



Chardonnay | Cabernet Sauvignon | Cape Bordeaux Red Blends

Prescient

FUND SERVICES

CHARDONNAY
REPORT 2026

WINEMAG.CO.ZA

ABOUT THE WINEMAG.CO.ZA TASTING PROGRAMME 2026

Winemag.co.za will release a series of category reports throughout the year with Prescient Fund Services as sponsor. Each report is 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 (wines ranked by quality relative to price) and scores on the 100-point quality scale for all wines entered. Upon publication, producers can purchase both Top 10 and regular rating stickers – consumers are encouraged to look out for these in the retail environment.

JUDGING PROCEDURES

The judging panel was chaired by me and further consisted of two trusted colleagues, James Pietersen, CEO of Brice & Burnett, and Jolette Steyn-Prior, the merchant's head of sales and imports.

Ratings were done according to the 100-point system, with final scores determined through discussion and retasting when necessary, rather than relying solely on arithmetic averages.

Christian Eedes

Editor, Winemag.co.za

KEY FINDINGS

South African Chardonnay appears to be in a somewhat unsettled place. There is plenty of quality – 37 of the 54 wines tasted scored 90 or more (68.5%), with the Top 10 ranging from 92 to 95 – but less evidence of a dominant stylistic direction. Instead, producers seem to be pulling in several directions: towards richness and texture, towards tautness and freshness, and towards more reductive, savoury expressions. The encouraging thing is that all three approaches can work; the less encouraging thing is that none yet feels definitive.

Reduction remains particularly topical. Struck-match, flinty notes feature in several of the higher-scoring wines, and when well judged they add to the impression of tension and energy, making the wines seem less obviously fruity. But reduction is a means rather than an end. At its best it enhances the wine; at its worst it becomes the most conspicuous thing about it. The line between intriguing and distracting can be surprisingly thin.

Acidity is another area where the category appears to be searching for balance. There are wines with wonderfully racy, driving acidity, but others where the acidity comes across as hard rather than refreshing. High acid is not automatically synonymous with freshness: fruit concentration, texture and phenolic maturity determine whether it feels integrated or simply angular. The best examples here, notably Delaire Graff Banghoek, Zevenwacht Estate and Z Collection, combine substantial fruit with acidity that creates definition and drive rather than austerity.

There is also a question about the seeming return of “big and buttery” Chardonnay. A while ago, it seemed to have receded from prominence but based on this tasting, it certainly hasn’t disappeared altogether. Some wines show early signs of tertiary development – deep colour, waxy or nutty notes, for example – despite being relatively young. Oxidation? Or are producers deliberately pursuing this style in response to demand from a particular market segment?

What emerges, then, is a category with considerable capability but no settled template. Perhaps that is not a problem. Chardonnay is sufficiently versatile to accommodate different interpretations. The challenge is ensuring that stylistic ambition results in wines with greater personality and complexity, rather than simply greater technique.

Winner benefits

Delaire Graff, as producer of best wine overall, wins shipping services to the value of R10,000 from Aspiring Couriers.

TOP 10 TASTING NOTES



De laire Graff | Best Overall Banghoek 2025

Price: R439

Total Production: 19 300 bottles Abv 13.9%

Matured for 10 months in 225-litre barrels, 40% new. Struck-match reduction before peach, citrus and a hint of vanilla on the nose. Great fruit concentration and punchy acidity before a long, deeply savoury finish. Opulent but equally immaculately balanced.



Zevenwacht Estate 2025

Price: R195

Total Production: 7 216 bottles Abv 13.15%

Matured for 10 months, 90% in 300-litre barrels, of which a quarter were new, and 10% in concrete egg. The palate is rich and broad, with a pleasingly thick texture, vibrant acidity providing drive, the finish savoury. Full yet balanced, with layers of flavour.



Benguela Cove Vinography Tr3s Chardonnay Multi Vintage

Price: R599

Total Production: 640 bottles Abv 13.5%

15% of the 2023 vintage, 35% of 2024 and 50% of 2025. Pear, peach and citrus, with more evolved notes of beeswax and mushroom on the nose. Pure fruit and racy acidity lead to a dry finish. Rich, textured and super-complex, with poise and persistence.





