



PRESCIENT
CHARDONNAY
~ REPORT 2016 ~

Convened by Winemag.co.za

APPROACH

The tasting is capped at 60 wines, partly consisting of examples which have 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.

While other bigger tastings can have a useful talent-spotting function, the intention here is very much to do good by what might be called the seeded players, the finite line-up in particular intended to avoid the perils of palate fatigue.

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, scoring done according to the 100-point system.

Christian Eedes
Editor, Winemag.co.za

KEY FINDINGS

South African Chardonnay has never looked better with 35 out of the 60 wines in the line-up rating 90 points or more on the 100-point quality scale, up from 29 last year.

The 2015 vintage has been billed as one of the great vintages of the modern era and it certainly seems to have favoured Chardonnay. In last year's report, where wines predominantly from the 2014 vintage featured, 94 was the highest score attained while this time around, there were four wines to score 95, all from the 2015 vintage (see below). Average score altogether was an astoundingly high 90.3.

Leaving aside the small-batch "Deconstructed" wines from Richard Kershaw which sell as a three-bottle set for R2 460, the average price per bottle of the other top wines was R284 which demonstrates this really is the deluxe category when it comes to white wines while average production was 18 266 bottles or 3 044 six-bottle cases attesting to Chardonnay's broad popular following.

While both Elgin and the various wards of Hemel-en-Aarde would like to be known as Chardonnay strongholds, Stellenbosch cannot be discounted with 17 wines out of the top 35 from this district. Next up was indeed Elgin with nine, then Constantia with two, followed by Franschhoek, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Robertson and Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley with one each. There were also two multi-regional blends.

What are local winemakers getting so right when it comes to Chardonnay? First, the grape seems well suited to South Africa's generally temperate climate, providing optimally ripe fruit without excessive sugar development, meaning that the end-wines are typically dense and flavoursome but still retain freshness and aren't overly alcoholic. Winemakers also know to limit malolactic fermentation (which tends to soften the wine) if they permit it at all and the use of oak is now extremely judicious – the taste of Chardonnay used to be just about synonymous with the taste of oak even 10 years ago but that is emphatically not the case anymore. Similarly, batonnage (stirring of the lees at the bottom of the barrel) doesn't seem to superimpose itself as much as it used to. Wines are by no means slight but the emphasis is very much on fruit definition rather than anything else.

Any place for winemakers who deliberately deviate from convention? The panel made a concerted effort to acknowledge wines which were slightly more off-the-wall but ultimately classically styled Chardonnay held sway. If you're looking for funky then Chenin Blanc is arguably better suited to this. If, on the other hand, you're looking for wines of some substance yet still possessing refinement, then South African top-end Chardonnay is as good as anything in the world, bar perhaps the very finest premier cru and grand cru Burgundy.

TASTING NOTES

95

DeMorgenon Reserve 2015

Price: R350

Total production: 10 000 bottles

Abv: 14.1%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. A subtle note of reduction before top notes of blossom and dried herbs as well as pear, lime and lemon and attractive oak. Great depth on the palate – extraordinary fruit concentration offset by racy acidity. Plenty of “Wow!” factor.

95

Groot Constantia 2015

Price: R186

Total production: 30 000 bottles

Abv: 13.78%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in French oak barrels, 38% new. The nose shows citrus, a hint of reduction and attractive oak. The palate meanwhile is extraordinarily pure and focused – intensely flavoured and full yet still tight and very long. Powerful but equally wonderfully refined.

95

Kershaw Deconstructed Lake District Bokkeveld Shale CY95 2015

Price: Part of three-bottle set costing R2 460

Total production: 290 bottles

Abv: 13.81%

Fermented and matured for some 11 months in barrel, 50% new. Citrus, freshly baked bread, some leesy character and spice on the nose. Rich and round, viscous in texture and very flavoursome, the finish long and savoury. Bold and distinctive.

95

Tokara Reserve Collection Stellenbosch 2015

Price: R160

Total production: 21 000 bottles

Abv: 14.13%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in barrel, 31% new. A forthcoming nose of lemon, a hint of vanilla, some yeasty complexity and a touch of reduction. Excellent fruit purity and palate weight, no shortage of freshness and a super-long finish – very precise winemaking.

