



**CAPE
WHITE
BLEND
REPORT
2016**

KEY FINDINGS

First of all, what is a “Cape White Blend”? For the purposes of this tasting, all white blends containing a Chenin Blanc component of more than 15% and less than 85% were eligible. The idea is to recognize the growing category of wines which sees different white grapes combined in a formal way to produce something outstanding.

There are, of course, quite a few white blends made in the so-called Bordeaux style which see Sauvignon Blanc combined with Semillon in varying proportions. Cape White Blends are separate to these, the stipulation regarding Chenin done so as to ensure that the category has some meaning but simultaneously allowing winemakers as much freedom of expression as possible.

Chenin Blanc is, of course, South Africa’s most widely planted with critics abuzz about the quality of many of the wines produced solely from it and it seems only fitting to recognise its role in premium blends as well.

Terms which are occasionally used for such wines are “Mediterranean” or “Rhône-style” on the basis that they tend to include varieties like Grenache Blanc, Roussanne and Viognier but ultimately they’re not that useful due to the fundamental role played to date by Chenin Blanc, a variety otherwise associated with the Loire and not generally regarded as warm climate. In addition, it’s high time the South African industry got over its cultural cringe – these are not derivative wines so why use derivative terminology to refer to them?

43 entries were received from 36 producers for this year’s competition and the average score on the 100-point quality scale was 88.5. Because Cape White Blends is an emerging category with almost no rules applying, this results in a huge diversity of expressions – some wines will definitely polarise consumers but the lack of formulaic winemaking and the commitment to pushing boundaries is commendable.

The best wines tended to have great texture but also great freshness. What’s interesting is many winemakers eschew new oak – the wines typically vinified in big-format, old barrels and that texture is therefore derived from the grapes, often from old vines.

As for rest of the line-up, there were some that came across as cheap ‘n cheerful, exhibiting plenty of primary fruit but no great structure or complexity. These wines certainly have their place and producers shouldn’t be disappointed with more modest ratings from the panel.

Then there were a few more ambitious wines which the panel felt hadn’t come off. “How funky is too funky?” was the question posed, wines showing flaws like excessive reduction or oxidation and in some cases, both! “The category lends itself to cowboy winemaking but the fruit ultimately has to be safe,” remarked Pietersen.

There was also a sense that some wines had been overworked, these appearing sweet, alcoholic and overly developed. Achieving ripeness under the Cape’s generally warm growing conditions is not usually

difficult so the issue therefore becomes preserving freshness and elegance – malolactic fermentation, batonnage and the use of oak need to be applied judiciously.

There was also debate about which varieties to employ for best results. Viognier, for instance, provides enticing aromatics but can compromise the palate when not handled well. The use of Sauvignon Blanc, with its greener aromatics and flavours, can make a wine look disjointed. And as for the importance of Marsanne and Roussanne, too early to tell. Those winemakers who are getting it right, however, have something that manages to be both of very good inherent quality but also uniquely South African.

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

95

Lammershoek Terravinum Reserve White 2015

Price: R185

Total production: 12 000 bottles

Abv: 13.45%

54% Chenin Blanc, 35% Viognier and 11% Chardonnay. Fermented and matured for eight months in barrels of various sizes, none new. A rather exotic nose including notes of bruised apple, peach, herbs and spice plus some yeasty character. The palate has impressive breadth and depth – a good core of fruit and bright acidity before a long and savoury finish. Comes across as entirely seamless.

94

DeMorgenzon Maestro White 2014

Price: R167.50

Total production: 24 000 bottles

Abv: 14.32%

26% Roussanne, 25% Chardonnay, 19% Grenache Blanc, 17% Chenin Blanc and 13% Viognier. Fermented and matured for 10 months in a combination of barrique, foudre and concrete egg. Pear, peach and citrus plus some thatch, honey and spice. Rich and full on the palate with coated acidity – very flavoursome with a long, savoury finish.

94

Muratie Laurens Campher Blended White 2015

Price: R135

Total production: 12 000 bottles

Abv: 14.06%

40% Chenin Blanc, 29% Sauvignon Blanc, 29% Verdelho and 2% Viognier. Fermented and matured for 10 months in 500-litre French oak barrels, 20% new. Lovely aromatics – apple, white peach, black currant plus subtle herbs and spice. The palate has wonderful richness and depth of flavour while remaining focussed and tight. Complex and long.

