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KEY FINDINGS

35 entries were received from 31 producers for this year's competition and the average score was 89.2. There were 15 wines (43% of the line-up) to rate 90 or higher on the 100-point scale and what is interesting is that among these, no particular growing area dominates: three wines from Elgin, three multi-regional blends, two from Elim, two from Stellenbosch, two from Walker Bay and one each from Cape Peninsula, Constantia and Durbanville.

The average price per bottle of the top 15 was R185.20 which suggests this category is starting to demand a premium while average production was 5 870 bottles or 978 six-bottle cases and thus still a very niche category.

As usual, a spread of styles from "light and fresh" to "rich and round", the challenge for the producer always being to arrive at a whole greater than the sum of its parts. It seemed to the panel that oxidative techniques were being applied more than ever (winemakers perhaps influenced by the success enjoyed by the Chenin-based wines made like this coming out of the Swartland), the outcome often controversial with such wines typically gaining in complexity and texture but sacrificing freshness. On the other hand, there were still wines which appeared too lean and green.

What is again striking is that there is no fixed recipe when it comes to making these wines, the combination of Sauvignon Blanc to Semillon among the top 15 varying widely from 83:17 in the case of Cape Point Vineyards Isledh 2015 to 35:65 for Constantia Uitsig Natura Vista 2014. What was the panel rewarding? Sometimes purity of fruit, other times structure, the very best combining both to form a complex and harmonious whole.

Barrel regimes are equally far from uniform, all manner of different formats employed and the Isledh even seeing a portion vinified in clay amphora. The best wine showed very thoughtful use of oak whereas on the lesser examples this occasionally looked a bit clumsy, "planky" being a descriptor used in one or two instances.

On the whole, however, a category where excellence is very much to the fore, the dedication on the part of producers in both vineyard and cellar patent to see.

JUDGING PROCEDURES

The judging panel is chaired by myself and further consists 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 taste blind, scoring done according to the 100-point system. Final ratings are made on the basis of discussion that involves retasting where necessary with a view to reaching consensus.

Christian Eedes
Editor, Winemag.co.za

TASTING NOTES

94

Iona One Man Band White 2015

Price: R240

Total production: 3 200 bottles

Abv: 13.9%

60% Semillon, 40% Sauvignon Blanc. Fermented and matured for 11 months in 500-litre French oak barrels, a combination of second- and third-fill. A wonderfully complex nose showing lime, pear, white peach and blackcurrant plus hints of spice and dried herbs. The palate shows strikingly pure fruit plus a riveting line of acidity before a long and saline finish. Seamlessly constructed.

Strandveld Adamastor 2014

Price: R145

Total production: 6 000 bottles

Abv: 12.75%

56% Sauvignon Blanc, 44% Semillon. The former tank fermented, the latter barrel fermented in mostly older 500-litre French oak barrels, maturation lasting 10 months. A complex and compelling nose - top notes of flowers and fynbos mingle with a slight smokiness and spice before apple and peach plus some vanilla. The palate is substantial without being weighty and there's excellent intensity of flavour, the finish long and savoury.

Tokara Director's Reserve 2014

Price: R240

Total production: 13 800 bottles

Abv: 14.0%

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. On the nose, some struck match reduction before fresh herbs, blackcurrant, pear and white peach. The palate is full but just about perfectly balanced – concentrated fruit, nicely coated acidity and a long, saline finish. Classy stuff.

93

Constantia Uitsig Natura Vista 2014

Price: R155

Total production: 6 300 bottles

Abv: 13.66%

65% Semillon, 35% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented in 600-litre barrels and the latter in tank. After fermentation, the blend is made and then matured for seven months in oak. A subtle and complex nose with some slight reduction before an attractive herbal note, citrus, white peach, Granny Smith apple and spice. The palate is lean but super-detailed and wonderfully poised. The finish, meanwhile, is long and savoury. A serious proposition.

92

Trizanne Signature Wines Reserve Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015

Price: R165

Total production: 3 000 bottles

Abv: 13.42%

51% Sauvignon Blanc, 49% Semillon. Fermented and matured for 11 months in a combination of 225-litre, 300-litre and 500-litre old French oak barrels. Alluring aromatics of dried herbs, flowers, apple and peach plus some subtle oxidative character. The palate meanwhile is rich and broad, dense even, with nicely coated acidity.

91

Barton Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015

Price: R70

Total production: 5 200 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

51% Sauvignon Blanc, 49% Semillon. Fermented and matured for nine months in tank. Fynbos, green bean, apple and white peach as well as attractive spice on the nose. The palate is well balanced with concentrated fruit offset by racy acidity. Very appealing.

Cape Point Vineyards Isliedh 2015

Price: R230

Total production: 6 780 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

83% Sauvignon Blanc, 17% Semillon. Largely fermented and matured for 10 months in 600-litre barrels, 40% new but also includes a 5% portion fermented in clay amphora. A super-complex nose showing dried flowers, cut apple, stone fruit, grandilla plus some yeasty complexity. Rich but balanced on the palate – layers of flavour, tangy acidity and a long, savoury finish.

91

Creation Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015

Price: R138

Total production: 10 000 bottles

Abv: 14.0%

80% Sauvignon Blanc (50% fermented in tank and 50% in barrel, 50% new) and 20% Semillon (fermented in second- and third-barrels), maturation lasting seven months. An exotic nose showing flowers, blackcurrant, citrus, peach and granadilla. Rich and ripe on the palate – concentrated fruit offset by zippy acidity. Makes a statement.

