

Prescient

SIGNATURE RED BLEND
REPORT 2021

WINEMAG.CO.ZA



The view from Guardian Peak.

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 James Pietersen and Jolette Steyn, both 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*

ABOUT SIGNATURE RED BLENDS

Why should South Africa be bound by the Bordeaux model when it comes to creating great blended red wine? Perhaps the Rhône is a better reference point given local growing conditions while the so-called “Cape Blend” incorporating Pinotage potentially gives us a unique selling proposition. Then, of course, there are the red blends of yesteryear – Alto Rouge, Chateau Libertas and Rustenberg Dry Red to name but three – which conformed to no particular model but are revered for their complexity and longevity.

Once again, we called for wines which were “distinctive of their originators” and instead of the usual practice of dividing them into various sub-groups according to style (Pinotage-based vs Shiraz-based being the differentiation most usually made), we tasted them as one continuous line-up – the thinking being that the fundamentals of wine appreciation such as complexity and balance should apply when it came to making quality assessments.

KEY FINDINGS

For this year's Signature Red Blend Report, there were 50 entries from 38 producers with 25 (50%) rating 90-plus on the 100-point quality scale.

The idea behind the Signature Red Blend Report is ultimately to gauge if a wine of different component parts might emerge that is authentically "South African" rather than derivative of something already established elsewhere in the world of wine.

The Report is now in its sixth year and until now, it has been difficult to say with certainty that one approach works better than any other. However, one sub-category of wines which does seem to do consistently well might be understood as Bordeaux blends supplemented by Shiraz.

This year's best wine overall, namely Mary le Bow 2018 as made by Bruce Jack of The Drift is precisely such an example, consisting of 43% Cabernet Sauvignon, 29% Malbec, 14% Shiraz and 14% Petit Verdot while there are a further three wines in the Top 10 (Chateau Libertas 2019, Boschendal Black Angus 2018 and Haskell II 2016) that also conform to this model.

The Rust en Vrede Estate is, of course, where it all began, a wine with a track record dating back to 1988 – this label was originally made its 1986 debut as a Cabernet-Merlot but then winemaker Kevin Arnold (now of Waterford) saw fit to deviate from the Bordeaux model by adding Shiraz into the mix two years later and that blend was to become standard. The 2016 vintage was joint-best wine in the Report of 2019 with a rating of 94 points, the 2017 best overall in last year's Report, again on 94, and the 2018 falls just outside this year's Top 10 on 91.

Arnold, mentioned above, has a wine in the Top 10 of this year's Report, namely The Jem 2015, and it might well be considered an effort to take the Bordeaux-blend-plus-Shiraz concept to the next level, this consisting of 48% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Shiraz, 9% Mourvèdre, 6% Petit Verdot, 5% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 3% Sangiovese and 3% Barbera. Arnold, however, likes to think of The Jem as an attempt at wine greatness "born from the understanding of the plant, soil and climate of a specific site, together with the creative art of winemaking and blending".

Arnold's philosophy is worthy paying attention to. However successful Bordeaux blends pimped up with Shiraz are proving to be, it would be unfortunate if this was applied too generally. The whole point of the Signature Red Blend Report which gathers seemingly disparate wines together is to explore what great red blends from these particular winelands might look like – the idea is not to compartmentalise and in so doing shut down the debate but rather to validate as many different approaches as possible and thereby keep discussion alive.

The average price of the 25 wines to rate 90-plus is R257 a bottle and of the Top 10 is R379. Offering the best quality relative to price is Chateau Libertas 2019 from Distell with a rating of 92 and selling for R59 a bottle.

TOP 10 TASTING NOTES



Mary le Bow Red 2018

R320

Total production: 1 648 bottles Abv: 13.5%

43% Cabernet Sauvignon, 29% Malbec, 14% Shiraz and 14% Petit Verdot. Grapes from Ashton and Robertson. Matured for 16 months in mostly French oak, 30% new. A hint of flinty reduction before red and black berries, dried herbs, earth and attractive oak on the nose while the palate shows great fruit purity to go with fresh acidity and nicely grippy tannins. Excellent depth and length.