Cavalli 2025

Price: R255

Total Production: 11 141 bottles Abv 13.2%

Matured for 10 months in 300-litre barrels, 30% new. Struck-match reduction, vanilla and lemon on the nose while the palate possesses a dense core of fruit matched by bright acidity, the finish dry. Solidly built.



Oak Valley Groenlandberg 2025

Price: R369

Total Production: 7 221 bottles Abv 13.77%

Matured for 10 months in barrel, 31% new. Lime, lemon, fynbos and vanilla on the nose. The palate is pure and linear with zesty acidity and a savoury finish. Well balanced and possessing lots of detail.



Zevenwacht Z Collection 2025

Price: R345

Total Production: 992 bottles, 30 magnums Abv 12.92%

Matured for 10 months, half in barrel (5% new) and half in concrete egg. Delicate aromatics of citrus, oatmeal, vanilla, spice and a hint of reduction. The palate is concentrated yet vital and so harmonious. Pure fruit and driving acidity before a finish that's long and pithy.





Avontuur Disa Gorge 2025

Price: R369

Total Production: 3 700 bottles Abv 13%

Matured for 11 months, 38% new. Flowers, herbs, pear, peach, citrus, a trace of vanilla and some leesy complexity on the nose. The palate is harmonious with concentrated fruit, well integrated acidity and a savoury finish. Substantial, with pleasing weight and texture.



Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2025

Price: R185

Total Production: 80 000 bottles Abv 13%

Grapes predominantly from Stellenbosch with a small portion from Robertson. Matured for eight months in barrel, 20% new. Lemon, orange, floral perfume, a touch of herbs and some yeasty complexity on the nose. Concentrated fruit, a fine line of acidity providing tension. Poised and elegant.



Vergelegen Reserve 2025

Price: R345

Total Production: 39 210 bottles Abv 12.5%

Matured for 10 months in a combination of 228- and 500-litre barrels plus foudre. A top note of floral perfume before citrus, vanilla and some leesy complexity. Dense fruit and bright acidity, with plenty of texture but also nuance.





McGregor Calcrete 2025

Price: R179

Total Production: 4 000 bottles Abv 12.84%

Unwooded. Flowers, herbs, lime and lemon on the nose. Light, fresh and tightly wound, with a persistent finish. Energetic and highly refreshing.



HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Because final ratings are determined by averaging the scores of three judges, decimal places come into play. As a result, the following wines fell just short of the Top 10 on 92 points:



Great Five Reserve 2025 (Stellenview) | Price: R150

Kruger Family Reserve 2025 (Stellenview) | Price: R195

Landskroon Unwooded 2026 | Price: R100

Mont Richelle Miko 2025 | Price: R820

Oak Valley Beneath the Clouds 2025 | Price: R165

Vriesenhof 2025 | Price: R280

BUYING GUIDE: RETAIL PRICES FOR WINES RATED 90+

Wine	Score	Price
Delaire Graff Banghoek 2025	95 – BEST OVERALL	R439
Zevenwacht Estate 2025	95	R195
Cavalli 2025	94	R255
Zevenwacht Z Collection 2025	94	R345
Oak Valley Groenlandberg 2025	94	R369
Benguela Cove Vinography Tr3s Chardonnay Multi Vintage	94	R599
Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2025	93	R185
Vergelegen Reserve 2025	93	R345
Avontuur Disa Gorge 2025	93	R369
McGregor Calcrete 2025	92	R179
Landskroon Unwooded 2026	92	R100
Great Five Reserve 2025 (Stellenview)	92	R150
Oak Valley Beneath the Clouds 2025	92	R165
Kruger Family Reserve 2025 (Stellenview)	92	R195
Vriesenhof 2025	92	R280
Mont Rochelle Miko 2025	92	R820
Chamonix Unoaked 2026	91	R135
Groote Post Pinch of Salt 2025	91	R237
Roodekrantz Child of Light 2025	91	R285
Vrede en Lust Marguerite 2025	91	R285
Tokara Reserve Collection 2025	91	R325
Babylonstoren 2025	91	R455
Warwick The White Lady 2024	91	R550
Boschendal Appellation Series Elgin 2024	91	R575
Oak Valley Tabula Rasa CY95 2022	91	R800
Oak Valley Tabula Rasa CY548 2022	91	R800
Org de Rac 2026	90	R115
Durbanville Hills Collectors Reserve The Cableway 2025	90	R160
Glenelly Glass Collection 2025	90	R170
Blaauwklippen 2025	90	R250
Saxenburg Private Collection 2025	90	R300
Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2025	90	R315
La Petite Ferme Barrel Fermented 2025	90	R325