Delaire Graff White Reserve 2014

Price: R285

Total production: 4 000 bottles

Abv: 13.0%

55% Sauvignon Blanc (Darling and Stellenbosch), 45% (Franschhoek). Fermented and matured for five months in old 225-litre French oak barrels. On the nose, a hint of reduction before notes of citrus and white peach. Lovely pure fruit and bright acidity. Thick, almost chewy in texture while there's some spicy bite on the finish.

Highlands Road Sine Cera 2014

Price: R140

Total production: 6 750 bottles

Abv: 13.67%

50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Semillon. Components vinified separately mainly in tank but including small portions aged in oak, while 10% from the previous vintage was added to the final blend. A hint of reduction before lime, naartjie, white peach and blackcurrant. The palate is particularly elegant – lean and fresh, it moves really well in the mouth while the finish is long and pithy.

KWV The Mentors Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015

Price: R175

Total production: 4 397 bottles

Abv: 13.67%

70% Sauvignon Blanc, 30% Semillon sourced variously from Stellenbosch, Darling and Walker Bay. 70% of the wine was matured for two months in barrel, 20% new. The nose shows lime and white peach, a little herbal character as well as a hint of lanolin. The palate is pleasantly lean with racy acidity, the finish long and extra-dry.

91

Vrede en Lust Barrique 2014

Price: R140

Total production: 4 930 bottles

Abv: 13.29%

54% Semillon, 46% Sauvignon Blanc. Fermented and matured for 11 months in second- and third-fill 225-litre French oak barrels. A definite waxy note on the nose plus citrus, peach, hay and a little spice. Medium bodied but possessing good flavour intensity and fresh acidity, the finish long and savoury.

90

Nitida Coronata Integration 2015

Price: R145

Total production: 5 500 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

60% Semillon, 40% Sauvignon Blanc, the former fermented in new French oak and the latter in tank. After fermentation, the wine was blended and matured for eight months in old 300-litre French oak barrels. A multifaceted nose showing sea breeze, fynbos, citrus and peach as well as a hint of vanilla and spice. The palate shows lovely fruit purity and a good line of acidity before long, dry finish.

Mulderbosch Faithful Hound White 2014

Price: R150

Total production: 6 000 bottles

Abv: 13.02%

62% Semillon (Franschhoek) and 38% Sauvignon Blanc (Elgin, Darling and Stellenbosch). Fermentation took place in 500-litre barrels (60% new in the case of the Semillon) before blending and maturation lasting four months. The nose shows white peach, red apple, vanilla and honey. The palate is rich and thick textured with moderate acidity and a gently savoury finish. No longer entirely primary.

Zorgvliet Simoné 2015

Price: R160

Total production: 2 100 bottles

Abv: 13.64%

50% Sauvignon Blanc, 50% Semillon, both fermented and matured for nine months in old 500-litre barrels French oak barrels, then blended and matured in tank for another four months. The nose shows stone fruit, naartjie, a hint of vanilla as well as hay and fynbos in the background. Lovely presence in the mouth – rich and broad with a slightly oxidative quality about it.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Barton Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015	Walker Bay	91
Benguela Cove Semillon Sauvignon Blanc 2015	Walker Bay	87
Bizoe Henriëtte 2015	Western Cape	87
Bloemendal Kanonberg 2014	Durbanville	87
Cape Point Vineyards Isliedh 2015	Cape Peninsula	91
Celestina Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015	Cape Agulhas	87
Chamonix Reserve White 2014	Franschhoek	87
Constantia Glen Two 2015	Constantia	89
Constantia Uitsig Natura Vista 204	Constantia	93
Creation Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015	Walker Bay	91
David Nieuwoudt Ghost Corner The Bowline 2015	Elim	89
Delaire Graff White Reserve 2014	Coastal Region	91
Elgin Vintners The Century 2014	Elgin	86
Flagstone Treaty Tree Sauvignon Blanc Semillon Reserve 2015	Elim	87
Gabriëlskloof Magdalena The Landscape Series 2015	Western Cape	87
Groot Constantia Gouverneur's Reserve 2014	Constantia	88
Highlands Road Sine Cera 2014	Elgiin	91
Highlands Road Sine Cera 2015	Elgin	88
Iona One Man Band White 2015	Elgin	94
Kings Kloof Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015	Coastal Region	86
KWV The Mentors Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015	Coastal Region	91
Morgenster White 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Mulderbosch Faithful Hound White 2014	Western Cape	90
Mulderbosch Faithful Hound White 2015	Western Cape	87
Newton Johnson Resonance 2016	Upper Hemel en Aarde Valley	88
Nitida Coronata Integration 2015	Durbanville	90
Steenberg Magna Carta 2015	Constantia	89
Strandveld Adamastor 2014	Elim	94
Tokara Director's Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	94
Trizanne Signature Wines Reserve Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2015	Elim	92
Vrede en Lust Barrique 2014	Elgin	91
Vrede en Lust Barrique 2015	Elgin	87
Waverley Hills Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2016	Tulbagh	87
Zorgvliet Simoné 2014	Banghoek	86
Zorgvliet Simoné 2015	Banghoek	90