



PRESCIENT
CABERNET SAUVIGNON
~ REPORT 2019 ~

KEY FINDINGS

Could 2017 prove to be an even better vintage than the much-acclaimed 2015 for South African Cabernet Sauvignon? Critics and public alike are just coming to terms with the greatness offered by the 2015 vintage and already some outstanding wines from 2017 are hitting the market - six of this year's top 10 are from 2017, three from 2016 and one from 2015. Out of the 21 wines entered from 2017, a total of 13 or 62% rated 90 points or higher on the 100-point quality scale.

However, 2016 is hardly a write-off with 17 or 41% out of the 41 wines entered from this year rating 90-plus. It's not so much a "weak" vintage but rather one suited to earlier drinking, the wines typically not having quite the same structure that either 2015 or 2017 provided.

In total, there were 94 wines entered from 76 producers. As for the role of terroir, it once again it appears that Stellenbosch owns the category – nine of the top 10 and 34 of the 43 wines to rate 90-plus from this district. Average cellar-door price of the 90-plus wines was R286.29 a bottle (ranging from R100 for the Morgenster 2014 to R980 for Rust en Vrede Single Vineyard 2016).

In terms of style, great single-variety Cabernet usually depends on concentration of fruit and firmness of tannins, the issue when it comes to assessment one of whether the producer has managed to achieve such power without sacrificing balance and character.

Inevitably, some wines came up short on account of being overdone – fruit picked too ripe, the juice worked too hard in the cellar, the oaking too overt. This, however, is almost a forgivable shortcoming – there's always the hope that such very big wines might settle down into something more pleasing with time in bottle.

What was curious to the panel this time around was the rather large number of wines that were the opposite of the above, which is to say made in a softer, more accessible style – obviously fruity and possessing relatively little by way of tannic structure. These wines were typically pleasant enough but seemed to be deliberately constructed for early consumption. The panel felt that these wines were not necessarily doing the "King of grapes" any good – if we are once again to produce a wine as long-lived as GS 1966, then you imagine it will have to possess a rather magical combination of forcefulness and finesse in its youth.

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

Top 10

95

Croydon Vineyards Covenant 2017

Price: R110

Total production: 3 000 bottles

Abv: 13.87%

Matured for 15 months in older oak. Red and black fruit, violets and herbs plus attractive oak-derived notes. The palate has lovely fruit expression with vibrant acidity and fine tannins. Succulent and dense, smooth textured in the best sense, the finish long and savoury.

94

Rust en Vrede Estate Vineyards 2017

Price: R295

Total production: 34 290 bottles

Abv: 14.76%

Matured for 18 months in French oak, 20% new. Red and black fruit, flowers and herbs plus some pencil shavings on the nose. The palate has a weightless intensity about it – pure fruit, vibrant acidity and chewy tannins. Balanced, layered and long. Has the structure to age with benefit for many years.

93

Blaauwklippen 2017

Price: R165

Total production: 13 100 bottles

Abv: 14.12%

89% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Merlot. Matured for 19 months in older oak. Top notes of fynbos and flowers before red and black fruit on the nose. Medium bodied with good freshness and a long, dry finish. Lovely fruit purity and detail.

93

Delaire Graff Reserve 2017

Price: R775

Total production: 6 300 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

Matured for 18 months in French oak, 80% new. A top note of violets before red and black fruit plus pencil shavings on the nose. The palate is beautifully balanced - great fruit density, plenty of verve and fine yet grippy tannins. A wine of particular structure and length.

93

Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2017

Price: R148

Total production: 75 000 bottles

Abv: 14.89%

Matured for 18 months in French oak, 40% new. The nose shows red and black fruit, violets and fresh herbs. Succulent fruit, vibrant acidity and crunchy tannins on the palate – nicely balanced and possessing real energy.

93

Le Riche 2016

Price: R240

Total production: 14 500 bottles

Abv: 14.54%

Matured for 24 months in French oak, 44% new. Red and black berries, violets and fresh herbs plus some pencil shavings on the nose. The palate, meanwhile, shows lovely pure fruit, bright acidity and fine tannins, the finish long and dry. A particularly elegant example of the variety.