Wildeberg Terroirs 2024	90	R325
De Grendel Op Die Berg 2025	90	R370
Haute Collection 2023 (Haute Cabrière)	90	R450
Chamonix Reserve 2023	90	R485

COMPLETE SCORES: A-Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Allée Bleue Isabeau 2024	Franschhoek	88
Avontuur Disa Gorge 2025	Stellenbosch	93
Babylonstoren 2025	Simonsberg-Paarl	91
Baleia 2024	Lower Duivenshok River	89
Benguela Cove Vinography Tr3s Chardonnay Multi Vintage	Walker Bay	94
Blaauwklippen 2025	Stellenbosch	90
Boschendal Appellation Series Elgin 2024	Elgin	91
Cavalli 2025	Stellenbosch	94
Chamonix Greywacke 2023	Cape Coast	89
Chamonix Reserve 2023	Elgin	90
Chamonix Unoaked 2026	Franschhoek	91
De Grendel Op Die Berg 2025	Ceres Plateau	90
De Wet 2026	Klein Karoo	89
Delaire Graff Banghoek 2025	Banghoek	95
Diemersdal Reserve 2025	Durbanville	89
Diemersdal Unwooded 2026	Cape Town	88
Durbanville Hills Collectors Reserve The Cableway 2025	Durbanville, Cape Town	90
Eikendal 2024	Stellenbosch	87
Glenelly Glass Collection Unoaked 2025	Stellenbosch	90
Great Five Reserve 2025 (Stellenview)	Stellenbosch	92
Groote Post Pinch of Salt 2025	Darling	91
Hartenberg 2024	Stellenbosch	88
Haute Collection 2023 (Haute Cabrière)	Franschhoek	90
Kershaw Clonal Selection Elgin 2024	Elgin	89
Kershaw GPS Series Lower Duivenhoks River 2023	Lower Duivenhoks River	89
Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2025	Stellenbosch	90
Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2025	Western Cape	93
Kruger Family Reserve 2025 (Stellenview)	Stellenbosch	92
La Petite Ferme Barrel Fermented 2025	Franschhoek	90

Landskroon Unwooded 2026	Western Cape	92
McGregor Calcrete 2025	Robertson	92
McGregor Terroir Selection 2025	McGregor	89
Mont Richelle Miko 2025	Franschhoek	92
Oak Valley Beneath the Clouds 2025	Elgin	92
Oak Valley Groenlandberg 2025	Elgin	94
Oak Valley Tabula Rasa CY95 2022	Elgin	91
Oak Valley Tabula Rasa CY548 2022	Elgin	91
Org de Rac 2026	Swartland	90
Paul Clüver Estate 2024	Elgin	89
Paul Clüver Village 2025	Elgin	89
Quoin Rock 2023	Cape Coast	88
Roodekrantz Child of Light 2025	Cape Coast	91
Saxenburg Private Collection 2025	Polkadraai Hills, Stellenbosch	90
Stellenzicht Acheulean 2025	Stellenbosch	89
Tokara Limited Release 2023	Stellenbosch	89
Tokara Reserve Collection 2025	Stellenbosch	91
Vergelegen Reserve 2025	Stellenbosch	93
Vrede en Lust Marguerite 2025	Elgin	91
Vriesenhof 2025	Stellenbosch	92
Warwick The White Lady 2024	Stellenbosch	91
Wildeberg Terroirs 2024	Stellenbosch	90
Winshaw Gold Dust to Grapes 2025	Stellenbosch	88
Zevenwacht Z Collection 2025	Polkadraai Hills	94
Zewenwacht Estate 2025	Polkadraai Hills	95



AVONTUUR



OAK VALLEY



KLEINE ZALZE



ZEVENWACHT



MCGREGOR



BENGUELA COVE



VERGELEGEN



CAVALLI

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