



**SIGNATURE
RED BLEND
REPORT
2017**

KEY FINDINGS

Why should South Africa be bound by the Bordeaux model when it comes to creating great blended red wine? Perhaps the Rhône is a better reference point given local growing conditions while the so-called “Cape Blend” incorporating Pinotage potentially gives us a unique selling proposition. Then, of course, there are the red blends of yesteryear – Alto Rouge, Chateau Libertas and Rustenberg Dry Red to name but three – which conformed to no particular model but are revered for their complexity and longevity.

Once again, we called for wines which were “distinctive of their originators” and instead of the usual practice of dividing them into various sub-groups according to style (Pinotage-based vs Shiraz-based being the differentiation most usually made), we tasted them as one continuous line-up – the thinking being that the fundamentals of wine appreciation such as complexity and balance should apply when it came to making quality assessments.

82 entries were received from 62 producers and the average score was 88.4 (this compares to 63 entries from 46 producers and an average score of 87.2 last year). There were 20 wines to be rated 90 or higher on the 100-point quality scale and again what was fascinating was how diverse the origins of these top performers were – seven specifically designated as being from Stellenbosch but then three as multi-regional blends (either “W.O. Coastal Region” or “W.O. Western Cape), two from Walker Bay and one each from Cape South Coast, Franschhoek, Northern Cape, Paarl, Simonsberg-Paarl, Slanghoek, Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley and Voor Paardeberg.

This poses the question as to whether or not a sense of “South African-ness” is discernible in the wines? To which the answer is that this appears to be a work in progress. Winemakers don’t seem to have quite the same confidence when it comes to blending with red varieties as they do with white.

From a technical point of view, a major point of discussion was wines which presented as overly sweet. Was this a deliberate ploy on the part of some winemakers to make their wines more appealing to a certain market segment or was this an unfortunate consequence brought about local growing conditions? Karlin Nel, assistant winemaker at Rupert & Rothschild and associate judge, made the thought-provoking comment that stuck fermentations might be a problem on some of the wines – very high sugars leading to high alcohol levels, alcohol toxic to yeasts and hence arresting the ferment before suitably dry.

It is unfortunate to relate that a host of winemaking shortcomings remain in evidence. Clumsy oaking masking fruit, reduction in some instances, oxidation in others and even the occasional manifestation of spoilage yeast *Brettanomyces*. These errors of judgement are not usually severe enough to make the wine undrinkable but rather just enough to prevent excellence being attained.

The spread of vintages on display also needs comment. It is understandable that a producer might have his or her 2016 on the market for reasons of cash-flow but in a line-up of 80-odd wines, these wines tend to look very callow indeed – rushing a wine to market should be avoided if at all possible. Conversely, a wine from 2010 or 2011 is almost inevitably going to appear advanced (the panel tastes with no indication of vintage)...

The wines that did find favour were frequently but not always lighter and drier, wines which might be termed "new wave" in style. This should not, however, be seen as something that should be universally implemented. The best examples take some getting used to typically being quite wild in terms of aroma and possessing a sweet 'n sour character with particularly grippy tannins (often as a result of whole-bunch fermentation) on the palate. The lesser examples meanwhile can be dilute with a certain brittle quality in terms of structure. Based on the evidence of this tasting, the quintessential South African red blend might be still be somewhere off but it's going to be a fascinating journey getting there...

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

92

Joostenberg Bakermat 2015

Price: R186

Total production: 2 382 bottles

Abv: 14.4%

39% Cabernet Sauvignon, 37% Syrah, 12% Mourvèdre and 12% Touriga Nacional. The nose shows striking perfumed character with notes of flowers and herbs as well as red and black berries. The palate shows good depth of fruit and freshness while being nicely grippy on the finish. Very flavoursome indeed.

92

Newton Johnson Granum 2015

Price: R273

Total production: 11 010 bottles

Abv: 14%

75% Syrah, 25% Mourvèdre. Hints of floral fragrance and scrub before cherries and plums on the nose. The palate is medium bodied and wonderfully fresh with very fine tannins, a nice peppery quality to the finish.

92

Olifantsberg Silhouette 2013

Price: R195

Total production: 13 500 bottles

Abv: 13.51%

96% Syrah, 2% Grenache, 1.5% Carignan and 0.5% Mourvèdre. Very perfumed on the nose with notes of cherry, cranberry and roses. The palate is intensely flavoured with lemon-like acidity and fine tannins. Succulent upfront before and long and salty finish. Not for everyone but very arresting.

92

Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon 2013

Price: R139

Total production: 6 850 bottles

Abv: 14.26%

60% Shiraz, 40% Cabernet Sauvignon. Dark fruit, pepper and attractive oak on the nose. Rich and full but balanced – good depth and freshness, the tannins nicely chewy. Has a real lusciousness about it.

91

Creation Syrah Grenache 2015

Price: R190

Total production: 10 000 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

80% Syrah, 20% Grenache. A not unpleasant hint of reduction before red and black fruit and some spice. Very concentrated on the palate with fresh acidity and nicely grippy tannins.

