



**ALTERNATIVE  
VARIETIES  
REPORT  
2018**

## KEY FINDINGS

The Alternative Varieties Report has been conceived in order to focus on single-variety wines which fall outside the mainstream. Just how mainstream is the South African wine industry when it comes to what's planted? According to industry body SAWIS, the top 10 varieties (Chenin Blanc, Colombar, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinotage, Chardonnay, Merlot, Ruby Cabernet, Muscat d'Alexandrie in that order) amounted to 86% of total plantings (82 553ha out of a total of 95 775ha) at the end of 2016, a further 96 varieties constituting the remaining 14%.

Of course, a substantial part of the Chenin Blanc and Colombar crop is used for distillation purposes and this does skew matters somewhat but it would seem clear that the national vineyard is not as diverse as it might be, especially in an era when climate change might make the cultivation of the more conventional varieties difficult.

In year one of the Alternative Varieties Report, we received 52 white wine entries and 45 red wine entries, those to score 90-plus on the 100-point quality scales as follows: seven examples of Rhône whites, seven Semillon, six Cabernet Franc, four Rhône red and one each of Petit Verdot, Pinot Gris, Nebbiolo, Riesling, Sangiovese, Verdelho and Vermentino.

Rhône whites (Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne and Viognier) look an immensely promising sub-category but equally something of a work in progress. These are varieties relatively new to South Africa and young vineyards seems to be constraining quality in some instances while winemakers also appear to be grappling with what stylistic approach works best. There were some quite neutral wines perhaps as a result of playing it too safe in the cellar while equally there were some rather wild and wooly numbers due to excessively oxidative techniques.

In the case of Semillon, oxidative winemaking again looks very much part of the playbook at the moment and the result is a number of wines which are particularly rich and broad. The danger, here, however, is that such examples become dull and lifeless. By contrast, there were a few examples of Sem which were more Sauvignon Blanc-like being clean and fresh, the David Nieuwoudt Ghost Corner Semillon 2016 from Elim being a prime example.

A handful of Riesling entries were tasted and while these were not unappealing, they tended to be a bit simple. A petrol-like/kerosene character is too often in evidence (the sign of premature development?) while too many examples seem to trade trade off residual sugar rather than proper fruit concentration.

When it came to the red wines, the two sub-categories which elicited the most conversation were Rhône varieties (Cinsault and Grenache) and Cabernet Franc. Cinsault and Grenache were tasted together and the panel had difficulty in discerning which was which. Winemaking style trumps varietal character at the moment, with two basic approaches in evidence. The first sees winemakers picking early and then opting to incorporate partial or full whole-bunch fermentation. The result is wines which are very aromatic but can be a bit light and "twiggy". The second approach is to pick later and attempt greater extraction in the cellar in an effort to attain more depth of fruit and structure although verve can often be forfeited.

The issue with Cab Franc seems to be what to do with its inherent pyrazine character (the chemical compound providing “green” aromas and flavours). Some producers are obviously going to great lengths in an effort to tame this character and there were quite a lot of rich, ripe and smooth textured examples in the tasting – wannabe Cab Sauv, if you will. That said, Cab Franc looks more capable of making stand-alone wines than either Malbec or Petit Verdot, the majority of wines from these two varieties looking relatively simple.

Overall, it was a most stimulating tasting and the sense of experimentation among winemakers working with alternative varieties is palpable. Greatness generally feels some time off, too many of the wines looking forced to a greater or less extent, but as the best sites are discovered for what are often varieties with not much track-record locally and winemakers hone their technique, then wines of real gravitas must ensue.

## **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**

### **WHITE**

#### **Rhône**

### **93**

Bosman Family Vineyards Fides Grenache Blanc 2016

Price: R185

Total production: 10 200 bottles and 60 magnums

Abv: 14.2%

Fermented on the skins, this process taking 20 days to finish. 20% of the wine matured in new Russian oak barrels. Amber in colour, the nose is very pretty with an intense floral perfume to go with orange and peach plus earth and spice. Hugely flavourful on the palate – concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and a grippy finish. Not for the uninitiated!

#### **Semillon**

### **93**

Idiom 2015

Price: R200

Total production: 1 600 bottles

Abv: 13%

Fermented and matured for six months in barrel. A complex nose with some floral blossom before tangerine, peach, liquorice, spice and a little nutty character. Super-concentrated fruit matched by fresh acidity with some herbal bite on the finish adding interest.

#### **Other**

### **93**

Arcangeli Feiteiras Verdelho 2016

Price: R200

Total production: 3 200 bottles.

