



PRESCIENT

CHENIN BLANC
REPORT 2020

ABOUT THE WINEMAG.CO.ZA TASTING PROGRAMME 2020



Winemag.co.za is set to produce 12 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.

We 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*

KEY FINDINGS

There were 88 entries from 57 producers received for the inaugural Prescient Chenin Blanc Report and what a strong category this once again proved to be – in addition to the top 10, a further 57 rated 90 points or higher on the 100-point quality scale. Put differently, 76.1% of the line-up made the crucial 90-point threshold.

As ever, the discussion that prevailed among the panel during tasting was less about basic quality and more about stylistic issues. The point is often made that the variety is capable of a wide array of legitimate but divergent expressions and judging therefore becomes about deciding why one particular wine should have precedence over another.

What was perhaps most impressive about this line-up was that for all the stylistic diversity on display, there was a real confidence and clarity of vision in the winemaking that generally shone through. In years gone by, there were always a few wines in such a line-up that could be criticised for being excessively simple – these were typically unwooded and at best showed pure fruit and plenty of freshness but at worst traded off yeast selections to achieve certain fermentation aromas while being excessively light on the palate. There's no doubt that such wines are still being made as they are perfectly suitable at entry level but there appears to be a realisation on the part of producers that they will not fare well in a serious wine competition.

Top-end Chenin Blanc now offers something for everyone. Previously, a key point of debate when convening to judge the category would be what viticultural and winemaking approaches were most apt. "When to pick?", "How reductive or oxidative to be during vinification?" and "How much new oak to apply?" are all decisions on the part of the winemaking team that perhaps weren't always taken as judiciously as they might have been.

It seems, however, we are increasingly reaching a point however where technique is not getting in the way of site, which is to say that winemakers are not forcing a particular style onto their wines but a rather remaining true to terroir. Obviously, some favour freshness over bigness and others want to make something as intense and full-bodied as possible but regardless there is a sense of top quality fruit being handled with imagination and sensitivity and the result is wines to suit all tastes.

In this regard, a quick scan of the Report's top 10 is revealing with alcohols varying from 12.5% in the case of Schultz Family Wines Skeleton Bay 2019 up to 14.28% in the case of DeMorgenzon Reserve 2018 and vinification involving all manner of vessels, the Stellenrust 2019 entirely tank fermented but other wines being handled in various combinations of barrel, concrete egg and foudre.

As most will know, Chenin Blanc is South Africa's most widely planted variety and there's a disproportionately large amount of old vines – the variety makes up 52.6% of the country's 3 505ha that are 35 years or older. That it is so ubiquitous is largely by accident – the rise in brandy production in the early part of last century followed the huge popularity of off-dry white wines like Lieberstein in the 1960s are two contributing factors – but what a happy accident this is proving to be.

In closing, a brief remark about pricing. The average price of the top 10 wines is R247,30 a bottle, which might appear healthy enough in terms of ensuring the economic sustainability of the industry but the variation across the 10 is extraordinary with Stellenrust 2019 the cheapest at R68 and Raats Family Wines Eden High Density Single Vineyard 2018 the most expensive at R800. The amount of money required to drink the very best Chenin appears to be far from clear...

TOP 10 TASTING NOTES



Bellingham

The Bernard Series Old Vine Cape Town 2018

R250

Total production: 3 000 bottles Abv: 13.5%

Grapes from a 1983 Durbanville vineyard. Predominantly spontaneously fermented and matured in a combination of barrel and foudre. Lemon, orange, stone fruit and some waxy character on the nose while the palate is rich and thick textured balanced by tangy acidity, the finish long and savoury. Displays plenty of depth and power.



DeMorgenzon

Reserve 2018

R430

Total production: 20 400 bottles Abv: 14.28%

Grapes from a 1972 vineyard. Spontaneously fermented and matured for 10 months in French oak, 20% new. A hint of reduction before citrus and stone fruit, some yeasty complexity plus hints of vanilla and spice. The palate is rich and creamy yet also possessing vibrant acidity, the finish long and savoury. Complex and sophisticated.



Lievland

Old Vine 2019

R150

Total production: 3 000 bottles Abv: 13.5%

Grapes from Paarl property Eenzaamheid, 30% from a 1976 vineyard and 70% from a 1983 vineyard. Fermented in a combination of tank and old oak before maturation lasting two months. Top notes of dried herbs and honeysuckle before citrus and peach on the nose while the palate shows lovely fruit concentration and bright acidity before a pithy finish. Great poise and drive.