91

DeMorgenzon Maestro Blue 2015

Price: R200

Total production: 8 600 bottles and 160 magnums bottles

Abv: 14.38%

44% Grenache, 29% Mourvèdre, 21% Syrah and 6% Petite Sirah. Red and black fruit, fynbos and spice on the nose. Medium bodied with pure fruit, vibrant acidity and chewy tannins – particularly well balanced.

91

Eikendal Charisma 2015

Price: R104

Total production: 45 000 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

74% Shiraz, 25% Petit Verdot and 1% Sangiovese. A hint of reduction before dark berries, wild herbs and spice on the nose. The palate is rich and deep – plenty of concentrated fruit, bright acidity and fine tannins.

91

Guardian Peak Summit 2014

Price: R160

Total production: 16 981 bottles

Abv: 14.55%

66% Shiraz, 25% Mourvèdre and 9% Grenache. Red and black berries plus some spice on the nose. Full bodied but very well balanced – good fruit definition and lively acidity before a gently savoury finish. Modern in style but deftly done.

91

Luddite Saboteur Red 2015

Price: R250

Total production: 27 000 bottles under cork, 3 000 under screwcap

Abv: 14.74%

77% Shiraz, 11% Mourvèdre, 9% Cabernet Sauvignon and 3% Cabernet Franc. Some floral fragrance before red and black berries, spice and a little smoky character. The palate is rich and full with good fruit concentration, fresh acidity and nicely ripe tannins – still very primary at this stage.

91

Opstal Carl Everson Cape Blend 2015

Price: R175

Total production: 3 850 bottles

Abv: 13.8%

37% Pinotage, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 23% Shiraz and 5% Cinsaut. Top notes of flowers, fynbos and musk before red and black berries. Relatively light bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins – a pretty wine.

91

Rust en Vrede 1694 2014

Price: R1 300

Total production: 4 618 bottles

Abv: 14.86%

62% Syrah, 32% Cabernet Sauvignon. A brooding quality to the nose with notes of dark fruit, fynbos, earth, pepper and spice to go with oak-derived vanilla. The palate is rich and full with layers of flavour, the finish long and savoury. Powerful but balanced.

91

Vondeling Erica 2014

Price: R195

Total production: 10 000 bottles

Abv: 14.1%

73% Shiraz, 12% Mourvèdre, 7% Grenache, 5% Carignan and 3% Viognier. Red and black fruit, flowers and fynbos, pepper and spice on the nose. Well balanced with pure fruit, fresh acidity and lovely ripe tannins.

90

Fairview Extraño 2013

Price: R100

Total production: 13 200 bottles

Abv: 14%

73% Tempranillo, 14% Grenache and 13% Carignan. Red and black berries, fynbos and spice on the nose. Sweet, juicy fruit, fresh acidity and nicely grippy tannins. Layers of flavour and good length.

90

Haskell II 2013

Price: R180

Total production: 3 300 bottles

Abv: 14.12%

59% Shiraz, 41% Cabernet Sauvignon. An alluring nose of red and black fruit, some leafiness and spice. The palate is full but balanced with good fruit concentration, fresh acidity and crunchy tannins.

90

Haut Espoir Gentle Giant 2012

Price: R90

Total production: 11 293 bottles

Abv: 14.74%

53% Merlot, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Cabernet Franc and 11% Shiraz. Red and black fruit, some herbal character plus vanilla and spice. Well-structured with concentrated fruit and bright acidity. Rich but still quite subtle and nuanced.

90

Le Riche Richesse 2015

Price: R140

Total production: 17 500 bottles

Abv: 14.61%

41% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Cinsaut, 13% Petit Verdot, 11% Merlot, 8% Cabernet Franc and 9% Malbec. Black fruit, some leafiness and pencil shavings on the nose. Lovely purity and depth of fruit, the finish long and dry. Stylish and sophisticated.

90

Orange River Cellars Lyra Vega 2015

Price: R95

Total production: 4870 bottles

Abv: 14.11%

75% Shiraz, 25% Petit Verdot. Dark fruit, some floral perfume and attractive oak character on the nose. Good depth, smooth in texture and suitably dry on the finish. Comes across as quite unusual and intriguing.

90

Spier Creative Block 8 2014

Price: R159

Total production: 41 390 bottles

Abv: 14.7%

32% Pinotage, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Merlot, 9% Shiraz, 6% Petit Verdot, 6% Cabernet Franc and 6% Cinsaut. An exotic nose showing red and black fruit, some earthiness, vanilla and spice. The palate is rich and flavoursome – sweet upfront before a savoury finish.

90

Stellenbosch Vineyards Credo Shiraz Merlot Viognier 2014

Price: R149

Total production: 4 933 bottles

Abv: 14.15%

79% Shiraz, 16% Merlot and 5% Viognier. Some floral fragrance before red fruit, spice and some more savoury notes on the nose. Medium bodied yet quite dense on the palate, the finish nicely dry.

