



**ALTERNATIVE
VARIETIES
REPORT
2019**

INTRODUCTION

The Alternative Varieties Report focuses on single-variety wines which fall outside the mainstream. Just how undifferentiated 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, Cinsault in that order) amounted to 86% of total plantings (81 359ha out of a total of 94 545ha) at the end of 2017, a further 93 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.

KEY FINDINGS

In year two of the Alternative Varieties Report, we received 44 white wine entries and 43 red wine entries, with 24 of the whites (or 54.5%) rating 90-plus on the 100-point quality scale and 16 of the reds (or 37.2%).

Among the white wines, Semillon enjoyed a particularly strong showing, the 2017 as made by Simonsberg-Paarl property Babylonstoren for its wine club members achieving a remarkable rating of 95 while a further eight examples were 90-plus (four of these from Elgin). The hallmark of these wines? Particular richness on the palate.

Among the reds, Cabernet Franc was the stand-out class with seven examples 90-plus, the Raats Family 2016 coming out tops with 94 points. There are only 820ha of this variety planted locally but the fruit quality seems to be exceptionally high and those working with it particularly adroit at their game.

As for the other categories, many of the examples of Viognier suffered from being a bit too much – it has to be left on the vine for a very long time before its characteristic perfume develops and the resulting wines often appear unduly sweet and thick textured.

Though plantings of Verdelho remain minute (75ha), there were three examples to rate 90-plus and this variety might well be worth keeping an eye on, the panel impressed with the vibrancy and freshness that these wines showed.

As was the case last year, Cinsault and Grenache were tasted together and here the feeling was that while both varieties very often make for good everyday drinking, it seems winemakers have difficulty in coaxing greatness from them. The lighter styles are often not so much elegant as dilute and simple while those intended to be richer and fuller quickly become clumsy and awkward.

When it came to Malbec and Petit Verdot, the panel's feeling was that while there was nothing terribly wrong with any of the wines entered, these varieties are surely better used as blending components than for making stand-alone wines.

It should also be noted that while many of the wines come from Stellenbosch and other well-established appellations, there are one or two brave producers working in less traditional locations achieving good results: Lyra Quasar Colombard 2018 from Northern Cape producer Orange River Cellars rated 89 while the Nebbiolo 2018 and Viognier NV from Abingdon in Lions River, KZN both rated 90. As climate change continues to play out, who knows what unheralded parts of the country will yet come to be considered as prime vineyard sites?

Beyond that, what makes this tasting both fun and interesting is the encounters with the weird and wonderful. Among the white wines to score 90-plus were two examples of Pinot Blanc and one each of Clairette Blanche, Pinot Gris and Roussanne while among the reds, there were one each of Carignan, Gamay, Nebbiolo, Tinta Barocca and Touriga Nacional – there is some smart drinking to be had from the lesser known varieties for those with a sense of adventure.

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

95

Babylonstoren Wine Club Semillon 2017

Price: R150

Total production: 1500 bottles

Abv: 14.63%

Fermented and matured for 16 months in older oak. A complex nose of white peach, blackcurrant, fynbos, spice and a pleasant waxy character while the palate is very well balanced with concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and a savoury finish. Plenty of wow factor.

92

Bosman Family Vineyards Fides Grenache Blanc 2017

Price: R220

Total production: 10 100 bottles and 65 magnums

Abv: 13.79%

Spontaneous fermentation before maturation lasting six months in older Russian oak. Amber in colour. The nose shows orange and stone fruit to go with nuts and some waxiness. The palate is deep and flavourful with some phenolic grip and a super-savoury finish.

92

Cavalli Verdelho 2016

Price: R300

Total production: 360 bottles

Abv: 13.59%

Matured for 18 months in a second-fill French oak barrel. Top notes of flowers and herbs plus slight waxy, nutty notes. The palate displays very little primary fruit but still possesses good depth of flavour, smooth texture and invigorating acidity. Most intriguing.

92

Eagles' Nest Viognier 2018

Price: R185

Total production: 19 800 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Matured for six months in French oak barrels, 15% new. A subtle but enchanting nose with a floral top note before white peach, earth and spice. The palate shows concentrated fruit, vibrant acidity and pithy finish – lovely composure.

92

Org De Rac Verdelho 2018

Price: R67

Total production: 2 600 bottles

Abv: 13.7%

Mainly tank fermented but a small portion fermented on staves and in barrel. A very appealing nose with floral perfume before citrus, white peach and spice. The palate is relatively lean yet flavourful with pure fruit and really vibrant acidity, the finish long and pithy.

92

Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve Semillon 2017

Price: R160

Total production: 3 435 bottles

Abv: 12.93%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in French oak, 15% new. Cut-apple, hay and white pepper plus some yeasty complexity on the nose while the palate shows concentrated fruit and a nice line of acidity before a bone-dry finish.

