

— PRESCIENT —

— SWEET WINE
& FORTIFIEDS
REPORT 2020 —



WINEMAG.CO.ZA

ABOUT THE WINEMAG.CO.ZA TASTING PROGRAMME 2020

Winemag.co.za will produce 13 category reports over the course of the year. Each report is based on the outcome of a blind tasting of wines entered within the specific category.

Winemag.co.za will announce a Top 10 with the release of each successive report. Producers of the Top 10 will be notified and are able to purchase newly designed Top 10 stickers while producers of the remaining wines may acquire regular rating stickers.

The programme culminates in a gala dinner where the individual best wine per category will receive an award and ratings on the 100-point quality scale for all the Top 10 wines will be revealed.

The Best of Category wines will subsequently be shown at tastings in both Johannesburg and London.



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*

ABOUT SWEET WINES AND FORTIFIEDS

Though Natural Sweet, Noble Late Harvest and Straw Wines are all styles of sweet wines, their respective methods of production differ significantly.

Natural Sweet is the vaguest category, with the only requirement for wines to be classified as such being that they possess a minimum residual sugar level of 30g/l. This makes the category something of a catch-all, allowing for easy-drinking wines of no great complexity to wines of real profundity.

What gives Noble Late Harvest wines their hallmark of complexity is “noble rot” – the fungal growth *Botrytis cinerea*, which concentrates acid and sugar in grapes while also increasing the viscosity (due to the production of glycerol) and altering the aromas and flavours of the finished wine.

Finally, there is Straw Wine, which should be made from naturally desiccated grapes, either dried on mats or allowed to shrivel on the vine.

Another class of wine altogether are the sweet fortifieds. Muscat de Frontignan is the name by which Muscat à Petit Grains, the finest of many Muscat varieties, is known in South Africa. It is a white grape variety but a red mutation also occurs. The epithet of Muscadel applies to fortified wines – grape juice that has been fortified with grape spirit.

Hanepoot (or Muscat d’Alexandrie) is another principal Muscat variety and hence included in this tasting. Jerepigo is the generic name for “wines” that have been made by adding alcohol to juice, regardless of variety and were not included.

The Port-style wines are made according to the template of the famous wines from the Douro region of Portugal. Any varieties are permitted but those associated with the Douro typically make for the most successful outcomes. The production process essentially involves the addition of flavourless, grape-distilled spirit to the fermenting must – this arrests further fermentation causing unfermented sugars to remain, giving Port a natural sweetness.

KEY FINDINGS

Entries for this year's Sweet Wine & Fortifieds Report convened by Winemag.co.za and sponsored by multinational financial services company Prescient were as follows: 1) Natural Sweet – two; 2) Noble Late Harvest – 10; 3) Straw – four; 4) Hanepoot – two; 5) Muscadel – 10; and 6) Port – eight. A total of 36 wines so a rather small sample taken collectively but overall quality across these various niche categories is extraordinarily high with 27 wines rating 90-plus on the 100-point quality scale. By all accounts, these styles of wines are in steep decline commercially, but wine enthusiasts are urged to reconsider and engage as there is just so much good stuff to be had!

Of the ten examples of Noble Late Harvest, four were from Sauvignon Blanc, two from Viognier, two from Chenin Blanc and one each from Riesling and Semillon so when it comes to varieties, it would seem anything goes. Stylistically, too, wines range widely from light and elegant to very rich and full – these are not wines to be purchased incidentally.

The two examples of Hanepoot and the 10 Muscadels all rated 90-plus bar the Nuy Wit Muskadel 2006 which is starting to fade a little. On the whole, however, the panel was impressed by the fruit intensity and careful spirit additions – those producers who bother to persist with these styles of wines obviously take them seriously.

On to the Port-style wines where the two Calitzdorp cellars that have long focussed on this category of Boplaas and De Krans not surprisingly dominated. When it came to the Vintage Reserves, there was no questioning the power of these wines, although there was some debate among the panel whether this should be utterly unbridled or not. Given that such wines are intended to be drunk many decades after bottling, the argument could be made that they almost can't have too much structure while the retort might well be that such universal principles of wine appreciation as detail and harmony should also apply...

TOP 10 TASTING NOTES



Boplaas Cape Tawny Reserve 1995

R250 per 375ml

Total production: 2 400 bottles Abv: 18.69%

90% Tinta Barocca, 10% Touriga Nacional. Matured for 17 years in cask. The nose shows rancio, some nuttiness and spice. The palate is extremely detailed, fresh and long – very delicate and fine.



Boplaas Cape Vintage Reserve 2015

R450

Total production: 2 100 bottles Abv: 18.44%

60% Touriga Nacional, 30% Touriga Franca, 8% Tinta Barocca and 2% Souzao. Matured for 12 months in pipes. Aromatics of red and black fruit, flowers, spice and chocolate. Lovely purity and depth of fruit on the palate, no shortage of freshness, the tannins very fine. A fortified of both power and poise.



De Krans Cape Vintage Reserve 2016

R325

Total production: 3 276 bottles Abv: 19.26%

74% Touriga Nacional, 18% Tinta Barocca and 8% Tinta Roriz. Matured in big vats for 20 months. Red and black fruit, tea leaf, liquorice, earth and spice on the nose while the palate shows dense fruit and firm tannins. Rich and thick textured, this is forceful stuff.





