



**SIGNATURE  
RED BLEND  
REPORT  
2018**

Compiled by [Winemag.co.za](http://Winemag.co.za)

## **ABOUT SIGNATURE RED BLENDS**

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.

## **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, a Cape Town firm which brokers and cellars 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

## KEY FINDINGS

68 entries were received from 54 producers and the average score was 89.25, compared to 82 entries from 62 producers and an average score of 88.4 in 2017, and there were 30 wines to rate 90 or higher on the 100-point quality scale compared to 20 a year ago – so fewer wines but better overall quality.

The Signature Red Blend Report is now in its third year and the relevant tasting once again proved to be a particularly thought-provoking exercise – flavour profiles, in many instances, are exotic and unusual and therefore challenging. Some wines are inevitably more aesthetically pleasing than others but for wine drinkers looking for something out of the ordinary, the best examples provide real excitement.

More and more producers seem to be breaking with convention, not just for novelty's sake but out of a conviction that they need to be innovative in order to best express their terroir. Soil and climate are not the same as the wine regions of Europe so why apply a derivative approach to what varieties are planted where and how best to combine them in the cellar?

A perennial stand-out wine is the Bakermat from Paarl property Joostenberg – 94 points for the 2014 vintage, 92 for the 2015 and now 93 for the 2016, the blend this time around consisting of 43% Syrah, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Mourvèdre and 6% Touriga Nacional. What is fascinating about Signature Reds as a category is just how many different varieties are being used in blends and how widely dispersed producers are. Whereas you'd expect Stellenbosch to dominate a single-variety Cabernet Sauvignon or Cape Bordeaux Red Blend class, only eight of the top performing 30 wines came from this district.

Not all plain sailing, however. One particularly tricky aspect of the tasting was gauging the seriousness of intent behind those wines which made up a particular sub-set, these being the "light reds" that have become increasingly fashionable in recent times. The wines seemed to span a spectrum from easy and soft but ultimately short on complexity through to fine and very intricate and the concern for the panel was not to over-reward a humble quaffer nor over-reward a carefully crafted concept wine. Here, the issue of whole-bunch fermentation was controversial – when this technique is well handled, it gives perfume and just the right amount of firmness to the tannins but when applied less successfully, the resulting wine can appear a bit gawky.

Of course, there were a number of ambitious "statement" wines premised on displaying as much fruit power as possible. The best were rich, dense and structured but some fell short because they appeared too sweet, over-extracted and lacking in energy.

It is also insightful to consider the role played by different varieties. Wines which turned out to include Cabernet Sauvignon sometimes displayed too much of an unyielding minty character whereas those with Pinotage as a component were occasionally marked by an undue sweetness. It has to be said that those wines which combine the varieties associated with the Rhône and southern France – Syrah, Cinsault, Grenache and Mourvèdre – do tend to work very well.

By way of benchmarking, there were two French wines in the mix, Chapoutier Rasteau 2015 (Wine Cellar price: R280 a bottle) and Domaine Grand Veneur Le Miocène 2015 (Wine Cellar price: R470 a bottle). The former, a blend of 50% Grenache and 50% Syrah, rated 89 and the latter a blend of 70% Grenache, 20% Syrah and 10% Mourvèdre, rated 90.

## TASTING NOTES

### 93

Babylonstoren Babel 2017

Price: R150

Total production: 70 000 bottles

Abv: 14%

25% Syrah, 23% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Malbec, 11% Petit Verdot, 9.5% Merlot, 9.5% Cabernet Franc and 8% Pinotage. Matured for 12 months in 300-litre French oak barrels, 30% new. Red and black berries, some leafiness, earth and spice on the nose. The palate shows super-dense fruit, tangy acidity and fine tannins. Power-packed but not short of detail, either.

### 93

Joostenberg Bakermat 2016

Price: R210

Total production: 1 830 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

43% Syrah, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 16% Mourvèdre and 6% Touriga Nacional. Matured for 20 months in French oak, 20% new. An enticing nose with top notes of flowers and herbs before red and black fruit, olive brine, vanilla, pepper and spice. The palate is full but balanced with plenty of flavour, the finish long and savoury.

### 93

Olifantsberg Silhouette 2015

Price: R220

Total production: 13 000 bottles

Abv: 14%

88% Syrah, 5% Grenache, 4% Carignan and 3% Mourvèdre. Components matured separately for six months in small- and large-format barrels before being blended and returned to barrel for a further four or so months. Red and black berries, olive, herbs and spice on the nose while the palate shows plenty of pure fruit, bright acidity and crunchy tannins – most appealing.

### 93

Org De Rac Die Waghuis Red Blend 2016

Price: R150

Total production: 2 800 bottles

Abv: 14.06%

66% Syrah, 19% Grenache, 12% Mourvèdre and 3% Verdelho. Matured for 14 months in second-fill 225-litre French oak barrels. A very attractive nose with notes of floral perfume and some lifted herbal character before wild strawberry and cherry. Relatively light with vibrant acidity and a saline finish.

