001 vintage from Vergelegen was not the first ever example but is considered a watershed in the development of the category on account of praise and attention it drew from critics.

Sauv-Sem blends are a niche category but there is general agreement that overall quality is exceptionally high and the RisCura White Hot Wine Awards serves to provide these wines with the attention they deserve.

JUDGING PROCEDURES

The competition was open to all producers in the country, conditions of participation being that wines submitted had to be 1) current release or soon to be released (no museum class entries) and 2) specifically labelled as blends (no wines labelled as “Sauvignon Blanc” but containing a fraction of Semillon permitted).

30 submissions were received from 21 producers this year. The judging panel was chaired by myself and further consisted of two trusted colleagues, namely Roland Peens and James Pietersen of Wine Cellar, merchants and cellarers of fine wine. We tasted blind, scoring done according to the 100-point system.

KEY FINDINGS

Once again, the overall quality was staggeringly good with 12 wines (40% of the line-up) rated 90 or more on the 100-point quality scale.

What lies at the root of this success? In short, there seems to be a realisation among producers that these are wines for the connoisseur and therefore only the most rigorous viticulture and winemaking will suffice. It is quite extraordinary how varied both varietal proportions and winemaking style are from one wine to the next as each producer seeks to come up with something of real distinction.

What did the panel reward? As ever, there was a stylistic spectrum ranging from “light and fresh” to “rich and round” in evidence. Wines could sit anywhere along this spectrum presuming they showed balance and complexity. Issues which concerned the tasters were when wines showed too much pyrazine-derived “green” character on the one hand or where oaking was clumsy, on the other. These points have been made before but bear repeating.

On the whole, however, Sauv-Sem blends account for some of South Africa's finest white wines and yet have still to gain a very wide public following. It has been said to me that some punters find that the wines taste too much like Sauvignon Blanc and therefore cannot see why they should pay a premium

while others experience the wines as not tasting of Sauvignon enough in the sense of not being overtly fruity and fresh!

Hopefully wine drinkers will overcome their biases and preconceptions quickly because these wines really do offer outstanding quality relative to price in world terms. The 2011 vintage from renowned Pessac-Léognan producer Domaine de Chevalier, available from Wine Cellar at R1 300 a bottle, was included in the line-up as a ringer and while this scored a respectable 91 points, there were number of South African wines to rate more highly on the day.

Christian Eedes
Winemag.co.za Editor

TASTING NOTES

94

Mulderbosch Faithful Hound 2013

Price: R150

Total production: 7 500 bottles

Abv: 13%

57% Franschhoek Semillon, 43% Elgin Sauvignon Blanc. Matured for 15 months in 500-litre French oak barrels, 30% new. Lime, white peach, black currant, some fynbos and oak spice on the nose. Great flavour intensity, coated acidity and a long, savoury finish. Full but balanced and really detailed, a wine of great presence.

93

Constantia Glen Two 2014

Price: R200

Total production: 7 700 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

70% Sauvignon Blanc, 30% Semillon. Matured for six months in 600-litre French barrels, 20% new oak and 10% new acacia. The nose shows lime, white peach, flowers and dried herbs. Weightless intensity on the palate – exceptionally pure fruit and racy acidity before a super-dry finish. Very elegant.

Nitida Coronata Integration 2014

Price: R135

Total production: 5 500 bottles

Abv: 13.37%

60% Semillon, 40% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented in new French oak and the latter in tank before the blend is made and maturation then taking eight months in old 300-litre barrels. A heady nose of white and yellow peach, tangerine, flowers, hay and attractive oak spice. Concentrated fruit and coated acidity – extraordinarily full and layered. Executed with great flair.

92

Oak Valley Mountain Reserve 2011

Price: Not yet released.

Total production: 2 989 bottles

Abv: 14.06%

75% Sauvignon Blanc, 25% Semillon, the former tank fermented and the latter fermented and matured for nine months in French oak, none new. A complex and exotic nose showing cut apple, cassis, vanilla, spice and some leesy character. Rich and thick textured with a long finish – starting to show some development so drink in the next year or two.

92

Tokara Director's Reserve 2014

Price: R240

Total production: 13 800 bottles

Abv: 14%

69% Sauvignon Blanc, 31% Semillon, the former fermented in 400-litre barrels and the latter in 225-litre barrels, all French and about 28% new. Maturation lasted nine months before blending. Particularly fragrant on the nose with notes of white flowers, lime, white peach and black currant. Great purity of fruit and racy acidity before a saline finish – a classy offering.

Vergelegen G.V.B. 2013

Price: Not yet released

Total production: 5 000 bottles

Abv: 13.98%

62% Semillon, 38% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented in 225-litre barrels, 50% new and the latter in 500-litre barrels, 25% new. Maturation lasted 10 months before bottling. White peach, grapefruit, elder flower, fennel and subtle vanilla on the nose. The palate is rich and flavour packed with coated acidity. Powerful and long, a little white pepper bite on the finish adding extra interest.