90

Warwick Three Cape Ladies 2013

Price: R160

Total production: 66 000 bottles

Abv: 14.21%

50% Pinotage, 30% Shiraz and 20% Cabernet Sauvignon. Red and black berries, some leafiness, spice and some attractive oak. Medium bodied with succulent fruit, fresh acidity and a long, gently savoury finish.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Alto Rouge 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Alvi's Drift Albertus Viljoen Bismarck 2013	Worcester	88
Alvi's Drift Albertus Viljoen Bismarck 2014	Worcester	84
Alvi's Drift Reserve Drift Fusion 2014	Worcester	86
Asara Vineyard Collection Cape Fusion 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Babylonstoren Babel 2016	Western Cape	89
Beyerskloof Synergy Cape Blend 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Bosman Family Vineyards Erfenis 2014	Wellington	89
Bouchard Finlayson Hannibal 2015	Walker Bay	88
Creation Syrah Grenache 2015	Walker Bay	91
De Krans Tritonia 2015	Calitzdorp	89
DeMorgenzon Maestro Blue 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Deux Frères Fraternité 2013	Stellenbosch	86
Edgebaston The Pepper Pot 2015	Coastal Region	86
Eikendal Charisma 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Ernie Els Big Easy Red 2016	Western Cape	88
Fable Mountain Vineyards Night Sky 2014	Coastal Region	89
Fairview Caldera 2013	Coastal Region	89
Fairview Extraño 2013	Coastal Region	90
Glen Carlou Petit Verdot Tannat 2012	Paarl	89
Guardian Peak Summit 2014	Western Cape	91
Hartenberg The Megan 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Haskell II 2013	Stellenbosch	90
Haut Espoir Gentle Giant 2010	Franschhoek	87
Haut Espoir Gentle Giant 2012	Franschhoek	90
Hogan Divergent 2016	Coastal Region	88
Holden Manz Visionaire 2013	Franschhoek	87
Iona One Man Band 2012	Elgin	87
Joostenberg Bakermat 2015	Paarl	92
Keermont Estate Reserve 2013	Stellenbosch	88
Ken Forrester Renegade 2013	Western Cape	88
Ken Forrester The Gypsy 2013	Western Cape	86
Ken Forrester Three Halves 2011	Western Cape	84
Klein Constantia Estate Red 2014	Constantia	88
Klein Gustrouw Reserve 2013	Jonkershoek Valley	89
Kloovenburg Eight Feet 2014	Swartland	88
KWV The Mentors Canvas 2014	Coastal Region	87
KWV The Mentors Canvas 2015	Coastal Region	TCA
Lammershoek Terravinum Reserve Red 2015	Swartland	89
Lammershoek Terravinum Reserve Red 2016	Swartland	89
Leipzig Master Blend 2016	Stellenbosch	87
Leipzig Shiraz Mourvedre Viognier 2016	Western Cape	86

Le Riche Richesse 2014	Stellenbosch	88
Le Riche Richesse 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Lourensford Limited Release Shiraz Mourvèdre Viognier 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Luddite Saboteur Red 2015	Cape South Coast	91
Marvelous Red 2014 (Yardstick Wines)	Western Cape	89
Metzer Family Wines The Kitchen Sink Red 2016		89
Morgenster Tosca 2014	Stellenbosch	82
Neil Ellis Rodanos 2012	Western Cape	86
Newton Johnson Granum 2015	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	92
Olifantsberg Silhouette 2013	Western Cape	92
Olifantsberg Silhouette 2014	Western Cape	89
Opstal Carl Everson Cape Blend 2015	Slanghoek	91
Orange River Cellars Lyra Vega 2015	Northern Cape	90
Painted Wolf Peloton Rouge 2014	Coastal Region	88
Painted Wolf Peloton Rouge 2015		87
Painted Wolf Pictus III 2011	Swartland	89
Painted Wolf Pictus IV 2012	Coastal Region	88
Paul Roos Die Filantroop 2015	Stellenbosch	86
Petrolhead Red Blend 2016	Swartland	88
Rickety Bridge The Foundation Stone Red 2014	Western Cape	87
Rust en Vrede Estate 2014	Stellenbosch	89
Rust en Vrede 1694 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Rustenberg RM Nicholson 2015	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	89
Simonsig Frans Malan 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Simonsig The GSM 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Spice Route Chakalaka 2014	Swartland	87
Spier Creative Block 3 2014	Coastal Region	89
Spier Creative Block 8 2014	Coastal Region	90
Springfontein Limestone Rocks Whole Lotta Love 2014	Walker Bay	87
Stellenbosch Hills 1707 Reserve Red 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Stellenbosch Vineyards Credo Shiraz Merlot Viognier 2014	Stellenbosch	90
Stellenbosch Vineyards Credo Shiraz Merlot Viognier 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Tierhoek Syrah Mourvedre Grenache 2015	Piekenierskloof	87
Truter Family Wines Agaat John David 2014	Western Cape	88
Vondeling Erica 2014	Voor-Paardeberg	91
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon 2013	Simonsberg-Paarl	92
Vrede en Lust Cotes de Savoye 2015	Western Cape	86
Warwick Three Cape Ladies 2013	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	90

Waverley Hills Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz 2016	Tulbagh	86
Waverley Hills Shiraz Mourvedre Viognier 2013	Tulbagh	87