Mulderbosch Steen op Hout 2019

R85

Total production: 180 000 bottles Abv: 13%

25% fermented in large, neutral oak barrels and foudres and 75% in stainless-steel tank. Top notes of flowers and herbs before white peach, vanilla and spice. Good palate weight, nicely integrated acidity and a saline finish. Precisely made, this has layers and layers of flavour.



Raats Family Wines Eden High Density Single Vineyard 2018

R800

Total production: 2 300 bottles Abv: 13.45%

Grapes from a vineyard planted in 2008. Spontaneously fermented and matured in 300-litre barrels. Top notes of potpourri and fresh herbs before citrus and white peach, earth and spice plus some leesy complexity. The palate meanwhile possesses lovely fruit definition and racy acidity before a pithy finish. Great poise and detail.



Schultz Family Wines Skeleton Bay 2019

R145

Total production: 6 080 bottles Abv: 12.5%

Grapes from a 1976 vineyard in Somerset West and 1961 vineyard in Paarl. Matured in old oak for nine months. A very pretty nose with notes of flowers and herbs, pear, peach and citrus and just a hint of reduction. Great purity of fruit and verve on the palate. Tightly wound with a pithy finish, this is very elegant.





Simonsig Chenin Avec Chêne 2017

R195

Total production: 9 326 bottles Abv: 13.43%

Grapes from a 1986 vineyard. Matured for 12 months in older 225- and 400-litre barrels. Citrus, apple and stone fruit plus some lanolin. Rich but balanced with good depth of fruit and fresh acidity, the finish gently savoury. Subtle and nuanced.



Stellenrust 2019

R68

Total production: 240 000 bottles Abv: 13.37%

From vineyards ranging from 30 to 43 years old on the Bottelary Hills. Spontaneously fermented and matured for five months in stainless steel tank. Top notes of straw and dried herbs before pear, naartjie, peach and green apple plus a hint of earth on the nose. Great fruit definition, lovely bright acidity and a very long, dry finish. Lean and energetic, this is very elegant.



Villion Henning 2018

R190

Total production: 1 330 bottles Abv: 13.06%

Grapes from a 1981 vineyard in Bot River. Spontaneously fermented and matured for 10 months in a combination of 300- and 400-litre barrels, 28% new. Some reduction before citrus and some stone fruit plus a floral note in the background. Rich and full-bodied with a pleasant sweet 'n sour quality. The acidity is nicely integrated and the finish long and gently savoury. A bold, showy wine.





Vrede en Lust Kogelberg 2017

R160

Total production: 4 300 bottles Abv: 13.5%

Fermented and matured for nine months in a combination of older 225- and 500-litre barrels. A leesy note before citrus and stone fruit. The palate is full bodied and slightly oil in texture, although there is also a great line of acidity. Sweet 'n sour with a very savoury finish, this makes a big impression.



COMPLETE SCORES A - Z

NAME	WINE OF ORIGIN	SCORE
Babylonstoren 2020	Simonsberg-Paarl	87
Bellingham The Bernard Series Old Vine Cape Town 2018	Cape Town	Top 10
Bergsig Patmos Reserve Collection 2017	Breedekloof	89
Bergsig Patmos Reserve Collectio2019	Breedekloof	90
Cavalli Filly 2019	Stellenbosch	93
Conradie Family Vineyards 2019	Nuy	88
Croydon Covenant 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Daschbosch Steen 2017	Breedekloof	92
Delheim Wild Ferment 2019	Stellenbosch	90
DeMorgenzon DMZ 2019	Stellenbosch	90
DeMorgenzon Reserve 2018	Stellenbosch	Top 10
Doran Reserve 2018	Voor Paardeberg	87
Eenzaamheid 2018	Agter Paarl	89
Esona Single Vineyard 2018	Robertson	90
Hazendal 2018	Stellenbosch	94
Holden Manz Reserve 2019	Western Cape	88
Jason's Hill Beatrix Reserve 2019	Breedekloof	91
Jail Break 2019 (Mountain Ridge)	Western Cape	91
Joostenberg Die Agteros 2019	Paarl	92
Jordan Inspector Péringuey 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Kaapzicht Kliprug Bush Vine 2019	Stellenbosch	91
Kaapzicht The 1947 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Kanu Heritage Collection 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Ken Forrester Petit 2019	Western Cape	90
Ken Forrester Old Vine Reserve 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Ken Forrester Terre Noir Swartland 2017	Swartland	89
Kleine Zalze Cellar Selection Bush Vines 2019	Coastal	88
Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2018	Stellenbosch	93
Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2019	Stellenbosch	93
Kleine Zalze Woolworths 2019	Coastal	88
Kruger Family Vineyards Old Vines Piekenierskloof 2019	Piekenierskloof	89
Laibach Sur Lie 2019	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	90
Lammershoek's Mysteries 2017	Swartland	92
Lammershoek's Mysteries Die Varkhok 2018	Swartland	88
Lateganskop The Zahir 2017	Breedekloof	93
L'Avenir Provenance 2019	Stellenbosch	92
L'Avenir Single Block 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Leeuwenkuil Heritage 2014	Swartland	90
Leeuwenkuil Heritage 2018	Swartland	92
Leeuwenkuil Reserve White 2019	Swartland	91
Leipzig 2019	Cape Town	90
Le Sueur Kluisenaar 2018	Klein Karoo	93
Le Sueur Kluisenaar 2019	Klein Karoo	89

