



PRESCIENT

CHARDONNAY

~ REPORT 2015 ~

APPROACH

The line-up was 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.

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 100-point system.

Christian Eedes
Winemag.co.za editor

KEY FINDINGS

This was a quite extraordinary tasting – 29 out of the 60 wines in the line-up rating 90 points or more on the 100-point quality scale.

Even more remarkable was that out of these top performing wines, 23 were from the 2014 vintage which has until now been rather maligned for producing “lighter, less powerful” wines. This panel found very much to the contrary, the wines from the 2014 being, in a word, towering.

Again and again, the judges were impressed by the power that the wines showed, power in the very best sense, power as depth of flavour. Fruit delineation was close to impeccable and I am very happy to recount that producers are not relying on excessively high alcohols by volume (13.5% seemed about average) nor extravagant oak regimes to make an impact.

As for which appellations were in the ascendancy, Elgin enjoyed an excellent showing with four wines out of the eight to obtain the joint highest score of 94 points. This ward, of course, likes to claim Chardonnay as its own but there’s still work to be done, Stellenbosch dominating last year’s Chardonnay Report when it was mostly the 2013 vintage under scrutiny.

This is the fifth year of the Chardonnay Report (previously known as the Christian Eedes Chardonnay Report but now sponsored by financial services company Prescient) and though we have dispensed with a top 10, individual producers who consistently appear at the top of the category and therefore might be considered the best are Paul Cluver and Uva Mira with Hartenberg perhaps a short distance behind.

Any concerns whatsoever? As was the case last year, one minor issue is reduction – a subtle note of “flint” or “burnt matchstick” can add complexity but there were a few wines where sulphur was arguably playing too much of a role.

Then there is the matter of “outlier wines”. Such wines might be very good on their own terms but are so stylistically different from the category in general that it becomes difficult for the judges, tasting blind, to reward them.

What did get the nod were wines which showed great purity of fruit, a fair amount of body and acidity and a definite dryness about them. Subtlety and austerity was favoured over the funky, even if funky often makes for interesting drinking. Ultimately, the panel sought to recognise classically styled Chardonnay and if that is what you prefer, then you’ve never had it so good.

TASTING NOTES

94

Eikendal 2014

Price: R165

Pear, white peach, lime and lemon plus a little leesy complexity on the nose. A leaner, more airy style with pure fruit and lovely freshness while the finish is long and savoury. Understated and sophisticated.

94

Groot Constantia 2014

Price: R174

Lime, lemon and grapefruit plus attractive oak and a hint of reduction on the nose. Wonderfully pure, clean fruit and driving acidity on the palate. Powerful yet poised.

94

KWV The Mentors 2013

Price: R165

Citrus, apple and an intriguing leesy quality. Generous fruit and good texture which make for a nicely coated acidity on the palate. Layers of flavour culminating in a long, savoury finish.

94

Paul Cluver Estate 2014

Price: R170

A complex nose showing citrus, red apple, vanilla and a little struck match reduction. Lovely fruit expression and coated acidity before a gently savoury finish. Impressive richness and layers of flavour.

94

Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2014

Price: R400

A subtle nose of pear, white peach, lime and lemon plus a little reduction. Excellent fruit concentration and freshness, the finish long and pithy. Particularly elegant.

94

Richard Kershaw Elgin Clonal Selection 2014

Price: R380

The nose shows lime and lemon, attractive oak and a struck match note. Pure fruit providing real depth on the palate but also lovely zip and energy. Rich and full but impeccably balanced.

94

Sumaridge 2013

Price: R200

An exotic nose showing plenty of primary fruit but also some more secondary waxy, leesy character. The palate shows great depth of flavour, tangy acidity and an ultra-long finish.

94

Uva Mira The Single Tree 2014

Price: R450

A potent wine – heady aromas of all sorts of fruit (pear, lime, lemon and white peach) as well as a little vanilla while the palate is luscious but also beautifully balanced, the finish long and savoury. Plenty of wow factor.

93

StellenRust Barrel Fermented 2014

Price: Not yet released.

Blossom, lime and lemon plus a little oak spice and a hint of yeasty complexity. Super-concentrated fruit, well-judged oak and driving acidity. Thick textured and long with plenty of detail.

93

Uva Mira The Mira 2014

Price: R145

Complex nose and palate. Aromas of lime and lemon, vanilla, a little reduction and a leesy note. Rich and full with great flavour intensity but not without verve thanks to tangy acidity. Big but very well proportioned.

92

Evidence 2014 (Julien Schaal)

Approximate retail price: R250

Idiosyncratic but enticing with notes of marmalade, red apple, honey and spice on nose and palate. Complex and subtle.

92

Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2014

Price: R310

Complex nose and palate. Aromas of lime, lemon, pear, peach, vanilla, a touch of struck match and some leesy complexity. Good core of fruit and zesty acidity - lovely richness and length.

92

Hartenberg 2013

Price: R95

Lime, lemon and apple plus vanilla and a subtle leesy note. Weightless intensity on the palate – good fruit expression, zippy acidity and a really long, savoury finish. Lots going on.

92

Newton Johnson Southend 2014

Price: R130

Lemon, orange, some vanilla and oak spice and a definite yeasty note. Rich and quite broad on the palate, tangy acidity lending balance.

92

Oak Valley Elgin 2014

Price: R145

A hint of reduction but pear, white peach, flowers and spice also present on the nose. Massive intensity – pure fruit, fresh acidity and well-managed oak. Layers of flavour culminating in a long, savoury finish.

92

Tokara Reserve Collection Stellenbosch 2014

Price: Not yet released.