92

Blake's Family Wines Tourmaline 2015

Price: R120

Total production: 3 000 bottles

Abv: 13.42%

60% Chenin Blanc, 25% Chardonnay and 15% Viognier. Fermented and matured for eight months in 300-litre French oak barrels, 100% new. Top notes of honeysuckle and dried herbs before citrus and stone fruit plus earth, some nuttiness and spice. Fabulous fruit concentration, creamy texture, coated acidity. Big and super-intense.

92

DeMorgenzon Maestro White 2015

Price: R167.50

Total production: 18 000 bottles

Abv: 14.07%

29% Roussanne, 23% Chardonnay, 22% Chenin Blanc, 18% Grenache Blanc and 8% Viognier. Fermented and matured for 10 months in a combination of barrique, foudre and concrete egg. The nose shows subtle notes of herbs and sea breeze before citrus, apple and peach. The palate shows excellent flavour intensity and freshness while the finish is long and savoury.

92

Piekenierskloof Heirloom White 2015

Price: R135

Total production: 4 902 bottles

Abv: 13%

65% Chenin Blanc, 20% Grenache Blanc and 15% Chardonnay. Fermented and matured for four months in a combination of new and second full 500-litre French and American oak barrels. A particularly fragrant and subtle nose of citrus, apple and peach plus honeysuckle and herbs as well as a hint of toasty oak. The palate meanwhile shows lovely pure fruit and fresh acidity before a long, dry finish.

92

Thorne and Daughters Rocking Horse 2015

Price: R220

Total production: 10 800 bottles

Abv: 13.6%

33% Roussanne, 23% Semillon, 18% Chenin Blanc, 20% Chardonnay and 6% Clairette Blanche.

Fermented and matured for nine months in old oak of various sizes. A tantalizingly fragrant nose with notes of potpourri, stone fruit and spice. Rich and broad on the palate with a creamy texture, sweet on entry but the finish lingering and savoury.

91

Darling Cellars Lime Kilns 2015

Price: R100

Total production: 3 333 bottles

Abv: 13.4%

40% Chenin Blanc, 30% Chardonnay and 30% Viognier. Fermented and matured for nine months in 300-litre French oak barrels, 80% new. Top notes of potpourri and dried herbs before cut apple and peach plus some attractive oak character. The palate is rich and full – plenty of concentrated fruit and bright acidity before a long and savoury finish.

91

Liepzig White 2015

Price: R80

Total production: 1 738 bottles

Abv: 14.05%

59% Chardonnay, 18% Viognier, 16% Chenin Blanc and 7% Sauvignon Blanc. Chardonnay, Viognier and Chenin Blanc matured for six months in older oak while the Sauvignon Blanc component is unoaked. A hint of reduction before citrus and peach as well as plenty of secondary character including honeycomb, nuts and spice. Full flavoured, rich and deep. Pleasantly thick textured with a savoury finish.

91

Painted Wolf Peloton Blanc 2014

Price: R95

Total production: 19 949 bottles

Abv: 12.88%

35% Chenin Blanc, 36% Viognier, 16% Roussanne, 10% Chardonnay and 3% Marsanne. The Chenin and Viognier fermented in tank on staves, the other components fermented and matured for 10 months in barrel. A pronounced waxy character to go with notes of citrus. Rich and thick textured, the acidity nicely integrated and the finish long and savoury.

91

Val du Charron Four White Legs 2015

Price: R74

Total production: 6 900 bottles

Abv: 14%

33% Chenin Blanc, 24% Nouvelle, 20% Pinot Gris, 20% Sauvignon Blanc and 3% Viognier. Matured for six months in barrel, 20% new and then a further three months in tank. A hint of reduction before citrus, stone fruit, thatch and a little rancio character. Super-rich and full on the palate, tangy acidity lending balance – perhaps not the most refined offering but very characterful.

