

An aerial photograph of a vineyard and winery. In the foreground, there are two large, light-colored buildings with blue roofs, surrounded by green grass and trees. Behind them, a large vineyard with rows of grapevines stretches across a hillside. The background features a rugged, rocky mountain under a clear blue sky.

Prescient

MERLOT  
REPORT 2021

WINEMAG.CO.ZA

Plaisir de Merle.



# ABOUT THE WINEMAG.CO.ZA TASTING PROGRAMME 2021



Winemag.co.za is set to produce 14 category reports over the course of the year with multinational financial services company Prescient as sponsor. Each report will be based on the outcome of a blind tasting of wines entered within a specific category.

A report includes key findings, tasting notes for the top wines, buyer's guide and scores on the 100-point quality scale for all wines entered. Upon release, producers can purchase both Top 10 and regular rating stickers – consumers are encouraged to look out for these in the retail environment.

The year culminates in a gala event when the individual best wine in each category will be celebrated. These top-performing wines will subsequently be shown at tastings in both Johannesburg and London.

# JUDGING PROCEDURES

The judging panel was chaired by me and further consisted of two trusted colleagues, namely Ndabezinhle Dube, Food & Beverage Operations Manager at the President Hotel, Cape Town and James Pietersen of Wine Cellar, Cape Town merchants and cellarers of fine wine. We tasted blind, labels out of sight. Ratings were done according to the 100-point system, final scores awarded on the basis of discussion that involved retasting where necessary rather than relying solely on arithmetic averaging.

*Christian Eedes,  
Editor, [Winemag.co.za](http://Winemag.co.za)*

# KEY FINDINGS

That Merlot can be a particularly difficult variety to handle both in the vineyard and cellar is emphatically borne out by the results of the fifth annual Prescient Merlot Report: 55 entries were received from 45 producers with just 11 (20%) rating 90-plus on the 100-point quality scale.

The great commercial appeal of Merlot is that it makes lush, plummy, velvety wines but the reality is that this appears difficult under local circumstances – it is notoriously prone to water stress and that is always going to be an issue in the warm climate conditions that prevail in the Cape. Canopy management (the way the vine's shoots and leaves are controlled) is also important, grape bunches ideally getting neither too little nor too much sunlight.

Unfortunately, there were too many wines that did not appear optimally ripe. Some were dilute and weedy while others possessed that curious combination of apparently green and over-ripe characteristics at the same time.

In contrast, there were examples where the producer had tried too hard to achieve lushness, the resulting wines appearing excessively round and soft, any real detail having been lost along the way. Use of oak on the more ambitious offerings was often clumsy, too.

All that said, it is not that local Merlot is entirely dire – 12 wines rated 89 and a further 14 rated 88 – these typically being fruit-forward with relatively low acidity and tannin, making them readily approachable to a wide market segment. In addition, where these wines are not too expensive, they should move fast in the retail environment ensuring that producer and trade are also happy...

And it would seem that said producers are not too greedy in terms of what they expect for Merlot, the average of the Top 10 being a relatively modest R197 a bottle, the outright best quality relative to price offered by the 2018 from Breedekloof winery Mountain Ridge, this receiving a rating of 90 and selling for R85 a bottle.

The question must remain, however, as to whether South Africa is capable of something profound when it comes to Merlot? Getting the site right and then applying meticulous farming are the obvious pre-requisites and it should be noted that Elgin producer Shannon Vineyards has had a wine among the top performers every year since the inaugural Merlot Report in 2017, this time around its Mount Bullet 2018 in the Top 10 with a rating of 90. Consistency is one of the things that allows a producer to charge a premium and this will set you back R495 a bottle.

# TOP 10 TASTING NOTES



De Grendel  
2019  
R160

Total production: 120 000 bottles Abv: 14.79%

*Matured for 13 months in French oak barrels, one-third new. Red and black berries, crushed herbs, oystershell and earth on the nose. The palate is full bodied but balanced – concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Shows great focus.*



Plaisir de Merle  
2018  
R180

Total production: 19 500 bottles Abv: 14.25%

*Matured for 16 months in French oak, 20% new. Aromatics of red and black berries, dried herbs, earth and boot polish. The palate is plush and smooth textured – good fruit density before a finish that is long and savoury.*



Vondeling  
Barrel Selection 2018  
R160

Total production: 6 600 bottles Abv: 13.7%

*Matured for 14 months in 300-litre French oak barrels, 25% new. Compelling aromatics with top notes of violets and fresh herbs before red and black berries, pencil shavings and a hint of earthiness. The palate, meanwhile, shows lovely fruit purity, fresh acidity and crunchy tannins. Succulent, lively and long.*





## Dornier 2018

R160

Total production: 9 427 bottles Abv: 14.8%

*Matured for 18 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. Black and blue berries, earth and pencil shavings on the nose. Good fruit concentration, lively acidity and firm tannins – a big wine with plenty of flavour intensity.*



## Jordan Black Magic 2018

R190

Total production: 22 800 bottles Abv: 13.5%

*Matured for 18 months in new and second-fill French oak barrels. Red and black berries, dried herbs, vanilla and pencil shavings on the nose. The palate is medium bodied and well balanced – a dense core of fruit, bright acidity and fine tannins. Tightly wound with a long, savoury finish.*



## Vergelegen Reserve 2016

R270

Total production: 6 637 bottles Abv: 14.8%

*86% Merlot, 9% Cabernet Franc and 5% Petit Verdot. Matured for 16 months in French oak, 40% new. Red and black berries, earth, pencil shavings and spice on the nose. Great structure – fruit, acidity and tannins come together in an elegant, harmonious whole.*