Strandveld The Navigator 2018

R225

Total production: 8 650 bottles and 210 magnums Abv: 14.07%

52% Shiraz, 24% Grenache, 17% Mourvèdre and 7% Viognier. Grapes picked over a five-day period and co-fermented. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 30% new. Red and black berries, cured meat, fynbos and white pepper on the nose while the palate shows good fruit concentration plus plenty of zip and powdery tannins. Intricate with a long, savoury finish.



Waterford The Jem 2015

R1 950

Total production: 15 578 magnums Abv: 14.37%

48% Cabernet Sauvignon, 22% Shiraz, 95 Mourvèdre, 6% Petit Verdot, 5% Merlot, 4% Cabernet Franc, 3% Sangiovese and 3% Barbera. Matured for 22 months in 225-litre French oak barrels, 33% new. Fragrant aromatics of red and black berries, potpourri and some leafiness while the palate is medium bodied and beautifully balanced – pure fruit and fresh acidity before a finish that is long and dry. Layers and layers of flavour.





Chateau Libertas 2019

R59

Total production: 107 964 bottles Abv: 13.2%

34% Cabernet Sauvignon, 33% Shiraz, 17% Petit Verdot and 16% Malbec. Grapes from Stellenbosch, Swartland and Darling. Matured on staves. Red and black berries, fynbos and white pepper on the nose while the palate is juicy and fresh with crunchy tannins. Pure, poised and just very pleasurable.



Guardian Peak SMG 2019

R160

Total production: 6 984 bottles Abv: 14.24%

59% Syrah, 29% Mourvèdre and 12% Grenache. Grapes from Stellenbosch, Breedekloof and Piekenierskloof. Half of the Grenache undergoes whole-bunch fermentation. Matured for 18 months in older 300- and 500-litre barrels. Pretty aromatics of red berries, fynbos and white pepper while the palate shows pure fruit, snappy acidity and fine tannins. Medium bodied and well balanced.



Spice Route Chakalaka 2018

R175

Total production: 21 000 bottles Abv: 14.13%

26% Shiraz, 24% Mourvèdre, 15% Grenache, 15% Carignan, 13% Durif and 7% Tannat. Matured for 12 months in older French and American oak. Alluring aromatics of red and black berries, dried herbs, purple flowers, vanilla and oak spice. The palate is deep and full of detail – a great core of fruit, bright acidity and fine tannins.





Boschendal Black Angus 2018

R345

Total production: 18 407 bottles Abv: 14%

65% Shiraz, 27% Cabernet Sauvignon and 8% Cabernet Franc. Matured for 14 months in 300-litre barrels, 40% new. Black berries, some leafiness, pencil shavings and turned earth on the nose while the palate is luscious and smooth textured – great fruit density and polished tannins. Full bodied but nicely balanced.



Haskell II 2016

R240

Total production: 3 300 bottles Abv: 14.44%

62% Cabernet Sauvignon and 38% Shiraz. Matured for 18 months in 225- and 300-litre French oak barrels, 40% new. Red and black berries, a pleasant leafy quality, oyster shell and some earthiness on the nose. The palate is medium bodied with fresh acidity and a savoury finish, the tannins starting to resolve nicely.



La Cave Cape Blend 2018

R220

Total production: 1 700 bottles Abv: 14.5%

60% Pinotage, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Merlot. Varieties matured separately for eight months before blending and being returned to barrel for a further 10 months, 100% new oak used. The nose shows dark berries, crushed herbs, earth and toasty oak while the palate is forceful with super-dense fruit and big tannins although there's also vibrant acidity. Plenty of flavour intensity.





Old Road Wine Co. The Spotted Hound 2019

R99

Total production: 6 600 bottles Abv: 13%

38% Cinsault, 36% Sangiovese, 17% Mourvèdre and 9% Carignan. Sangiovese from Piekenierskloof, the rest from Agter-Paarl. Matured for eight months in older oak. The nose is attractively perfumed with notes of red berries, fynbos and white pepper while the palate is light but still flavourful, the finish possessing a nice saline quality.