93

Plaisir de Merle 2015

Price: R260

Total production: 33 866 bottles

Abv: 14.41%

85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 11% Shiraz, 4% Petit Verdot. Matured for approximately 16 months in French oak, 60% new. Vanilla and pencil shavings before red and black berries and some attractive herbal character. Medium bodied with pure fruit, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Lovely composure and detail.

93

Strydom Rex 2016

Price: R267

Total production: 1 890 bottles

Abv: 14.24%

Matured for 18 months in French oak, 30% new. Cassis, violets and pencil shavings plus a slight smokiness on the nose. The palate is full but balanced – concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and firm tannins, a pleasantly austere quality to the finish.

92

Fleur Du Cap Series Privée 2016

Price: R180

Total production: 10 000 bottles

Abv: 14.7%

Matured for 18 months in French oak, approximately 40% new oak. Cassis, dried herbs plus oak-derived vanilla and spice on the nose. Particularly powerful palate – dense fruit, nice freshness and firm tannins, the finish super-long and dry.

92

Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2017

Price: R180

Total production: 22 735 bottles

Abv: 14%

85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10 % Cabernet Franc and 4 % Petit Verdot. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 25% new. Red and black berries, flowers and herbs on the nose. The palate shows impressive structure and energy – dense fruit plus a good line of acidity and firm tannins. Juicy on entry before a finish that is long and very dry, this is particularly elegant.

BUYING GUIDE: CELLAR-DOOR PRICES FOR WINES RATED 90+

Wine	Score	Price
Croydon Vineyards Covenant 2017	95	R110
Rust en Vrede Estate Vineyards 2017	94	R295
Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2017	93	R148
Blaauwklippen 2017	93	R165
Le Riche 2016	93	R240
Plaisir de Merle 2015	93	R260
Strydom Rex 2016	93	R267
Delaire Graff Reserve 2017	93	R775
Fleur Du Cap Series Privée 2016	92	R180
Lanzerac 2016	92	R180
Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2017	92	R180
Benguela Cove 2017	92	R285
Peter Falke Exclusive Blend 2014	92	R350
Glenelly Lady May 2013	92	R520
Morgenster 2014	91	R100
Glenelly Glass Collection 2016	91	R115
Edgebaston 2017	91	R140
Groot Constantia 2017	91	R249
Alto 2015	91	R260
Spier 21 Gables 2015	91	R295
Tokara Reserve Collection 2016	91	R320
Ernie Els Proprietor's 2015	91	R340
Meerlust 2015	91	R345
Peter Falke Exclusive Blend 2015	91	R350
Warwick The Blue Lady 2016	91	R350
Le Riche Reserve 2016	91	TBC
Maastricht 2017	90	R120
Org de Rac Reserve 2015	90	R135
Org de Rac Reserve 2016	90	R135
Zorgvliet 2017	90	R140
Simonsig Labyrinth 2015	90	R145
Cavali Colt 2016	90	R150
Stellenbosch Reserve Ou Hoofgebou 2017	90	R160
Dornier Equanimity 2016	90	R165
Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2016	90	R180
Cederberg 2017	90	R190
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Napoleonsberg 2015	90	R300
Waterford 2016	90	R356
Glen Carlou Gravel Quarry 2015	90	R424
Neil Ellis Jonkershoek Valley Stellenbosch 2016	90	R425
Cederberg Five Generations 2016	90	R550
Rickety Bridge The Bridge 2016	90	R650
Rust en Vrede Single Vineyard 2016	90	R980