Lievland Old Vine 2019	Paarl	Top 10
Lievland Limited Release Oogappel 2018	Stellenbosch	92
Longridge 2018	Stellenbosch	90
Mariëtte 2017 (La Belle Rebelle)	Breedekloof	90
Mariëtte 2018 (La Belle Rebelle)	Breedekloof	92
Meinert 6Chen 2018	Swartland	91
Mason Road 2019 (Brookdale)	Paarl	89
Mooiplaas Houmoed 2019	Stellenbosch	91
Mulderbosch Steen op Hout 2019	Stellenbosch	Top 10
Old Road Wine Co. Anemos 2018	Coastal	93
Old Road Wine Co. Single Vineyard Stone Trail 2018	Franschhoek	93
Opstal Carl Everson 2018	Slanghoek	90
Painted Wolf Black Pack 2018	Swartland	89
Painted Wolf Lycaon Old Vines 2018	Wellington	92
Post House Stamp Of Chenin 2019	Stellenbosch	92
Post House Stamp Of Chenin Reserve 2019	Stellenbosch	92
Raats Family Wines Eden High Density Single Vineyard 2018	Stellenbosch	Top 10
Raats Family Wines Old Vine 2018	Stellenbosch	92
Raats Family Wines Original 2019	Stellenbosch	89
Raised By Wolves Driehoek 2017	Stellenbosch	90
Remhoogte Honeybunch Reserve 2019	Simonsberg-Stellenbosch	88
Rickety Bridge 2019	Western Cape	89
Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve 2018	Western Cape	92
Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve 2019	Western Cape	92
Rietvallei 2019	Robertson	89
Romansrivier Steen 2019	Breedekloof	89
Roodekrantz Old Bush Vine 2018	Coastal	93
Schultz Family Wines Skeleton Bay 2018	Western Cape	92
Schultz Family Wines Skeleton Bay 2019	Western Cape	Top 10
Simonsig 2015	Stellenbosch	92
Simonsig Chenin Avec Chêne 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Simonsig Chenin Avec Chêne 2017	Stellenbosch	Top 10
Simonsig Chenin Avec Chêne 2018	Stellenbosch	88
Stellenrust 2019	Stellenbosch	Top 10
Stellenrust 54 Barrel Fermented 2018	Stellenbosch	91
Stellenrust Old Bushvine 2018	Stellenbosch	92
The Fledge & Co. Klipspringer Swartland Steen 2018	Swartland	91
Tierhoek Certified Heritage Vineyards 1977 2019	Piekenierskloof	90
Vrede en Lust Kogelberg 2017	Elgin	Top 10
Villion Henning 2018	Bot River	Top 10
Villiera 2019	Stellenbosch	93
Villiera Barrel Fermented 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Wildeckrans Barrel Select Reserve 2018	Bot River	91
Wild House 2018 (Strange Kompanjie)	Western Cape	89
Zevenwacht Old Vine 2019	Stellenbosch	92

CONTACT DETAILS

Editorial

Christian Eedes
christian@winemag.co.za
+27 83 454 3644
@ChristianEedes

Business Director

Jacqueline Lahoud
jax@winemag.co.za
+27 83 654 7721
@JaxLahoud

Proudly sponsored by multinational financial services company:

PRESCIENT

www.prescient.co.za