Abv: 12.38%

12% skin fermented. Matured for 10 months in older 300-litre barrels. Marmalade, some nuttiness and spice on the nose. The palate is rich and flavourful but also remarkably vibrant – a dramatic wine.

**RED**

**Cabernet Franc**

**93**

Warwick 2015

Price: R320

Total production: 6 000 bottles and 500 magnums

Abv: 14.82%

Matured for 26 months in French oak, 30% new. Red and black fruit, some floral perfume and attractive herbal character plus vanilla on the nose. Full bodied with plenty of dense, sweet fruit upfront but no shortage of freshness and a nicely dry finish. Deftly done.

## **BUYING GUIDE: CELLAR-DOOR PRICES FOR WHITE WINES RATED 90 – 92**

### **RIESLING**

#### **90**

Vrede en Lust Early Mist Riesling 2017

Price: R79

### **RHÔNE**

#### **92**

Ken Forrester Woolworths Reserve Collection Viognier 2016

Woolworths price: R69.99

Org de Rac Roussanne 2017

Price: R72

#### **91**

Olifantsberg Grenache Blanc 2016

Price: R175

#### **90**

Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyards Grenache Blanc 2016

Price: R130

Nitida The Tinkery Viognier 2017

Price: R145

Vrede en Lust Viognier 2017

Price: R109

### **SEMILLON**

#### **92**

Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve Semillon 2016

Price: R140

#### **91**

Arcangeli Semillon 2016

Price: R150

Dornier Semillon 2017

Price: R160

## **90**

Bosman Family Vineyards Semillon 2015

Price: R100 (Wine Club members only)

David Nieuwoudt Ghost Corner Semillon 2016

Price: R190

## **90**

Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Semillon 2016

Price: R99

## **OTHER**

## **90**

Morgenster Vespri Vermentino 2017

Price: R120

Usana Pinot Gris 2016

Price: R85



## **BUYING GUIDE: CELLAR-DOOR PRICES FOR RED WINES RATED 90 – 92**

### **Cabernet Franc**

#### **91**

Rietvallei JMB 2015

Price: R320

#### **90**

Raats Dolomite 2015

Price: R125

Raats Family 2015

Price: R500

Rainbow's End 2016

Price: R195

Warwick 2014

Price: R320

### **Italian**

#### **91**

Morgenster Nabucco Nebbiolo 2014

Price: R338

#### **90**

Koelenbosch Sangiovese 2015 (Koelenhof)

Price: R75

### **Rhône**

#### **90**

Blackwater Daniel Grenache 2017

Price: R235

Blackwater Hinterland Cinsault 2014

Price: R235

Sutherland Grenache Reserve 2016

Price: R300

Waverley Hills Grenache 2017

Price: R120

**Other**

**90**

Sutherland Petit Verdot Reserve 2015

Price: R300

## COMPLETE SCORES A – Z: WHITE WINES

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Alvi's Drift Signature Viognier 2017	Worcester	89
Arcangeli Feiteiras Verdelho 2016	Botrivier	93
Arcangeli Semillon 2016	Cape South Coast	91
Black Elephant Vintners & Co The Back Roads Bo Lamotte Viognier 2015	Franschhoek	89
Black Elephant Vintners & Co. The Dark Side of the Vine Semillon 2015	Franschhoek	89
Bosman Family Vineyards Fides Grenache Blanc 2016	Wellington	93
Bosman Family Vineyards Semillon 2016	Upper Hemel-en-Aarde	90
B Vintners De Alexandria 2017	Stellenbosch	89
Cederberg Bukettraube 2017	Cederberg	89
Creation Viognier 2017	Cape South Coast	89
David Nieuwoudt Ghost Corner Semillon 2016	Elim	90
Dornier Semillon 2017	Stellenbosch	91
Eagles' Nest Viognier 2017	Constantia	88
Hartenberg Riesling 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Haut Espoir Semillon 2016	Franschhoek	88
Hermanuspietersfontein Witbroodjie Semillon 2016	Sondagskloof	85
Highlands Road Semillon 2017	Elgin	89
Idiom Semillon 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Keermont Companion Marsanne 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Keermont Companion Barrel Selection Roussanne 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Ken Forrester Barrel Selection Roussanne 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Ken Forrester Woolworths Reserve Collection Viognier 2016	Stellenbosch	92
Koelenhof Koelnektar Gewurztraminer 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Lammershoek Mysteries Die Harde Blaar Harslevelu 2016	Swartland	89
Lanzerac Keldermeester Versameling Bergpad Pinot Blanc 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyards Grenache Blanc 2016	Voor Paardeberg	90
Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyards Grenache Gris 2016	Voor Paardeberg	89
Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyards Marsanne 2016	Voor Paardeberg	88
Lourensford Limited Release Viognier 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Lowerland Colombard 2017	Prieska	88
Lowerland Colombard MCC 2016	Prieska	87
Lowerland Witgat Viognier 2015	Prieska	87
Maanschijn Easy, Tiger Grenache Gris 2017	Voor Paardeberg	88
Meinert The German Job Riesling 2016	Elgin	88
Morgenster Vespri Vermentino 2017	Western Cape	90
Nitida Riesling 2017	Cape Town	88