92

Vrede en Lust Barrique 2017

Price: R150

Total production: 5 500 bottles

Abv: 13.28%

89% Semillon and 11% Sauvignon Blanc. Fermented and matured in older oak. Lime and lemon, white peach, hay, some fynbos and a slight waxy note on the nose. The palate is pure and focused with layers of flavour and nicely coated acidity, the finish long and savoury.

BUYING GUIDE: CELLAR-DOOR PRICES FOR WHITE WINES RATED 90 – 91

Riesling

91

Groote Post 2017

Price: R105

90

Nederburg The Winemasters 2017

Price: R75

Semillon

91

Highlands Road 2017

Price: R190

Highlands Road 2018

Price: R190

90

Nitida 2018

Price: R115

Haut Espoir 2017

Price: R175

Dornier 2018

Price: R185

Malanot Asiel 2018

Price: R200

Viognier

91

La Couronne 2016

Price: R260

La Couronne 2017

Price: R260

90

Abingdon Signature NV

Price: R280

Other

91

Lanzerac Keldermeester Versameling Bergpad Pinot Blanc 2017

Price: R200

91

Stellenbosch Vineyards Limited Release Verdelho 2018

Price: R250

Mariëtte Pinot Blanc 2018 (Le Belle Rebelle)

Price: R350

90

Usana Pinot Gris 2017

Price: R98

Lieben Roussanne 2018

Price: R220

Daschbosch Avon Clairette Blanche 2018

Price: R400

TASTING NOTES: RED

94

Raats Family Cabernet Franc 2016

Price: R550

Total production: 4 500 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

Matured for 18 months in French oak, 25% new. Red and black fruit, rose-like perfume, fresh herbs and a little vanilla on the nose. The palate shows great fruit concentration, fresh acidity and chewy tannins – plenty of reined-in power.

93

Morgenster Cabernet Franc 2016

Price: R110

Total production: 7 300 bottles

Abv: 14%

Matured for 12 months in older French oak. Pretty aromatics of red and black fruit, some floral fragrance and fresh herbs. Medium bodied and beautifully balanced – pure fruit, fresh acidity and silky tannins, the finish long and savoury.

92

Lammershoek The Mysteries Die Ou Man Tinta Barocca 2015

Price: R324.90

Total production: 1 300 bottles

Abv: 13.68%

Fermented in 2 000-litre foudre and matured for 11 months in older 500-litre barrels. Red and black fruit, herbs, liquorice, earth and spice on the nose. Super-rich and dense and yet not short of freshness, the tannins very firm – an intriguing drop.

92

Raats Dolomite Cabernet Franc 2017

Price: R165

Total production: 17 269 bottles

Abv: 14%

95% Cabernet Franc, 5% Malbec. Matured for 14 months in older French oak. A youthful, somewhat shy nose showing red fruit, some herbal undertones and earth. The palate is relatively medium bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Well balanced and understated.

92

Warwick Cabernet Franc 2015 (magnum)

Price: R700

Total production: 6 000 bottles and 500 magnums

Abv: 14.82%

Matured for 26 months in French oak, 30% new. An attractive herbal top note before red and black fruit, pencil shavings and boot polish on the nose. Full bodied and intensely flavoured on the palate, the finish long and dry.