Lime, lemon, some vanilla and a leesy note on the nose. Big and rich with real depth of flavour offset by racy acidity.

92

Vergelegen Reserve 2014

Price: Not yet released.

Citrus blossom, pear, white peach, lemon and a little oak spice on the nose. Light but complex with lovely fruit purity, fresh acidity and a long pithy finish. Particularly elegant.

91

Chamonix 2014

Price: R160

Very expressive on nose and palate. Aromas of flowers, lemon, orange and peach plus some yeasty complexity. Rich and ripe on the palate with moderate acidity and a gently savoury finish.

91

Iona Elgin 2014

Price: R187

Pear, lime and lemon on the nose plus vanilla and a flinty note. Weightless intensity on the palate – pure and focused with nervy acidity. A wine of refinement.

91

Môreson Mercator Premium 2014

Price: Not yet released.

Citrus, green and red apple plus creamy oak on the nose. Fuller style with plenty of sweet fruit, good weight and texture before a savoury finish.

91

Radford Dale 2013

Price: R200

A wine that does not trade off primary fruit – biscuit and yeasty notes on the nose before a palate which is rich and full. Some fruit in evidence but this is more about texture and mouth-feel, a good line of acidity ensuring the wine does not become listless.

91

Warwick White Lady 2014

Price: R235

A top note of blossom before pear and citrus plus a little hint of reduction on the nose. Succulent fruit and bright acidity before a saline finish.

91

Vriesenhof 2014

Price: R150

An unusual nose showing overtly floral top notes before citrus, peach and spice plus plenty of yeasty complexity. Rich and broad with soft acidity, but the finish long and dry even so.

90

Ataraxia 2013

Price: Sold out.

A floral top note before notes of pear, white peach and citrus on the nose. The palate, meanwhile, shows succulent fruit and fresh acidity before a long, pithy finish.

90

Bartinney 2014

Price: R127

Lime and lemon plus some leesy complexity on the nose and palate. Still very primary with pure fruit and tangy acidity, the finish long and dry.

90

Buitenverwagting 2014

Price: R120

Citrus, vanilla and burnt toast plus some yeast complexity and a little reduction. Rich and full with sweet fruit and tangy acidity. Powerful and long.

90

DeMorgenzon Reserve 2014

Price: Sold out.

A floral top note before notes of pear and white peach and attractive oak notes on the nose. Clean and very fresh on the palate – a leaner style and still very primary so keep for at least 12 months.

90

Mulderbosch 2014

Price: R105

Peach, lemon and orange on the nose. Rich and broad on the palate with a creamy texture and tangy acidity. Layers of flavour.

90

Rustenberg Five Soldiers 2013

Price: R300

Citrus, vanilla and spice plus some struck match on the nose. The palate shows super-concentrated fruit balanced by vibrant acidity – rich and thick textured, this is powerful stuff.

COMPLETE RATINGS A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Rating
Almenkerk 2014	Elgin	85
Arendsig Blok A15 2014	Robertson	87
Ataraxia 2013	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	90
Bartinney 2014	Banghoek Stellenbosch	90
Boschendal Elgin Series 2013	Elgin	87
Bouchard Finlayson Kaaimansgat 2014	Overberg	87
Buitenverwachting 2014	Constantia	89
Capensis 2013	Western Cape	87
Chamonix 2014	Franschhoek	91
Chamonix Reserve 2014	Franschhoek	89
Creation Art of Chardonnay 2014	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	85
Crystallum Clay Shales 2014	Overberg	87
Crystallum The Agnes 2014	Western Cape	88
DeMorgenzon Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	90
De Wetshof Bateleur 2013	Robertson	88
De Wetshof The Site 2014	Robertson	88
Delaire Graff Terrace Block Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Edgebaston - Finlayson Family Wines 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Eikendal 2014	Western Cape	94
Evidence 2014 (Julien Schaal)	Elgin	92
Fleur du Cap Unfiltered 2014	Western Cape	87
Glen Carlou 2014	Paarl	88
Groot Constantia 2014	Constantia	94
Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2014	Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	92
Hartenberg 2013	Stellenbosch	92
Hartenberg The Eleanor 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Haskell Anvil 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Iona Elgin 2014	Elgin	91
Jordan Nine Yards 2014	Stellenbosch	86
Julien Schaal 2014	Elgin	89
KWV The Mentors 2013	Elgin	94
Lismore 2013	Greyton	85
Longridge 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Longridge Clos du Ciel 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Meerlust 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Môreson Mercator Premium 2014	Franschhoek	91
Mulderbosch 2014	Stellenbosch	90
Newton Johnson Family Vineyards 2014	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	89
Newton Johnson Southend 2014	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	92
Oak Valley Elgin 2014	Elgin	92

Paul Cluver Estate 2014	Elgin	94
Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2014	Elgin	94
Richard Kershaw Elgin Clonal Selection 2014	Elgin	94
Radford Dale 2013	Stellenbosch	91
Restless River 2013	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	88
Rustenberg Five Soldiers 2013	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	90
Rustenberg Stellenbosch 2014	Stellenbosch	87
StellenRust Barrel Fermented 2014	Stellenbosch	93
Sterhuis Barrel Selection 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Sumaridge 2013	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	94
Sutherland 2012	Elgin	87
Tokara Reserve Collection Stellenbosch 2014	Stellenbosch	92
Uva Mira 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Uva Mira The Mira 2014	Stellenbosch	93
Uva Mira The Single Tree 2014	Stellenbosch	94
Vriesenhof 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Warwick White Lady 2014	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	91
Waterford Single Vineyard 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Vergelegen Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	92
Yardstick 2013	Western Cape	88