Nitida Semillon 2017	Cape Town	88
Nitida The Tinkery Viognier 2017	Cape Town	90
Olifantsberg Grenache Blanc 2016	Breedekloof	91
Org de Rac Roussanne 2017	Swartland	92
Org de Rac Verdelho 2017	Swartland	88
Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve Semillon 2016	Franschhoek	92
Steenberg Semillon 2016	Constantia	88
Stellar The Storyteller Viognier 2017	Olifants River	89
Stofberg Family Vineyards Mariette Pinot Blanc 2017	Breedekloof	89
Sutherland Riesling 2017	Elgin	88
Usana Pinot Gris 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Val du Charron Reserve Pinot Gris 2017	Wellington	87
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Semillon 2016	Elgin	90
Vrede en Lust Early Mist Riesling 2017	Elgin	90
Vrede en Lust Viognier 2017	Western Cape	90
Zevenwacht Z Collection Gewurztraminer 2016	Stellenbosch	86

## COMPLETE SCORES A – Z: RED WINES

Almenkerk Petit Verdot 2014	Elgin	88
Arcangeli Romulus Nebbiolo 2016	Western Cape	89
Asara Gamay 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Black Elephant Vintners & Co The Back Roads Matoppie Petite Sirah 2015	Franschhoek	89
Blackwater Daniel Grenache 2017	Botrivier	90
Blackwater Hinterland Cinsault 2014	Darling	90
Blackwater Omerta Carignan 2015	Swartland	87
Blake's Boys Malbec 2016	Western Cape	87
Bosman Family Vineyards Cinsaut 2016	Wellington	88
Bosman Family Vineyards Nero d'Avola 2015	Wellington	89
Creation Sumac Grenache 2016	Walker Bay	89
David Finlayson Camino Africana Cabernet Franc 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Definitum Petit Verdot Reserve 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Dornier Malbec 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Dornier Petit Verdot 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Eenzaamheid Cinsaut 2017	Paarl	89
Idiom Malbec 2015	Stellenbosch	85
Idiom Sangiovese 2014	Stellenbosch	89
Koelenbosch Sangiovese 2015 (Koelenhof)	Stellenbosch	90
KWV The Mentors Petit Verdot 2016	Western Cape	88
Lanzerac Dok Keldermeester Versameling Malbec 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyards Cinsaut 2016	Swartland	88
Leeuwenkuil Family Vineyards Grenache Noir 2016	Swartland	88
Lowerland Tolbos Tannat 2016	Prieska	87
Morgenster Nabucco Nebbiolo 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Neil Ellis Groenekloof Darling Hills Cinsaut 2015	Groenekloof	89
Neil Ellis Piekenierskloof Grenache 2014	Piekeniersklf	88
Raats Family Cabernet Franc 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Raats Dolomite Cabernet Franc 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Rainbow's End Cabernet Franc 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Rainbow's End Limited Release Cabernet Franc 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Rietvallei Dark Cin Cinsaut 2016	Robertson	89
Rietvallei JMB Cabernet Franc 2015	Robertson	91
Skipskop Petit Verdot 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Steenberg Nebbiolo 2015	Constantia	88
Sutherland Grenache Reserve 2016	Elgin	90
Sutherland Petit Verdot Reserve 2015	Elgin	90
Tierhoek Grenache 2016	Piekeniersklf	89
Trizanne Signature Wines Barbera 2017	Darling	88
Van der Merwe & Finlayson Diamond Project Tempranillo 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Cabernet Franc 2015	Elgin	89
Warwick Cabernet Franc 2014	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	90

Warwick Cabernet Franc 2015	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	93
Waverley Hills Grenache 2017	Tulbagh	90
Zorgvliet Petit Verdot 2015	Banghoek	87