91

The Fledge & Co. Vagabond 2015

Price: R140

Total production: 3 948 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

35% Chardonnay, 26% Chenin Blanc, 26% Viognier, 6/5% Verdelho 6.5% and 6.5% Hárslevelü. The Chardonnay, Viognier and Verdelho were fermented in old French oak barrels of varying size; the Hárslevelü was fermented on skins for a week before being put into old French oak. The Chenin Blanc was tank fermented before barrel maturation. 13 months of maturation in total. Very aromatic with notes of white flowers and hay before citrus, apple and peach plus a hint of spice. The palate shows pure fruit and fresh acidity – a wine of real vibrancy.

90

Springfontein Limestone Rocks Dark Side of The Moon 2014

Price: R395

Total production: 1 200 bottles

Abv: 14.36%

42% Chenin Blanc, 33% Pinotage, 25% Chardonnay. Fermented in older, large-format barrels and matured for 17 months in 70% French and 30% Hungarian oak barrels, all new. On the nose, red apple, stone fruit, lots of spice but also some floral character in the background. The palate meanwhile is very flavourful, pleasantly thick textured but also possessing bright acidity. Unconventional – has a definite oxidative character about it.

90

Vondeling Babiana 2013

Price: R215

Total production: 12 000 bottles

Abv: 13.64%

60% Chenin Blanc, 15% Grenache Blanc, 15% Viognier and 10% Chardonnay. Fermented and matured for 12 months in French oak, one-third new. Stone fruit, some intriguing waxy character plus vanilla and spice. Rich but balanced – lovely weight and texture on the palate.

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Adoro Naudé White 2006	Western Cape	88
Adoro Naudé White 2009	Western Cape	88
Adoro Naudé White 2010	Western Cape	84
Allee Bleue Starlette Blanc 2016	Franschhoek	84
Alvi's Drift Reserve CVC 2015	Worcester	89
Barton Blanc 2015	Walker Bay	87
Bergsig Icarus 2014	Breedekloof	87
Blake's Family Wines Tourmaline 2015	Swartland	92
Bosman Family Vineyards Adama White 2015	Western Cape	86
Darling Cellars Lime Kilns 2015	Darling	91
Daschbosch Exanimo 2013	Breedekloof	87
Daschbosch Exanimo 2014	Breedekloof	85
DeMorgenzon Maestro White 2014	Stellenbosch	94
DeMorgenzon Maestro White 2015	Stellenbosch	92
Doran Vineyards Arya 2015	Voor Paardeberg	84
Fairview Cape Granite White Blend 2015	Paarl	89
Fairview Nurok 2015	Paarl	87
Flagstone Noon Gun 2015	Western Cape	86
Hartenberg Alchemy Sauvignon Blanc Semillon Chenin Blanc 2016	Stellenbosch	84
Joostenberg Fairhead 2015	Paarl	88
Keermont Terrasse 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Lammershoek Terravinum Reserve White 2015	Swartland	95
Leipzig White 2015	Western Cape	91
Miles Mossop Saskia 2013	Coastal Region	89
Muratie Laurens Campher Blended White 2015	Stellenbosch	94
Neethlingshof The Six Flowers 2016	Stellenbosch	87
Painted Wolf Peloton Blanc 2014	Coastal Region	91
Perdeberg The Dry Land Collection Rossouw's Heritage 2015	Coastal Region	84
Piekenierskloof Heirloom White 2015	Piekenierskloof	92
Riebeek Cellars Short Street CGV 2015	Swartland	89
Solms-Delta Amalie 2014	Western Cape	85
Springfontein Limestone Rocks Dark Side of The Moon 2014	Walker Bay	90
Stark-Condé The Field Blend 2015	Jonkershoek Valley	87
The Fledge & Co. Vagabond 2015	Western Cape	91
Thorne and Daughters Rocking Horse 2015	Western Cape	92
Val du Charron Four White Legs 2015	Western Cape	91
Van Collier Family Reserve Fijndraai Viognier Chenin Roussanne 2016	Stellenbosch	88

Vondeling Babiana 2013	Voor Paardeberg	90
Vondeling Babiana 2014	Voor Paardeberg	87
Vondeling Babiana 2015	Voor Paardeberg	89
Vrede en Lust White Mischief 2015	Elgin	87
Welbedacht Myra Quintuple 2015	Wellington	89
Zevenwacht The Tine Mine 2015	Stellenbosch	88