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

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
Mary le Bow Red 2018	94	R320
Strandveld The Navigator 2018	93	R225
Waterford The Jem 2015	93	R1 950
Chateau Libertas 2019	92	R59
Guardian Peak SMG 2019	92	R160
Spice Route Chakalaka 2018	92	R175
Old Road Wine Co. The Spotted Hound 2019	91	R99
La Cave Cape Blend 2018	91	R220
Haskell II 2016	91	R240
Boschendal Black Angus 2018	91	R345
Thelema Mountain Red 2017	91	R90
Thelema Mountain Red 2018	91	R90
Zonnebloem Shiraz Mourvèdre Viognier 2018	91	R115
Boschendal Nicolas 2017	91	R199
DeMorgenzon Maestro Blue 2017	91	R230
Perdeberg Endura Winemaker's Selection Cape Blend 2017	91	R350
Rust en Vrede Estate 2018	91	R480
De Wet Vintage Mashup 2020	90	R95
Allesverloren 1704 Red 2018	90	R99
Alto Rouge 2019	90	R110
Leeuwenkuil Reserve Red Blend 2018	90	R140
Eikendal Charisma 2020	90	R145
Benguela Cove Lighthouse Collection Moody Lagoon 2019	90	R150
Haute Cabrière Arnim Family Réserve 2019	90	R155
Babylonstoren Babel 2020	90	R175

COMPLETE SCORES A - Z

NAME	WINE OF ORIGIN	SCORE
Allesverloren 1704 Red 2018	Swartland	90
Allesverloren Três Vermelhos 2018	Swartland	87
Allesverloren Três Vermelhos 2019	Swartland	87
Alto Rouge 2018	Stellenbosch	89
Alto Rouge 2019	Stellenbosch	90
Babylonstoren Babel 2020	Simonsberg Paarl	90
Bellingham The Bernard Series Small Barrel S.M.V. Limited Release 2018	Paarl	87
Bellingham The Homestead Red Blend 2017	Western Cape	89
Benguela Cove Lighthouse Collection Moody Lagoon 2019	Walker Bay	90
Boplaas Ring of Rocks Nel Family Reserve 2018	Western Cape	89
Boschendal Black Angus 2018	Stellenbosch	91
Boschendal Nicolas 2017	Coastal Region	91
Chateau Libertas 2019	Western Cape	92
De Wet Vintage Mashup 2020	Worcester	90
DeMorgenzon Maestro Blue 2017	Stellenbosch	91
Eikendal Charisma 2020	Stellenbosch	90
Essay Syrah Cinsault Grenache Mourvèdre 2020	Coastal Region	89
Guardian Peak SMG 2019	Western Cape	92
Haskell II 2016	Stellenbosch	91
Haute Cabrière Arnim Family Réserve 2019	Western Cape	90
Jakkalsvlei Mount Cuvée Cape Blend 2020	Western Cape	88
Joostenberg Bakermat 2018	Paarl	89
La Cave Cape Blend 2018	Wellington	91
Leeuwenkuil Reserve Red Blend 2018	Swartland	90
Leipzig Heimat 2018	Western Cape	89
Leipzig Master Blend 2018	Western Cape	87
Leipzig The Manor 2018	Western Cape	88
Lowerland Die Verlore Bokooi 2020	Prieska	89
Mary le Bow Red 2018	Western Cape	94
Middelvlei Momberg 2019	Stellenbosch	87
Old Road Wine Co. The Butcher and Cleaver 2018	Coastal Region	87
Old Road Wine Co. The Spotted Hound 2019	Western Cape	91
Painted Wolf Pictus VII 2017	Coastal Region	89
Painted Wolf Pictus VIII 2018	Coastal Region	88
Perdeberg Endura Winemaker's Selection Cape Blend 2017	Paarl	91
Rust en Vrede Estate 2018	Stellenbosch	91
Spice Route Chakalaka 2018	Swartland	92
Spice Route Malabar 2015	Swartland	88
Stellenzicht Acheulean Red 2018	Stellenbosch	88
Stellenzicht Thunderstone Red 2018	Coastal Region	89
Strandveld The Navigator 2018	Elim	93
The Drift Moveable Feast 2017	Cape South Coast	87
Thelema Mountain Red 2017	Western Cape	91
Thelema Mountain Red 2018	Western Cape	91
Thor Vintners Age of The Rebel The Prohibition 2019	Durbanville	88

Tierhoek Grenache Syrah Mourvedre 2020	Piekenierskloof	89
Vondeling Monsonia 2017	Voor Paardeberg	89
Waterford The Jem 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Zevenwacht The Tin Mine 2018	Stellenbosch	89
Zonnebloem Shiraz Mourvèdre Viognier 2018	Stellenbosch	91

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