

THE  
**CHRISTIAN  
EEDES**

**CABERNET  
SAUVIGNON  
REPORT**

- 2013 -

presented by



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Private Investments

## **INTRODUCTION**

Cabernet Sauvignon is the world's best travelled dark-skinned wine grape. In its traditional home of Bordeaux, it's a component of some of the world's greatest wines and it's been taken up around the world as producers seek to emulate this. In South Africa, it's the second most widely planted variety making up a little under 12% of the national vineyard. Who's who in the zoo?

## **METHODOLOGY**

Rather than endeavouring to be all-inclusive, my departure point is to scrutinize the front-runners in the category. This involves putting together a line-up of 60 wines, partly consisting of examples which had fared well in recent local or international competition and partly from those producers I consider to be the best in their field even if somewhat low-profile.

Why the limited size of the line-up? The South African wine industry is extraordinarily dynamic with new producers of note emerging all the time but I'm less concerned with performing a talent-spotting function (this is achieved by other tastings with bigger line-ups) and more interested in discovering if a hierarchy of quality is starting to emerge, the modern era of South African wine now well under way.

Even though a top 10 is generated based on the tasting, the exercise is pitched more as an in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the category in question, all wines submitted receiving a rating and a detailed tasting note. This, in addition to the fact that producers are not asked to pay an entry fee, alleviates the "competition fatigue" that exists in many quarters.

The judging panel was chaired by myself and further consisted of two trusted colleagues, namely Roland Peens of Wine Cellar, a Cape Town firm which brokers and cellars fine wine, and James Pietersen, beverage manager for local restaurants Balducci's and Belthazar. Both are experienced tasters, Peens a former taster of Platter's and Pietersen an existing one. PKF were the tasting auditors.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

Cabernet is renowned for its capacity to age, thanks in large part to its high level of tannins, and yet this is increasingly a quality which consumers do not desire. As a consequence, winemakers seem to be going to great lengths to emphasise fruit and the resulting wines are tending to be ever riper, sweeter and more alcoholic.

The best examples do display fruit concentration, but retain shape and form. The Le Riche Reserve 2010, one of the wines to be rated 5 Stars, has a relatively high alcohol by volume of 15% on the back label but for all its power does not lack balance. The Guardian Peak Lapa 2010 and Rust en Vrede 2010 also among the top 10 are pretty muscular too. There were, however, too many wines in the line-up for this report that showed plenty of forward fruit but lacked the inherent structure to warrant cellaring for any length of time.

To complicate matters further, levels of methoxypyrazines (the compound which gives Cabernet "green" flavours) have rightly or wrongly become an issue and the panel collectively was strict on wines showing

too herbal or leafy character. In moderation, however, pyrazines can contribute to aromatic lift and the impression of freshness and we weren't utterly intolerant of wines showing some of this character – the 2009 from Thelema 2009 shows a slight note of mint as is customary for this cuvée but this did not prevent it from a place among the top 10 .

Another point of concern was the clumsy addition of tartaric acidity. This is done supposedly to add freshness but in some cases imparted an unfortunate sourness. On the whole, however, the thin and weedy wines of yesteryear have been left behind and South African premium Cabernet is characterised by richness and weight. The very best examples have savoury complexity too.

## **THE TOP 10**

### **FIVE STARS**

La Bri 2009

Cellar price: R95

Red and black fruit, an attractive herbal edge, milk chocolate and spice on the nose. Medium bodied with racy acidity and fine tannins. Refined, subtle and truly complex. Drink now – 2019.

Le Riche Reserve 2010

Cellar price: R300

Dark fruit, iodine and pencil shavings on the nose. Hugely concentrated but still balanced – lively acidity and silky tannins. Powerful and very long on the finish. Great focus for all its undoubted size. Drink 2014 – 2020.

### **FOUR AND A HALF STARS**

Graham Beck The Coffeestone Cabernet 2011

Cellar price: Not yet released

Tilled earth and oak spice on the nose. Super-concentrated red and black fruit, vibrant acidity and wonderful tannic grip. Extremely tight and primary now, this needs plenty of time in bottle. Drink 2015 – 2021.

Guardian Peak Lapa 2010

Cellar price: R220

Dark fruit, attractive oak spice. Powerful and dense but balanced. Great fruit concentration, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Pure and focused with a long, savoury finish. Drink 2014 – 2017.

Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve 2010

Cellar price: R190

Red and black fruit, tobacco and vanilla on the nose. Clean and pure with fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins. Very primary now but wonderfully poised – needs time to open up. Drink 2014 – 2017.

Rudera 2011

Cellar price: R185

Rather primary on the nose with notes of red and black berries, tea leaf plus vanilla. Excellent fruit concentration, bright acidity and firm but fine tannins. Oak apparent but not inappropriate for such a young wine. Drink 2015 – 2018.

Springfield Méthode Ancienne 2006

Cellar price: R230

Red and black berries plus an attractive savoury note on the nose. Juicy upfront but finishes long and dry. Elegant and still amazingly primary for its age. Drink now – 2016.