## Mischa La Famille 2019

R110

Total production: 11 034 bottles Abv: 13.66%

*Grapes from own Wellington vineyards plus the Paardeberg, Swartland. Matured for 12 months in a combination of American, French and Hungarian oak, 25% new. Red and black berries, violets, some leafiness and attractive oak. Medium bodied with good fruit expression, bright acidity and pleasantly grippy tannins, the finish long and dry.*



## Mountain Ridge 2018

R85

Total production: 3 400 bottles Abv: 14.5%

*Matured for 12 months in older oak. Aromatics of cherries and plums, a hint of olive and some leafiness. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and a gently savoury finish – balanced and appealing. Great everyday drinking.*



## Shannon Mount Bullet 2018

R495

Total production: 4 876 bottles Abv: 14.67%

*Matured for 20 months in French oak barrels, 25% new. Dark berries, crushed herbs, milk chocolate and spice on the nose. The palate is rich and full – sweet, dense fruit offset by bright acidity, the tannins nicely firm. A big, glossy rendition of the variety.*





## Stellenbosch Reserve Kweekskool 2019

R160

Total production: 11 760 bottles Abv: 14.25%

*Matured for 12 months in older oak. Red and black berries, some leafiness and a hint of earth on the nose while the palate is free of artifice with good clean fruit, bright acidity and a savoury finish.*





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

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
De Grendel 2019	92	R160
Plaisir de Merle 2018	92	R180
Vondeling Barrel Selection 2018	92	R160
Domier 2018	91	R160
Jordan Black Magic 2018	91	R190
Vergelegen Reserve 2016	91	R270
Mischa La Famille 2019	90 (Top 10)	R121
Mountain Ridge 2018	90 (Top 10)	R85
Shannon Mount Bullet 2018	90 (Top 10)	R495
Stellenbosch Reserve Kweekskool 2019	90 (Top 10)	R160
Groot Constantia 2018	90	R266

# COMPLETE SCORES A - Z

NAME	WINE OF ORIGIN	SCORE
Almenkerk 2016	Elgin	86
Bloemendal Waterlily 2018	Durbanville	87
Boschendal 1685 2018	Western Cape	89
Canto 2018	Durbanville	89
Cape Five Reserve 2018 (Stellenview Premium Wines)	Coastal Region	89
Creation 2019	Walker Bay	86
Creation Reserve 2019	Walker Bay	88
<b>De Grendel 2019</b>	<b>Cape Town</b>	<b>92</b>
De Trafford 2016	Stellenbosch	88
Diemersdal 2017	Cape Town	89
Diemersdal 2018	Cape Town	87
<b>Dornier 2018</b>	<b>Stellenbosch</b>	<b>91</b>
Durbanville Hills Collectors Reserve The Lighthouse 2018	Durbanville Cape Town	87
Durbanville Hills Woolworths 2018	Durbanville	87
Durbanville Hills 2019	Durbanville Cape Town	89
Eagles' Nest 2016	Constantia	88
Eikendal 2020	Stellenbosch	88
Fleur du Cap Unfiltered 2017	Stellenbosch	88
Great Five Reserve 2017 (Stellenview Premium Wines)	Coastal Region	87
Groenland Premium 2017	Bottelary Stellenbosch	86
Groot Constantia 2018	Constantia	90
Groote Post 2019	Darling	85
Jason's Hill 2018	Breedekloof	88
<b>Jordan Black Magic 2018</b>	<b>Stellenbosch</b>	<b>91</b>
Kings Kloof Family Reserve 2018	Stellenbosch	87
Kunjani 2018	Stellenbosch	89
La Bri 2018	Franschhoek	84
Laibach Claypot 2017	Simonsberg Stellenbosch	89
Laibach The Ladybird 2019	Western Cape	89
Lanzerac 2019	Jonkershoek Valley Stellenbosch	88
Le Bonheur The Manor Meander 2019	Stellenbosch	88
MAN Family Wines Jan Fiskal 2019	Coastal Region	89
Meinert 2017	Devon Valley	88
Mischa 2019	Wellington	86
<b>Mischa La Famille 2019</b>	<b>Western Cape</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Mountain Ridge 2018</b>	<b>Breedekloof</b>	<b>90</b>
Mountain Ridge 2019	Breedekloof	83
Muratie Alberta Annemarie 2017	Stellenbosch	87
Nederburg 2019	Western Cape	89
Nitida 2019	Durbanville Cape Town	88
Overgaauw 2019	Stellenbosch	89
<b>Plaisir de Merle 2018</b>	<b>Simonsberg Paarl</b>	<b>92</b>
Remhoogte Aspect 2017	Simonsberg Stellenbosch	88
Rickety Bridge 2020	Franschhoek	85
Ridgeback 2018	Paarl	86

<b>Shannon Mount Bullet 2018</b>	<b>Elgin</b>	<b>90</b>
Simelia 2018	Wellington	88
<b>Stellenbosch Reserve Kweekskool 2019</b>	<b>Stellenbosch</b>	<b>90</b>
Top Five Collection 2018 (Stellenvue Premium Wines)	Western Cape	88
<b>Vergelegen Reserve 2016</b>	<b>Stellenbosch</b>	<b>91</b>
Vergelegen The Mistake 2016	Stellenbosch	89
Villiera Monro 2019	Stellenbosch	86
<b>Vondeling Barrel Selection 2018</b>	<b>Voor Paardeberg</b>	<b>92</b>
Zevenwacht 2017	Stellenbosch	87
Zorgvliet 2019	Banghoek	88

# 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

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