



PRESCIENT
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
~ REPORT 2017 ~

Convened by Winemag.co.za

KEY FINDINGS

This is the sixth annual Cabernet Sauvignon Report, sponsored by a multinational financial services provider Prescient since last year, and upon completing this tasting, I was left with a feeling that for all the mystique associated with wines from this variety, it's actually pretty difficult to make something truly outstanding under local conditions.

It is as if winemakers are on the horns of dilemma - pursue elegance and hope the resulting wines aren't underdone or pursue power and try not to lose all character and refinement.

On the one hand, winemakers face the reality that wines are now rarely cellared for any length of time and are drunk younger and younger, demanding a softer, more accessible style. On the other hand, Cabernet Sauvignon remains a premium category and therefore needs to taste suitably luxurious.

One winemaking approach therefore is to make wines in a lighter style featuring more red than black fruit. As a result of attempting to be more accessible to the average drinker, these wines can come across as a little simple.

Another approach is to make wine from much riper fruit which will in turn provide smoother, riper tannins. The problem here however is the resulting wines can appear excessive – the aromas and flavours not clearly defined but appearing jammy. Combine this with heavy extraction and clumsy oak aging and the result is wines which might be impressive to the uninitiated but ultimately lack detail and refreshment, the overall impression being of something sweet, soft and alcoholic.

Whatever stylistic point of departure winemakers are adopting, there seems to be preoccupation with flattening out Cabernet's tannins – this seems a little unfortunate because while no-one wants to drink astringent wine, some tannic grip is precisely what has always made the variety so well suited to food as well as providing it with maturation potential, which remains the mark of great wine even if contrary to commercial trends.

Pyrazines (the chemical compound in Cabernet Sauvignon which provides a "green" or vegetative character) remain topical. They can be positive providing the wine with a certain leafiness or herbal character but equally negative, mint and even outright grassiness being qualities the panel wasn't keen to reward.

But less about the shortcomings of the category and more about the wines that were successful. There were 15 wines to rate 90 points or higher on the 100-point quality scale, Stellenbosch dominating with 14 wines from this district (only Groot Constantia 2015 from elsewhere). Out of the top wines, nine were from 2014 and my sense is that this was a marginally better vintage for Cabernet Sauvignon than 2013. Average production of the top 15 was just under 1 320 12-bottle cases which is relatively small in world terms while the average price was R338.53 a bottle (ranging from R140 for the Peter Falke 2013 to R1 300 for the Vergelegen V 2012).

As I've said before, those wines scoring 86 to 89 should not be overlooked, this band of points roughly equivalent to Four Stars in terms of the old Five Star rating system. The average score of all 65 wines in the line-up was 87.8 and it is clear that South Africa is capable of very good Cabernet Sauvignon. The quest, though, is for greatness.

Christian Eedes

Winemag.co.za co-owner and editor

APPROACH

The tasting is capped at 65 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, Cape Town merchants and cellarers of fine wine.

We tasted blind, scoring done according to the 100-point system.

TASTING NOTES

92

Neil Ellis Jonkershoek Valley Stellenbosch 2014

Price: Not yet released.

Total production: 6 690 bottles

Abv: 14%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 100% new. Red and black fruit, some leafiness, pencil shavings and vanilla on the nose. The palate meanwhile possesses good weight and texture – pure fruit, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Seamlessly assembled.

92

Strydom Rex 2014

Price: R220

Total production: 3 000 bottles

Abv: 14.65%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 40% new. A brooding nose of red and black fruit, pencil shavings, oyster shell and earth. Rich and full on the palate with layers of flavour and a particularly long finish. Grand and impressive.

91

Bartinney 2014

Price: R179

Total production: 15 000 bottles

Abv: 14.4%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 50% new. Red and black fruit plus notes of milk chocolate and spice on the nose. Rich and broad on the palate with lush fruit and moderate acidity.

91

Jordan The Long Fuse 2014

Price: R160

Total production: 35 400 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 23 months in French oak, 25% new. Red and black fruit, fynbos plus attractive oak. Medium bodied with plenty of detail and lovely balance – pure fruit, fresh acidity and fine tannins, the finish long and savoury.

91

Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2013

Price: R335

Total production: 5 750 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 24 months in French oak, 90% new. Red and black fruit plus vanilla and some toasty character on the nose. Big and dense on the palate but well balanced – lush fruit and fresh acidity, the finish long – very striking.

91

L6e Riche Reserve 2014

Price: R500

Total production: 10 500 bottles

Abv: 14.58%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 22 months in French oak, 62% new. Red and black fruit, a hint of tobacco, some earthiness and a little cocoa on the nose. Good fruit definition, fresh acidity and pleasantly grippy tannins – understated and classy.

91

Peter Falke 2013

Price: R140

Total production: 8 600 bottles

Abv: 14.14%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 100% new. Red and black fruit, an attractive leafiness and pencil shavings. Dense fruit with vibrant acidity and firm but fine tannins, the finish long and slightly saline.