Thelema 2009

Cellar price: R175

Red and black fruit, oak spice, plus some herbal lift on the nose. The palate shows finesse and balance with just the right amount of fruit weight, fresh acidity and fine tannins. Great complexity – cassis, some earthiness and that trademark mint. Drink now – 2019.

Waterford 2009

Cellar price: R165

Lots of complexity on the nose, aromas including red and black fruit, floral perfume and oak spice. Also iodine and some earthy character. The palate is medium bodied with fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins. The finish is long and savoury. Old fashioned but hugely pleasing. Drink now – 2019.

#### **FOUR STARS**

Rust en Vrede 2010

Cellar price: R220

Red and black berries plus attractive oak spice on the nose. Luscious sweet fruit, fresh acidity and firm tannins. Big but well proportioned – very youthful, clean and pure. Drink now – 2017.

## **REST OF LINE-UP**

### **FOUR STARS**

#### **Bartinney 2010**

Red and black fruit plus some tea leaf. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Nicely understated. Drink now – 2015.

#### **Boekenhoutskloof 2010**

Red and black fruit, attractive oak plus intriguing mushroom, earthy notes on the nose and palate. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Deceptively approachable but there's real complexity here. Drink now – 2017.

#### **Cederberg Five Generations 2010**

Cassis, violets and some liquorice on the nose and palate. Sweet on entry although fresh acidity lends balance and the tannins are fine – nicely composed and very attractive. Drink now – 2017.

#### **Dalla Cia Classico 2010**

Red and black fruit, some floral perfume and oak spice on the nose. Medium- to full-bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Classically styled and worthy of some bottle maturation. Drink 2014 – 2020.

#### **David Finlayson "GS" 2010**

Prominent oak on the nose – vanilla through more toasty notes. Rich and full with a core of sweet dark fruit offset by fresh acidity. Drink now – 2017.

#### **De Trafford 2010**

Dark fruit and a tea leaf note on the nose. Sweet on entry with some raisin character in evidence. Big and bold – appears quite heavily extracted. Drink now – 2015.

#### **Dieu Donné 2010**

Dark fruit, fynbos and some oak spice on the nose. Quite lean on the palate with fresh acidity and relatively hard tannins. Old fashioned but not without appeal. Drink 2015 – 2017.

#### **Jordan 2010**

Red and black fruit, a hint of mint and vanilla on the nose. Medium bodied with good fruit expression, fresh acidity and fine tannins. A nicely restrained offering. Drink now – 2017.

#### **Kanonkop 2010**

Plums, cassis and vanilla on the nose. Full bodied but balanced – great fruit purity, fresh acidity, fine tannins. Well judged on the part of the winemaker and still way off showing at its best. Drink 2014 – 2020.

#### **Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection 2010**

Red and black berries, a herbal note plus prominent oak. Juicy sweet fruit, fresh acidity and relatively little tannic grip. Made for early drinking. Drink now – 2015.

La Motte 2010

Dark fruit. Vanilla and oak spice on the nose and palate. Big and powerful with fresh acidity and smooth tannins. Drink now – 2015.

Meerlust 2010

Dark fruit and toasty oak on the nose. Good concentration, fresh acidity and firm tannins. Rich and full but well balanced and possessing a long finish. Drink 2014 – 2020.

Neil Ellis 2010

Red and black fruit plus attractive oak on the nose. Leaner, more old-fashioned style with a slight green edge. Fresh to the point of tart acidity and fine tannins. Drink now – 2015.

Neil Ellis Vineyard Selection 2010

Cassis, some leafiness, vanilla and oak spice on the nose. Concentrated with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Suitably lean and long. Drink 2015 – 2020.

Rickety Ridge The Bridge 2009

Ultra-ripe dark fruit, mint and cola on the nose and palate. Big and thick textured although fresh acidity lends balance. Not classic but will have its followers. Drink now – 2016.

Spier Woolworths Reserve 2010

Red fruit and some floral perfume on the nose. Sweet on entry with relatively soft tannins – made to be readily approachable. Drink now.

Stark-Condé 2010

Black fruit plus an oak-derived tarry note on the nose and palate. Rich and full with bright acidity and firm tannins. Quintessential Cab but perhaps short of nuance. Drink 2014 – 2017.

Thelema The Mint 2010

Cassis and overt minty note on the nose. Juicy and fresh on the palate with fine tannins. Of a particular style. Drink now – 2017.

Uitkyk Carlonet 2009

Red fruit plus prominent oak on the nose and palate. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and chewy tannins. Drink now – 2016.

Vergelegen V 2008

Cassis plus some pretty fynbos notes on the nose. Great structure with concentrated fruit, fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins. Carefully assembled although some might find it too green. Drink now – 2018.

**THREE AND A HALF STARS**

Brenaissance King of Clubs 2009

Red and black fruit, toasty oak plus an undertone of mint on the nose and palate. Rich and powerful with moderate acidity. Drink now – 2014.

