



Tonnellerie
Saint Martin

PINOT NOIR
~ REPORT 2017 ~

KEY FINDINGS

The modern era of Pinot Noir in South African is generally regarded to have begun when the late Tim Hamilton-Russell set up his Hemel-en-Aarde Valley property in 1975, first bottling being in 1981. For a long time, however, plantings of the variety remained limited, nobody but a few obsessed producers convinced that it had a real future locally.

However, as the right clones have been planted in the right places, there has recently been a dramatic improvement in quality and the category is now as exciting as any. Whereas plantings were 577ha at the end of 2006, this jumped to 1 153ha by the end of 2016, the equivalent of 1.2% of the national vineyard and making it the seventh most planted red variety in the country behind Cinsaut and ahead of Cabernet Franc (although it should be noted much of it destined for Méthode Cap Classique).

52 entries were received from 33 producers for this year's competition and the average score was 88.1. There were 14 wines (27% of the line-up) to rate 90 or higher on the 100-point scale and the spread of growing areas is intriguing: four from Elgin, two each from Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Napier and Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley and once each from the Ceres Plateau, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Stellenbosch as well as a multi-regional blend, The Fledge & Co. Katvis 2016 made from a combination of Langeberg and Klein Karoo fruit. Two Burgundies were included as ringers, Joseph Drouhin Morey St Denis 2015 rating 93 points and Henri Boillot Bourgogne 2015 91.

Is there an archetypal South African Pinot Noir? Not at this stage, the panel encountering successful renditions across the stylistic spectrum from light and elegant (such as Vrede en Lust 2016) to rich and full (Creation Reserve 2015).

Shortcomings typically arose when winemakers tried too hard to achieve a particular stylistic goal. Where elegance was the aim, some wines appeared excessively light and lean. In particular, the panel debated the use of whole-bunch fermentation, done to bring an impression of freshness and finer tannins to a wine but often lending a "twiggy" instead. The feeling was that this technique should not be used willy-nilly.

Conversely, where fullness and richness was intended, a few wines came across as over-ripe, over-extracted and over-oaked. Fruit power is entirely legitimate when it comes to Pinot Noir but it's a difficult trick to pull off.

It was also fascinating to note varying degree of herbaceousness on many of the wines. Here the feeling was that this was a valid part of the overall drinking experience as long as it was in balance. Also, this herbaceousness should be terroir-derived rather than being the product of leaf-roll virus, under-ripe picking.

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

93

Creation Reserve 2015

Price: R340

Total production: 10 000 bottles

Abv: 14%

Matured for 12 months in French oak, 40% new. Red and black berries plus some attractive oak character. Great depth of fruit, fresh acidity and sleek tannins. Rich but very well balanced and built to last.

93

Joseph Drouhin Morey St Denis 2015

Wine Cellar price: R595

Black berries, earth and spice on the nose. Full bodied with luscious fruit, fresh acidity and grippy tannins – has a real poise about it.

92

Dabar 2014

Price: R130

Total production: 2 600 bottles

Abv: 13.8%

10% stalks added back, maturation lasting 11 months in French oak, 30% new. Red berries, some attractive musky character and a touch of leather on the nose while the palate shows dense fruit, fresh acidity and fine, densely packed tannins. Delicious but probably ready for drinking.

92

Dabar 2015

Price: R130

Total production: 3 240 bottles

Abv: 13.72%

10% stalks added back, maturation lasting 11 months in French oak, 30% new. Red and black fruit plus musk and attractive oak character on the nose. Full but balanced with lovely fruit purity, racy acidity and good tannic structure. Long and savoury on the finish.

92

Newton Johnson Family Vineyards 2016

Price: R325

Total production: 15 948 bottles

Abv: 13.3%

Matured for 11 months in French oak, 30% new. An enticing nose of red fruit, musk and smoked meat. Excellent fruit concentration, fresh acidity and wonderfully chewy tannins. Layers of flavour and great length. Extraordinarily youthful now, it promises much in time.

92

Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2015

Price: R550

Total production: 3 600 bottles

Abv: 13.6%

Matured for 11 months in French oak, 20% new. A floral top note before red and black fruit plus a slight reductive note. Dense fruit, bright acidity and properly ripe tannins. Has a lovely succulence about it.

91

De Grendel Op die Berg 2014

Price: R175

Total production: 15 000 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

MLF in new oak before 13 months of maturation in older oak. Cranberry and cherries plus vanilla and a little reduction on the nose. The palate shows succulent fruit, vibrant acidity and chewy tannins – powerful and long.

91

Shannon Vineyards Rockview Ridge 2015

Price: R285

Total production: 2 688 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Matured for 12 months in French oak, 30% new. Red cherry, roses and spice on the nose. Good fruit density with zippy acidity and fine tannins, the finish gently savoury. Refined and elegant.