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Alto 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Allesverloren 2016	Swartland	89
Amazing Grace The Daniel Collection 2015 (Black Elephant Vintners & Co.)	Franschhoek	86
Asara Vineyard Collection 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Bartinney 2015	Banghoek Stellenbosch	87
Benguela Cove 2017	Walker Bay	92
Bergsig Reserve 2013	Breedekloof	89
Bergsig Oom Prop Reserve 2015	Breedekloof	88
Blaauwklippen 2017	Stellenbosch	93
Cavalli Colt 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Cederberg 2017	Cederberg	90
Cederberg Five Generations 2016	Cederberg	90
Clos Malverne Reserve 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Croydon Vineyards Covenant 2017	Stellenbosch	95
David Finlayson GS 2016 (Edgebaston)	Stellenbosch	85
Delaire Graff Reserve 2017	Banghoek	93
Delaire Graff Laurence Graff Reserve 2015	Banghoek	89
De Meye 2017	Stellenbosch	88
De Trafford 2016	Stellenbosch	83
Deux Frères 2015	Stellenbosch	81
Dornier Equanimity 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Durbanville Hills Collectors Reserve The Castle of Good Hope 2017	Durbanville Cape Town	89
Eikendal 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Edgebaston 2017	Stellenbosch	90
Ernie Els 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Ernie Els Proprietor's 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Fleur Du Cap Series Privée 2016	Stellenbosch	92
Glen Carlou Gravel Quarry 2015	Paarl	90
Glenelly Glass Collection 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Glenelly Glass Collection 2017	Stellenbosch	89
Glenelly Lady May 2013	Stellenbosch	92
Groenland Premium 2016	Bottelary Stellenbosch	87
Groot Constantia 2017	Constantia	91
Guardian Peak Lapa 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Hartenberg 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Haut Espoir 2012	Franschhoek	88
Holden Manz 2016	Franschhoek	88
Jakob's Vineyards 2014	Hemel-en- Aarde Ridge	89
Jason's Hill 2016	Breedekloof	88
Joostenberg Philip Albert 2016	Paarl	89
Jordan The Long Fuse 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2017	Stellenbosch	93
La Bri Limited Release 2016	Franschhoek	89

Lanzerac 2016	Stellenbosch	92
Leipzig 2017	Stellenbosch	89
Le Riche 2016	Stellenbosch	93
Le Riche Reserve 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Louisvale V Barrels 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Maastricht 2017	Durbanville	90
Marklew 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Mariëtjie 2016	Breedekloof	89
Meerlust 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Meinert 2015	Devon Valley	88
Miravel Ella Family Reserve 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Morgenster 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Mountain Ridge 2014	Western Cape	88
Muratie Martin Melck Family Reserve 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Nederburg The Manor House 2016	Western Cape	88
Nederburg Two Centuries 2015	Paarl	89
Neethlingshof 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Neil Ellis Jonkershoek Valley Stellenbosch 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Neil Ellis Stellenbosch 2017	Stellenbosch	92
Oldenburg Vineyards 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Oldenburg Vineyards Rondekop Per Se 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Org de Rac Reserve 2015	Swartland	90
Org de Rac Reserve 2016	Swartland	90
Org de Rac Reserve 2017	Swartland	88
Peter Falke Exclusive Blend 2014	Stellenbosch	92
Peter Falke Exclusive Blend 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Peter Falke PF 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Plaisir de Merle 2015	Simonsberg-Paarl	93
Rainbow's End 2017	Banghoek Stellenbosch	88
Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve 2016	Franschhoek	88
Rickety Bridge The Bridge 2016	Franschhoek	90
Rietvallei 2016	Robertson	88
Romansrivier Reserve 2014	Western Cape	88
Rust en Vrede Estate Vineyards 2017	Stellenbosch	94
Rust en Vrede Single Vineyard 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Schultz Family Wines Dungeons 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Simonsig Labyrinth 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Spier 21 Gables 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Springfontein Daredevils' Drums Mashies Extreme 2016	Walker Bay	87
Stellenbosch Reserve Ou Hoofgebou 2017	Stellenbosch	90
Strydom Rex 2016	Stellenbosch	93
Sutherland 2015	Elgin	89
Thelema 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Tokara Reserve Collection 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Usana The Fox 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Napoleonsberg 2015	Simonsberg-Paarl	90

Warwick The Blue Lady 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Waterford 2016	Stellenbosch	90
Zevenwacht 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Zorgvliet 2017	Banghoek	90