Buitenverwachting 2009

Red fruit and attractive oak on the nose and palate. Medium bodied with good freshness. Shows some restraint, savoury rather than sweet. Drink now – 2016.

Cederberg 2010

Ultra-ripe dark fruit and oak spice on the nose. Sweet with soft tannins and lacking some freshness. Drink now.

Delaire Graff Reserve 2011

Plums and cassis plus attractive oak on the nose and palate. Bright acidity and good tannic grip. All present and correct but currently extremely tightly wound – drink 2015 onwards.

Delheim 2011

Ultra-ripe dark fruit and oak spice on the nose and palate. Modern in style with moderate acidity and soft, smooth tannins. Drink now – 2016.

Dombeya 2008

Dark fruit, oak spice plus a pronounced green edge on the nose and palate. Well composed but perhaps lacking a bit of fruit weight. Drink now.

Edgebaston 2010

Red and black fruit, hint of mint and vanilla on the nose and palate. Rich and ripe with moderate acidity and soft tannins. Drink now – 2015.

Ernie Els 2011

Concentrated and sweet with moderate acidity and soft tannins. Unashamedly modern in style. Drink now.

Flagstone Music Room 2010

Ripe dark fruit, vanilla plus some more toasty oak-derived aromas and flavours. Rich and broad with a plush texture but a little lacking in freshness. Drink now – 2015.

Fleur du Cap Unfiltered 2010

Cassis plus prominent oak on the nose and palate. Good concentration, fresh acidity and firm but fine tannins. Savoury rather than sweet on the finish. Needs time to open up. Drink 2015 – 2017.

Glen Carlou Gravel Quarry 2009

Red fruit, mint and oak spice on the nose and palate. Rather lean and austere with fresh acidity and firm tannins. Drink now – 2016.

Glenelly Lady May 2010

Brooding nose displaying red and black berries and some earthiness. Rich and full on the palate with concentrated fruit, moderate acidity and a plush texture. An extravagant offering. Drink now – 2017.

Grangehurst Exclusive Selection Woolworths 2008

Cassis, crushed herbs and an earthy note on the nose. Pleasantly lean and austere with fresh acidity and firm tannins. Drink now – 2018.

Kleine Zalze Family Reserve 2008

Red fruit, violets but also a hint of volatile acidity on the nose. Medium-bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Already quite developed with some notes of decay in evidence. Drink now.

Le Riche 2010

Cassis and violets on the nose. Rich and ripe with moderate acidity and a plush texture. Drink now – 2015.

Oldenburg Vineyards 2010

Ripe red and black fruit on the nose and palate. Sweet on entry with soft tannins. Very expressive and plush textured but perhaps a bit too hot on the finish. Drink now – 2015.

Perdeberg 2011

Red fruit plus an attractive herbal note on the nose. Light-bodied and fresh but no great complexity. Drink now – 2014.

Plaisir de Merle 2010

Red and black cherry, vanilla, plus some light reduction on the nose. Medium bodied with juicy fruit, bright acidity and relatively smooth tannins. Drink now – 2015.

Rustenberg Peter Barlow 2008

Dark fruit plus some developed, earthy notes on the nose. Layers of flavour plus fresh acidity although tannins already quite soft. Drink now – 2015.

Saxenburg Private Collection 2007

Red and black fruit, some herbal character and pencil shavings on the nose. Rich and full with firm tannins and a savoury finish but a bit short on intricacy. Drink now.

Vergelegen Reserve 2007

Cassis and crushed herb aromas. Concentrated fruit with fresh acidity and fine tannins. Classically styled, still youthful but concerns about “green” character. Drink now – 2017.

Webersburg 2007

Red and black fruit plus definite green edge on the nose and palate. Marked by a sweet ‘n sour character. Drink now.

**THREE STARS**

Eikendal 2010

Disconcerting vegetal note on the nose. Medium bodied with red and black fruit and bright acidity but finishes somewhat short. Drink now.

Hartenberg 2008

Red and black fruit, oak spice, some fynbos plus a slightly dank note. Full bodied but a bit awkward and lacking in balance. Drink now.

KWV Cathedral Cellar 2010

Slightly jammy note plus oak spice on the nose and palate. Appears sweet, soft and a bit dilute. Drink now.

Nederburg II Centuries 2008

The nose shows red and black fruit plus a slightly malty overtone. Rich and broad on the palate, with a bit of a sweet 'n sour sensation. Tannins are soft and plush. Drink now – 2015.

Stark-Condé Three Pines 2010

Opulent with plenty of sweet, ripe fruit, bright acidity and only very lightly tannic. Seems a bit too easy. Drink now – 2015.

Tokara 2011

Red fruit, moderate acidity and soft tannins. Straightforward.

#### **TWO AND A HALF STARS**

Bon Courage Inkará 2011

Dark fruit but also a green quality on the nose and palate. Sweet 'n sour in character, a bit rustic and lacking in precision. Drink now - 2014.

Vergenoegd 2007

Red fruit plus vegetal, earthy notes on the nose. The palate appears simple with little fruit concentration or structure. Drink now.