90

B Vintners Reservoir Road 2016

Price: R165

Total production: 3 756 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

15% whole-bunch fermentation and matured for 15 months in older oak. Red and black cherry, fresh herbs and a touch of vanilla on the nose. Medium bodied with vibrant acidity and crunchy tannins. Subtle and elegant.

90

Creation Reserve 2016

Price: R340

Total production: 9 500 bottles

Abv: 13.8%

Matured for 14 months in French oak, 30% new. A floral note before black and blue berries plus attractive oak. Big but balanced with sumptuous fruit, fresh acidity and firm tannins. Modern in style.

90

Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2016

Price: R440

Total production: 43 368 bottles

Abv: 13.87%

15% whole-bunch fermentation and matured for 10 months in French oak, 39% new. Notable oak but also red cherry, musk and a hint of mint. Good depth of fruit, bright acidity and firm tannins. Appears very youthful and should reward ageing.

90

Henri Boillot Bourgogne 2015

Wine Cellar price: R425

Some floral perfume as well fresh herbs before dark cherry plus a little earthiness. Good fruit concentration, bright acidity and relatively firm tannins. Hangs together well, the finish long and dry.

90

Newton Johnson Walker Bay 2016

Price: R202

Total production: 17 820 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Matured for 11 months in French oak, 10% new. Red berries plus some floral perfume on the nose. Light bodied with particularly fresh acidity and a slightly salty finish. New wave in style.

90

Oak Valley Sounds of Silence 2015

Price: R125

Total production: 10 680 bottles

Abv: 13.74%

10% whole-bunch fermentation and matured for nine months in French oak, 25% new. Reductive on the nose but also strawberry, cherry and tea leaf notes. Juicy fruit and pleasantly tart acidity before a savoury finish.

90

The Fledge & Co. Katvis 2016

Price: R175

Total production: 7 100 bottles

Abv: 13.34%

Matured for nine months in older French oak. Red and black fruit plus herbs, earth and spice on the nose. Good core of fruit, fresh acidity and crunchy tannins – has a nice delicacy about it.

90

Vrede en Lust 2016

Price: R175

Total production: 6 638 bottles

Abv: 13.33%

Matured for nine months in older French oak. Red berries, musk and vanilla on the nose. A pretty wine being light bodied with snappy acidity and a pleasantly stalky finish.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Bouchard Finlayson Galpin Peak 2015	Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	87
Henri Boillot Bourgogne 2015	Bourgogne	90
Boplaas 2016	Calitzdorp	86
B Vintners Black Bream 2016	Walker Bay	89
B Vintners Reservoir Road 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Coetzee Family Wines Blomveld se Vlei 2014	Koekenaap	84
Creation Reserve 2015	Walker Bay	93
Creation Reserve 2016	Walker Bay	90
Cuvée Rika 2014	Elgin	87
Cuvée Rika 2015	Elgin	87
Dabar 2014	Napier	92
Dabar 2015	Napier	92
David Finlayson Camino Africana Reserve 2014	Stellenbosch	86
De Grendel Op die Berg 2013	Ceres Plateau	89
De Grendel Op die Berg 2014	Ceres Plateau	91
Domaine des Dieux Josephine 2012	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	83
Domaine des Dieux Josephine 2013	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	89
Edgebaston 2015	Western Cape	83
Joseph Drouhin Morey St Denis 2015	Morey-Saint-Denis	93
Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2015	Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	88
Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2016	Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	90
Haute Cabrière Reserve 2014	Franschhoek	86
Highlands Road 2012	Elgin	88
Highlands Road 2014	Elgin	87
Iona 2014	Elgin	88
Kershaw Clonal Selection Elgin 2016	Elgin	89
Kleinhoekkloof 2015	Robertson	87
Kruger Family Wines 2016	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	86
Kruger Family Wines Pearly Gates 2016	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	89
La Vierge Noir 2014	Hemel-en-	89

	Aarde Rdige	
Maastricht 2015	Durbanville	86
Matthew van Heerden Signature 2016	Elgin	89
Newton Johnson Family Vineyards 2016	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	92
Newton Johnson Walker Bay 2016	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	90
Nitida 2015	Durbanville	89
Oak Valley Groenlandberg 2016	Elgin	89
Oak Valley Sounds of Silence 2015	Elgin	90
Oak Valley Sounds of Silence 2016	Elgin	86
Ormonde 2015	Darling	88
Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2015	Elgin	92
Shannon Rockview Ridge 2015	Elgin	91
Sir Robert Stanford 2014	Western Cape	87
Sir Robert Stanford 2016	Western Cape	85
Spioenkop 2015	Elgin	85
Stellar The River's End 2014	Koekenaap	87
The Fledge & Co. Classic 2016	Elgin	86
The Fledge & Co. Katvis 2016	Western Cape	90
Vriesenhof 2009	Stellenbosch	84
Vriesenhof 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Vrede en Lust 2015	Elgin	89
Vrede en Lust 2016	Elgin	90
Whalehaven 2015	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	88
Whalehaven Conservation Coast 2013	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	88
Whalehaven Conservation Coast 2014	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	88