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

### **92**

Fairview Extraño 2015 – R100

Ernie Els Big Easy Red Blend 2016 – R155

Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Merlot Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon 2015 – R155

Wildehurst Red 2014 – R195

Glenelly Estate Reserve 2012 – R230

Donkiesbaai Rooiwijn 2017 – R330

Springfontein Limestone Rocks Whole Lotta Love Cape Red Blend 2015 – R395

### **91**

Muratie Melck's Shiraz Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon 2014 – R100

Leipzig Master Blend 2017 – R135

Opstal Carl Everson Cape Blend 2016 – R180

Haskell II 2014 – R220

Glenelly Estate Reserve 2013 – R230

Luddite Saboteur Red 2016 – R255

Bellingham The Bernard Series Small Barrel S.M.V. 2015 – R320

### **90**

Villiera Down to Earth Touriga Nacional Shiraz 2016 – R56

Boland Cellar One Formation Pinotage Shiraz Grenache 2016 – R83

Fairview Homtini 2016 – R160

Under Oaks French Flair 2015 – R175

Strandveld The Navigator 2015 – R185

Nederburg The Motorcycle Marvel 2016 – R187

Lammershoek Terravinum Reserve Red 2016 – R210

DeMorgenzon Maestro Blue 2015 – R215

Vondeling Monsonia 2015 – R215

Thorne & Daughters Wanderer's Heart 2017 – R225

Rust en Vrede Estate 2015 – R450

**Domaine Grand Veneur Le Miocène 2015 – R470**

Rust en Vrede 1694 Classification 2015 – R1 500

## COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Alto Rouge 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Babylonstoren Babel 2017	Simonsberg-Paarl	93
Beaumont Vitruvian 2014	Bot River	89
Bellingham The Bernard Series Small Barrel S.M.V. 2015	Paarl	91
Beyerskloof Faith 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Beyerskloof Synergy Cape Blend 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Boland Cellar One Formation Shiraz Grenache Viognier 2015	Western Cape	80
Boland Cellar One Formation Pinotage Shiraz Grenache 2016	Western Cape	90
Boschendal 1685 S & M Shiraz Mourvèdre 2016	Coastal Region	89
<b>Chapoutier Rasteau 2015</b>	<b>Rasteau</b>	<b>89</b>
Creation Syrah Grenache 2016	Walker Bay	88
Daschbosch Cape Blend 2016	Breedekloof	88
De Krans Tritonia 2016	Calitzdorp	88
DeMorgenzon Maestro Blue 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Dieu Donné The Cross Collection Shiraz Viognier 2015	Franschhoek	87
Donkiesbaai Rooiwijn 2017	Piekeniers-kloof	92
Eikendal Charisma 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Erika O. Syrah Grenache Noir Cinsault 2016	Coastal Region	88
Ernie Els Big Easy Red Blend 2016	Western Cape	92
Ernie Els Proprietor's Blend 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Fairview Broken Barrel 2015	Coastal Region	89
Fairview Caldera 2016	Western Cape	89
Fairview Extraño 2015	Coastal Region	92
Fairview Homtini 2016	Darling	90
Glenelly Estate Reserve 2012	Stellenbosch	92
Glenelly Estate Reserve 2013	Stellenbosch	91
<b>Grand Veneur Le Miocène 2015</b>	<b>Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape</b>	<b>90</b>
Guardian Peak Summit Shiraz Mourvèdre Viognier 2015	Western Cape	88
Haskell II 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Hogan Divergent 2016	Coastal Region	88
Iona One Man Band Red 2012	Elgin	89
Joostenberg Bakermat 2016	Paarl	93
Kloovenburg Eight Feet 2016	Swartland	89
Lammershoek Terravinum Reserve Red 2016	Swartland	90
Leipzig Master Blend 2017	Western Cape	91
Leipzig Shiraz Mourvèdre Viognier 2016	Western Cape	89
Leopard Frog Vineyards Kiss & Tell 2006	Stellenbosch	84
Leopard Frog Vineyards Tao 2009	Stellenbosch	82
Leopard Frog Vineyards Tendré 2011	Stellenbosch	88
Leopard Frog Vineyards Tribe 2007	Stellenbosch	88
Lourensford Shiraz Mourvèdre Viognier Limited Release 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Luddite Saboteur Red 2016	Cape South Coast	91
Môreilig The Hedge 2017	Swartland	88
Muratie Melck's Shiraz Merlot Cabernet Sauvignon 2014	Western Cape	91

Nederburg The Motorcycle Marvel 2016	Western Cape	90
Olifantsberg Silhouette 2015	Breedekloof	93
Opstal Carl Everson Cape Blend 2016	Slanghoek	91
Orange River Cellars Lyra Vega 2016	Northern Cape	89
Org De Rac Die Waghuis Red Blend 2016	Swartland	93
Rooiberg Reserve Cape Blend 2015	Robertson	89
Rust en Vrede 1694 Classification 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Rust en Vrede Estate 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Simonsig Frans Malan 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Simonsig The GSM 2017	Stellenbosch	89
Spice Route Chakalaka 2015	Swartland	89
Springfontein Limestone Rocks Whole Lotta Love Cape Red Blend 2015	Walker Bay	92
Strandveld The Navigator 2015	Cape South Coast	90
Tanagra Carah 2015	McGregor	87
The Drift Moveable Feast 2015	Overberg	88
The Smuggler's Boot GSM Blend 2016 (Richard Kershaw)	Western Cape	89
Thorne & Daughters Wanderer's Heart 2017	Western Cape	90
Under Oaks French Flair 2015	Coastal Region	90
Verdict 2016 (La Petite Ferme)	Franschhoek	88
Villiera Down to Earth Touriga Nacional Shiraz 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Vondeling Monsonia 2015	Voor-Paardeberg	90
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Merlot Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon 2015	Simonsberg-Paarl	92
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Shiraz Cabernet Sauvignon 2014	Simonsberg-Paarl	87
Waverley Hills SMV Shiraz Mourvèdre Viognier 2013	Tulbagh	87
Welgegund Providence 2015	Wellington	88
Wildehurst Red 2014	Swartland	92