94

Iona 2015

Price: R250

Total production: 12 000 bottles

Abv: 13.6%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in French oak, 18% new. Beautiful aromatics of pear, white peach, citrus and Granny Smith apple plus a hint of burnt matchstick as well as spice and dried herbs. On the palate, arresting fruit purity and exhilarating acidity – very well assembled.

94

Kershaw Clonal Selection Elgin 2015

Price: R470

Total production: 10 300 bottles

Abv: 13.92%

Fermented and matured for some 11 months in barrel, 40% new. On the nose, lime and lemon plus a hints of gun flint and toasty oak. Loads of flavour, good palate weight and coated acidity before a long finish.

94

Sterhuis Barrel Selection 2015

Price: R165

Total production: 6 000 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

Fermented and matured for 10 months in French oak, 40% new. Lime, lemon and grapefruit plus some reduction and a little spice on the nose. Rich and ripe on the palate – great fruit concentration and vibrant acidity, the finish long and dry.

93

Delaire Graff Banghoek Reserve 2015

Price: R160

Total production: 34 000 bottles

Abv: 14.4%

Fermented and matured for 10 months in French oak barrels, 40% new. A definite reductive note to go with citrus, some leesy character and a hint of oak on the nose. Plenty of reined-in power on the palate – concentrated fruit offset by driving acidity, the finish long and savoury.

93

De Wetshof Bateleur 2014

Price: R350

Total production: 6 700 bottles

Abv: 13.43%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in French oak barrels, 100% new. A classic nose of blossom before lemon and white peach as well as a brush of vanilla. The palate is rich and round with lovely composure – pure fruit offset by zesty acidity, the texture creamy, the finish long. Lovely composure.

93

Eikendal 2015

Price: R155

Total production: 13 619 bottles

Abv: 13.78%

Fermentation begun in tank and finished in in 500-litre French oak barrels, 20% new, maturation lasting 14 months. Pretty aromatics of blossom, pear, white peach and citrus. The palate has lovely breadth and depth – plenty of concentrated fruit and zesty acidity before a pithy finish.

93

Hartenberg 2015

Price: R100

Total production: 47 603 bottles and 309 magnums

Abv: 13.81%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in French oak, 33% new. Some blossom before lime and lemon plus a little leesy complexity. Relatively light with pure fruit and fresh acidity – a pretty wine.

93

Kershaw Deconstructed Groenland Mountain Bokkeveld Shale CY548 2015

Price: Part of three-bottle set costing R2 460

Total production: 290 bottles

Abv: 13.74%

Fermented and matured for some 11 months in barrel, 50% new. Lime and lemon plus a hint of reduction, attractive oak and some leesy complexity on the nose. A super-flavourful palate with snappy acidity and a savoury finish.

93

Uva Mira The Single Tree 2015

Price: R495

Total production: 2 550 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Fermented and matured for nine months in French oak, 60% new. Very pretty aromatics – flowers and dried herbs before pear, white peach and citrus. The palate shows lovely fruit purity and fresh acidity while the finish is long and savoury. Delicate and detailed.

92

Ataraxia 2014

Price: R235

Total production: 28 320 bottles

Abv: 13.48%

Fermented and matured for nine months in French oak, 26% new. Hint of reduction before notes of lemon, orange and grapefruit plus some yeasty complexity. Has real presence on the palate being rich and thick textured, tangy acidity lending balance.

92

Rustenberg Stellenbosch 2015

Price: R170

Total production: 147 840 bottles and 1 800 magnums

Abv: 14%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in 300-litre French oak barrels, 25% new. A pretty nose displaying a top note of blossom before lime and lemon plus some creamy oak in the background. Lovely fruit purity, freshness and length – very well balanced.

91

Bartinney Hourglass 2015

Price: R620

Total production: 800 bottles

Abv: 13.6%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in French oak, 60% new. Lemon, orange and tropical fruit plus some leesy character and toasty oak on the nose. The palate is rich and thick textured with tangy acidity lending balance, the finish long and savoury.