BUYING GUIDE: CELLAR-DOOR PRICES FOR RED WINES RATED 90 – 91

Cabernet Franc

91

Raats Dolomite 2016

Price: R150

90

Vrede en Lust Artisan Range 2016

Price: R275

Raats Family 2015

Price: R500

Other

91

Olifantsberg Grenache Noir 2017

Price: R195

Bosman Family Vineyards Twyfeling Cinsault 2017

Price: R220

90

Boplaas Touriga Nacional 2017

Price: R78

La Couronne Le Petite Malbec 2016

Price: R130

Stand Alone Gamay Noir 2018

Price: R187

Lammershoek The Mysteries Die Onderstok Carignan 2017

Price: R324.90

Creation Grenache 2017

Price: R360

Abingdon Signature Nebbiolo 2018

Price: R400

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Abingdon Signature Nebbiolo 2018	Lions River KwaZulu-Natal	90
Abingdon Signature Viognier NV	Lions River KwaZulu-Natal	90
Allesverloren Tinta Barocca 2017	Swartland	89
Allesverloren Touriga Nacional 2016	Swartland	88
Anura Reserve Malbec 2017	Simonsberg- Paarl	87
Babylonstoren Viognier 2018	Simonsberg- Paarl	89
Babylonstoren Wine Club Semillon 2017	Simonsberg- Paarl	95
Bemind Cinsault 2018	Breedekloof	87
Bizoe Idioglossia Malbec 2017	Western Cape	87
Boplaas Touriga Nacional 2017	Calitzdorp	90
Bosman Family Vineyards Primitivo Secco 2017	Wellington	89
Bosman Family Vineyards Twyfeling Cinsault 2017	Wellington	91
Bosman Family Vineyards Fides Grenache Blanc 2017	Wellington	92
Bosman Family Vineyards Wine Club Selection Pinot Gris 2018	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde	89
Bosman Family Vineyards Wine Club Selection Weisser Riesling 2018	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde	89
Cavalli Verdelho 2016	Stellenbosch	92
Creation Grenache 2017	Hemel-en- Aarde Ridge	90
Daschbosch Avon Clairette Blanche 2018	Breedekloof	90
Deetlefs Familie Semillon 2018	Western Cape	89
Die Plêk Cinsault 2016 (Jasper Raats)	Stellenbosch	88
Dornier Malbec 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Dornier Petit Verdot 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Dornier Semillon 2018	Stellenbosch	90
Eagles' Nest Viognier 2018	Constantia	92
Groote Post Darling Hills Semillon 2015	Darling	89
Groote Post Riesling 2015	Darling	88
Groote Post Riesling 2017	Darling	91
Haut Espoir Semillon 2017	Franschhoek	90
Highlands Road Semillon 2017	Elgin	91
Highlands Road Semillon 2018	Elgin	91
Idiom Viognier 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Ken Forrester Reserve Collection Grenache 2017	Stellenbosch	89
Kloovenburg Grenache 2018	Swartland	89
Kranskop Tannat 2017	Klaasvoogds	89
Kranskop Viognier 2018	Robertson	89
Kruger Family Wines Old Vines Cinsault 2018	Piekenierskloof	88
Kruger Family Wines Old Vines Grenache 2018	Piekenierskloof	87
La Couronne Le Petite Malbec 2016	Franschhoek	90
La Couronne Malbec 2016	Franschhoek	89
La Couronne Viognier 2016	Franschhoek	91

La Couronne Viognier 2017	Franschhoek	91
Lammershoek The Mysteries Die Harde Blaar Harslevelu 2017	Swartland	87
Lammershoek The Mysteries Die Onderstok Carignan 2017	Swartland	90
Lammershoek The Mysteries Die Ou Man Tinta Barocca 2015	Swartland	92
Lanzerac Keldermeester Versameling Bergpad Pinot Blanc 2017	Jonkershoek Valley, Stellenbosch	91
Lieben Cabernet Franc 2017	Western Cape	88
Lieben Roussanne 2018	Western Cape	90
Malanot Asiel Semillon 2018	Elgin	90
Mariëtte Pinot Blanc 2018 (Le Belle Rebelle)	Breedekloof	91
Marras Piekenierskloof Greanche 2017	Piekenierskloof	87
Morgenster Cabernet Franc 2016	Stellenbosch	93
Nederburg The Beautiful Lady Gewürztraminer 2018	Western Cape	88
Nederburg The Winemasters Albariño 2018	Western Cape	89
Nederburg The Winemasters Riesling 2017	Western Cape	90
Nitida Riesling 2018	Durbanville, Cape Town	86
Nitida Semillon 2018	Durbanville, Cape Town	90
Olifantsberg Grenache Blanc 2017	Breedekloof	89
Olifantsberg Grenache Noir 2017	Breedekloof	91
Opstal The Barber Semillon 2018	Breedekloof	88
Orange River Cellars Lyra Quasar Colombard 2018	Northern Cape	89
Org De Rac Roussanne 2018	Swartland	89
Org De Rac Verdelho 2018	Swartland	92
Raats Dolomite Cabernet Franc 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Raats Dolomite Cabernet Franc 2017	Stellenbosch	92
Raats Family Cabernet Franc 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Raats Family Cabernet Franc 2016	Stellenbosch	94
Rainbow's End Cabernet Franc 2017	Banghoek, Stellenbosch	88
Rainbow's End Limited Release Cabernet Franc 2017	Banghoek, Stellenbosch	88
Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve Semillon 2017	Franschhoek	92
Rickety Bridge The Printer's Devil Titivillus Grenache Noir 2017	Franschhoek	87
Rietvallei "Dark Cin" Cinsaut 2016	Robertson	88
Rietvallei JMB Cabernet Franc 2014	Robertson	88
Stand Alone Gamay Noir 2018	Stellenbosch	90
Stellenbosch Vineyards Limited Release Cinsault 2018	Stellenbosch	89
Stellenbosch Vineyards Limited Release Grenache 2018	Stellenbosch	88
Stellenbosch Vineyards Limited Release Theronia 2018	Stellenbosch	89
Stellenbosch Vineyards Limited Release Verdelho 2018	Stellenbosch	91
Sutherland Grenache Reserve 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Tanagra Colombard 2018	McGregor	89
Usana Pinot Gris 2017	Stellenbosch	90
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Cabernet Franc 2016	Western Cape	90
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Grenache 2017	Simonsberg-Paarl	88
Vrede en Lust Barrique 2017	Elgin	92
Vrede en Lust Early Mist Riesling 2018	Elgin	88

Vrede en Lust Viognier 2018	Western Cape	89
Vriesenhof Grenache 2017	Piekenierskloof	88
Warwick Cabernet Franc 2015 (magnum)	Stellenbosch	92