De Krans Cape Vintage Reserve 2017

R325

Total production: 3 414 bottles Abv: 18.91%

79% Touriga Nacional, 18% Tinta Barocca and 6% Tinta Roriz. Matured in big vats for 20 months. The nose shows black and blue fruit, chocolate and spice. Rich and full on the palate with smooth tannins and a savoury finish – very polished.



De Krans Muscat De Frontignan 2019

R98

Total production: 4 086 bottles Abv: 15.02%

From vineyards planted in 1976 along the Gamka River in Calitzdorp. Aromas of sultana, flowers and spice. The palate is complex and thick-textured, plenty of sweet fruit upfront but the finish is super-long and savoury.



Delheim Edelspatz Noble Late Harvest 2019

R310 per 375ml

Total production: 4 500 bottles Abv: 12%

From a Riesling vineyard planted in 1985. Fermented and matured for nine months in French oak. Subtle notes of flowers, citrus and spice on the nose while the palate is fine and delicate – with pure fruit and bright acidity, this has a lovely tension about it.





GlenWood Noblesse Grand Duc 2017

R360 per 375ml

Total production: 3 800 bottles Abv: 13%

100% Semillon. Spontaneously fermented and matured for 28 months in French oak. Notes of straw, dried apricot and caramel on the nose while the palate is rich and flavourful with punchy acidity lending balance. Has a lovely vinosity about it.



Highlands Road Noble Late Harvest 2017

R190 per 375ml

Total production: 2 100 bottles Abv: 12%

100% Sauvignon Blanc. Matured in old oak for 12 months. White peach and some mushroom on the nose. The palate has a creamy texture offset by a good line of acidity. Complex and age-worthy.



Nuy Rooi Muskadel 2010

R134

Total production: 6 933 bottles Abv: 16%

Wonderfully complex nose with top notes of potpourri and spice before boiled sweets, raisins and toffee. The palate has great balance – good depth of fruit, acidity well integrated, the spirit addition expertly handled. Complex and long.





Villa Esposto Muscat D'Alexandrie Straw Wine 2017

R120 per 375ml

Total production: 3 200 bottles Abv: 11.59%

Grapes from a Hanepoot vineyard planted in 1969, this is made by Klawer Cellars in the Olifants River region. Dried fruit, herbs and straw on the nose. The palate has a lovely viscosity about it yet also plenty of freshness, while the finish is long and dry with some pleasant grip. Great flavour intensity.



COMPLETE SCORES A - Z

NAME	WINE OF ORIGIN	SCORE
NATURAL SWEET		
Groot Constantia Grand Constance 2016	Constantia	91
Thelema Vin de Hel Muscat Late Harvest 2018	Stellenbosch	90
NOBLE LATE HARVEST		
Aaldering Estate 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Delheim Edelspatz 2019	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	Top 10
Durbanville Hills Cape Honey Bee 2018	Durbanville Cape Town	90
GlenWood Noblesse Grand Duc 2017	Franschhoek	Top 10
Highlands Road 2017	Elgin	Top 10
Joostenberg Chenin Blanc 2018	Paarl	88
Ken Forrester T 2018	Stellenbosch	89
Longridge Edelgoud Edellaatoes 2015	Stellenbosch	92
Lothian Vineyards 2017	Elgin	91
Lothian Vineyards 2018	Elgin	90
STRAW		
Botanica Mary Delany Collection Fire Lily Straw Wine NV	Stellenbosch	88
Lammershoek Mysteries Swart Strooi 2016	Swartland	88
Villa Esposto Muscat D'Alexandrie Straw Wine 2017	Olifants River	Top 10
Villa Esposto Muscat D'Alexandrie Straw Wine 2018	Olifants River	90
HANEPOOT		
Botha Kelder 2019	Breedekloof	91
Lateganskop No. 102 Muscat D'Alexandrie NV	Western Cape	91
MUSCADEL		
Allesverloren Red Muscadel 2019	Swartland	91
Boplaas Heritage Collection Muscadel 2013	Calitzdorp	90
De Krans Muscat De Frontignan 2019	Klein Karoo	Top 10
Nuy Barbieri Idro Barrel Aged Red Muscadel 2013	Nuy	92
Nuy Rooi Muskadel 2010	Nuy	Top 10
Nuy Wit Muskadel 2006	Nuy	88
Nuy Wit Muskadel 2013	Nuy	91
Rietvallei 1908 Muscadel 2015	Robertson	91
Rietvallei Red Muscadel 2018	Robertson	91
PORT-STYLE		
Allesverloren Fine Old Vintage 2012	Swartland	87
Boplaas Cape Tawny Reserve 1995	Klein Karoo	Top 10
Boplaas Cape Vintage Reserve 2015	Western Cape	Top 10
Boplaas Cape Vintage Reserve 2017	Western Cape	91
Botha Kelder Late Bottled Vintage 2016	Breedekloof	89
De Krans Cape Vintage Reserve 2016	Calitzdorp	Top 10
De Krans Cape Vintage Reserve 2017	Calitzdorp	Top 10
Haut Espoir Sweet Semillon NV	Franschhoek	81
Jakkalsvlei Vineyards Lord Jackal Trop Cape Vintage Reserve 2013	Western Cape	90

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