91

Domaine de Chevalier Blanc 2011

Price: R1 300

Total production: From only 5ha of the 50ha under vineyard, 80% being Sauvignon Blanc and 20% Semillon.

Abv: 13%

White peach, black currant, a hint of spice and a little leesy complexity. Good concentration with bright acidity, the finish possessing a gently savoury quality. Seamless and still remarkably youthful.

Highlands Road Sine Cera 2013

Price: R130

Total production: 4 440 bottles

Abv: 13.08%

50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Semillon, fermented in tank together before 35% matured for six months in barrel, ranging from first to third-fill. Citrus, white peach, black currant, flowers, a hint of vanilla and some leesy complexity on the nose. The palate meanwhile shows plenty of concentrated fruit and driving acidity – plenty of wow factor!

91

Gabriëlskloof Magdalena 2013

Price: R120

Total production: 3 165 bottles

Abv: 13.42%

55% Semillon, 45% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented and matured for six months in 400- and 500-litre barrels, 30% new and the latter in tank. Lime and white peach as well as flowers and thatch on the nose. Rich but balanced – layers of flavour, creamy texture and a long, saline finish.

Strandveld Adamastor 2012

Price: R145

Total production: 6 830 bottles

Abv: 13.59%

53% Semillon, 47% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented and matured for 10 months in 300- and 500-litre French oak, 25% new and the latter tank predominantly fermented. Lime and lemon, white peach, thatch and some leesy complexity on the nose. Rich and thick textured with moderate acidity. Sweet up front before a savoury finish – has real interest.

Trizanne Signature Wines Sauvignon Blanc Semillon Reserve 2014

Price: R145

Total production: 2 500 bottles

Abv: 13.32%

51% Sauvignon Blanc and 49% Semillon, fermented and matured for 10 months in French oak, none new. Lime, white peach, apple and a little spice on the nose and palate. Good fruity purity and racy acidity, the finish long and savoury. Really well balanced possessing both breadth and depth.

90

Constantia Uitsig Constantia 2013

Price: R125

Total production: 10 430 bottles

Abv: 14%

67% Semillon, 33% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented in barrel and the latter in tank before the blend is made and matured for a further seven months in barrel, 20% new. A pleasantly grassy top note before lime, white peach, some oak spice and a little maritime character on the nose. Full and weighty with a long finish.

90

Strandveld Adamastor 2013

Price: R145

Total production: 6 045 bottles

Abv: 13.17%

52% Semillon, 48% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented and matured for 10 months in 300- and 500-litre French oak, 17% new and the latter predominantly tank fermented. The nose shows notes of thatch, fynbos and cut grass before lime, white peach and subtle spice. The palate meanwhile is intensely flavoured with driving acidity and a long, savoury finish making for a particular drinking experience.

Complete scores below.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Rating
Bizoe Henriëtte 2014	Western Cape	85
Bloemendal Kanonberg 2013	Durbanville	88
Bloemendal Kanonberg 2014	Durbanville	87
Cape Point Vineyards Isliedh 2014	Cape Peninsula	87
Constantia Glen Two 2014	Constantia	93
Constantia Uitsig Constantia 2013	Constantia	90
Delaire Graff White Reserve 2013	Coastal Region	87
Domaine de Chevalier Blanc 2011	Pessac-Léognan, Bordeaux	91
Gabriëlskloof Magdalena 2013	Bot River	91
Gabriëlskloof Magdalena 2014	Bot River	89
Groot Constantia Gouverneurs Reserve 2014	Constantia	87
Highlands Road Sine Cear 2013	Elgin	91
KWV The Mentors Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2013	Darling	87
KWV The Mentors Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2014	Western Cape	88
Morgenster 2014	Stellenbosch	89
Mulderbosch Faithful Hound 2013	Western Cape	94
Mulderbosch Faithful Hound 2014	Western Cape	87
Nitida Coronata Integration 2014	Durbanville	93
Nitida Sauvignon Blanc Semillon Reserve Collection 2015	Durbanville	86
Oak Valley Mountain Reserve 2011	Elgin	92
Spier Creative Block 2 2014	Coastal Region	87
Steenberg Magna Carta 2012	Constantia	85
Steenberg Magna Carta 2013	Constantia	85
Strandveld Adamastor 2012	Elim	91
Strandveld Adamastor 2013	Elim	90
Tokara Director's Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	92
Trizanne Signature Wines Sauvignon Blanc Semilon Reserve 2014	Elim	91
Vergelegen G.V.B. 2012	Stellenbosch	88
Vergelegen G.V.B. 2013	Stellenbosch	92
Vrede en Lust Barrique 2013	Elgin	89
Vrede en Lust Barrique 2014	Elgin	87