91

Rustenberg Peter Barlow 2012

Price: R400

Total production: 6 557 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 24 months in French oak, 64% new. A brooding nose of red and black fruit, earth, oyster shell, fresh herbs and oak spice. Rich and dense with layers of flavour and great length.

91

Tokara Reserve Collection 2013

Wine Cellar price: R315

Total production: 7 800 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 4% Merlot and 4% Cabernet Franc. Matured for 22 months in French oak, 48% new. Red and black fruit, an attractive herbal note plus graphite and spice. Relatively medium bodied with fresh acidity and long, savoury finish. Plenty of detail.

91

Waterford Estate 2014

Price: R295

Total production: 54 600 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

90% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Petit Verdot and 4% Merlot. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 34% new. Red and black fruit, some leafiness and appealing oak character. Rich and full but beautifully balanced – pure fruit, fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins.

91

Warwick Blue Lady 2014

Price: R275

Total production: 3 233 bottles

Abv: 14%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 24 months in French oak, 64% new. Dark fruit and attractive oak on the nose. Super-concentrated and smooth textured on the palate but not without freshness. Modern in style.

90

Groot Constantia 2015

Price: R201

Total production: 20 000 bottles

Abv: 14%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 17 months in French oak, 53% new. A herbal top note before red and black fruit plus oyster shell on the nose. Concentrated and powerful with an intensely savoury finish, this is compelling stuff.

90

Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2014

Price: Not yet released

Total production: 30 900 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 25% new. Dark fruit, a hint of fresh herbs and oyster shell on the nose. Pleasantly austere on the palate – pure fruit, particularly fresh acidity and firm tannins making for a long, dry finish.

90

Spier 21 Gables 2014

Price: R260

Total production: 16 000 bottles

Abv: 14.46%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 26 months in French oak, 100% new. Cassis, mint, chocolate and spice on the nose. Juicy fruit, fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins – modern in style and sure to have broad appeal.

90

Vergelegen V 2012

Price: R1 300

Total production: 13 500 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 100% new. Red fruit, some fynbos and sea breeze on the nose. Appears quite medium bodied with fresh acidity and a savoury finish. Old school in style.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Alto 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Bartinney 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Bartinney Skyfall 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Belfield Magnifica 2014	Elgin	84
Boekenhoutskloof Franschhoek 2014	Franschhoek	86
Boekenhoutskloof Stellenbosch 2015	Franschhoek	87
Cederberg 2015	Cederberg	88
Cederberg Five Generations 2015	Cederberg	89
Dalla Cia Classico 2015	Stellenbosch	87
David Finlayson GS 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Delaire Graff Laurence Graff Reserve 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Delaire Graff Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	86
De Trafford 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Edgebaston 2014	Stellenbosch	86
Eikendal 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Ernie Els 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Ernie Els Proprietor's 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Flagstone Music Room 2014	Western Cape	87
Fleur du Cap Unfiltered 2014	Stellenbosch	86
Glen Carlou Gravel Quarry 2012	Paarl	88
Groot Constantia 2015	Constantia	90
Guardian Peak Lapa 2014	Western Cape	85
Hartenberg 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Jordan The Long Fuse 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Kanonkop 2012	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	87
Keermont 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2013	Stellenbosch	91
Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2014	Stellenbosch	87
KWV The Mentors Darling 2014	Darling	87
KWV The Mentors Stellenbosch 2014	Stellenbosch	85
Le Riche 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Le Riche Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Meerlust 2013	Stellenbosch	85
Môreson Mata Mata 2015	Coastal Region	87
Nederburg II Centuries 2013	Western Cape	86
Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2014	Stellenbosch	90
Neil Ellis Jonkershoek Valley Stellenbosch 2014	Stellenbosch	92
Oldenburg Vineyards 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Pella Granietbult 2014	Stellenbosch	85
Peter Falke 2013	Stellenbosch	91
Plaisir de Merle 2013	Paarl	88

	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde Valley	87
Restless River 2013		
Reyneke Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	85
Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve 2014	Franschhoek	85
Rickety Bridge The Bridge 2014	Franschhoek	87
Rudera 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Rustenberg Peter Barlow 2012	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	91
Rustenberg Peter Barlow 2013	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	87
Rust en Vrede Estate Vineyards 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Rust en Vrede Single Vineyard 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Spier 21 Gables 2014	Stellenbosch	90
Spier Woolworths Private Collection 2014	Coastal Region	87
Stark-Condé 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Stark-Condé Three Pines 2014	Jonkershoek Valley	88
Stony Brook Ghost Gum 2013	Franschhoek	88
Strydom Rex 2014	Stellenbosch	92
Thelema 2013	Stellenbosch	87
Thelema Sutherland 2013	Elgin	87
The Stellenbosch Reserve Ou Hoofgebou 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Tokara Reserve Collection 2013	Stellenbosch	91
Vergelegen V 2012	Stellenbosch	90
Vergenoegd 2012	Stellenbosch	89
Warwick Blue Lady 2014	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	91
Waterford Estate 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Webersburg 2014	Stellenbosch	88