91

Chamonix Reserve 2015

Price: R370

Total production: 6 400 bottles

Abv: 12.64%

Fermented and matured in a combination of 70% new 228-litre French oak barrels, 20% concrete eggs and the rest older barrels for 14 months. Pear, peach, apple and citrus plus vanilla and a hint of reduction. Great balance – concentrated fruit offset by fresh acidity before a long, salty finish.

91

Evidence 2015 (Sophie & Julien Schaal)

Approximate retail price: R215

Total production: 4 000 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in 300-litre French oak, 25% new. Lunch-box orange plus a little nuttiness on the nose. Rich, ripe and very flavourful, tangy acidity lending balance.

91

Kershaw Groenland Mountain Koffieklip CY96 2015

Price: Part of three-bottle set costing R2 460

Total production: 290 bottles

Abv: 14.36%

Fermented and matured for some 11 months in barrel, 50% new. Lime and lemon plus a little reduction and some leesy complexity. The palate has heft with plenty of concentrated fruit and fresh acidity. Somewhat idiosyncratic but very flavourful.

91

Longridge Clos du Ciel 2014

Price: R560

Total production: 1 674 bottles

Abv: 12.5%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in French oak, 100% new. Exotic aromatics of lemon and lunchbox orange plus a little nuttiness and some yeasty character. Rich and smooth textured making for nicely coated acidity – very flavourful if slightly “funky”.

91

Matthew Van Heerden Signature Wines 2015

Price: R280

Total production: 3 600 bottles

Abv: 14%

Fermented and matured for 10 months in French oak, 30% new. White peach, citrus plus tropical fruit and some leesy complexity. Rich and full but balanced – good fruit concentration, zippy acidity and a savoury finish.

91

Oak Valley Elgin 2015

Price: R150

Total production: 13 940 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Fermented in barrel. Maturation lasted nine months, 86% in barrel of which 26% was new and the rest in tank. A hint of reduction before notes of pear and citrus. Still very primary with pure fruit and fresh acidity, the finish long and dry.

91

Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2015

Price: R450

Total production: 3 480 bottles

Abv: 13.78%

Fermented and matured for nine months in French oak, 25% new. An exotic nose showing lemon and orange plus more tropical fruit as well as buttered toast. Rich and full on the palate, tangy acidity lending balance.

91

Radford Dale 2015

Price: R215

Total production: 14 400 bottles

Abv: 12.7%

Fermented and matured for nine months in French oak, 20% new. Appears particularly primary on the nose with some blossom before notes of pear, white peach and citrus. Light bodied and well balanced – pure, fresh and long.

91

StellenRust Barrel Fermented 2015

Price: R130

Total production: 4 200 bottles

Abv: 13.8%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in French oak, 30% new. Marmalade and stone fruit, some leesy character and spice on the nose. The palate is rich and broad, tangy acidity lending balance.

91

Vergelegen Reserve 2015

Price: Not yet released.

Total production: 9 456 bottles

Abv: 14%

Fermented and matured for some 10 months in French oak, 50% new. Pear, peach and citrus plus vanilla and a hint of reduction. Oak noticeable on the palate but also plenty of pure fruit and fresh acidity so should integrate with time in bottle. Powerful and layered.

91

Warwick White Lady 2015

Price: R300

Total production: 14 438 bottles

Abv: 13.54%

Fermented and matured for nine months in French oak, 33% new. Citrus, white peach and attractive oak on the nose. Rich and broad with moderate acidity but very flavourful, the finish long and savoury.

91

Yardstick 2014

Price: R150

Total production: 11 640 bottles

Abv: 13.43%

Fermented and matured for 10 months in French oak, 10% new. Citrus, some yeast complexity and spice on the nose – has an oxidative edge to it. Appears slightly sweet on entry but it's nicely thick textured and there's plenty of detail to discover.

90

Capensis 2014

Price: R900

Total production: 12 000 bottles

Abv: 14.37%

Fermented and matured for 10 months in French oak, 50% new. Attractive oak-derived vanilla and spice, a hint of reduction plus lemon and yellow peach. Rich and full on the palate but equally well balanced. Makes a statement.

90

Bouchard Finlayson Missionvale 2014

Price: R222

Total production: 8 328 bottles

Abv: 13.08%

Fermentation begun in tank and finished in 228-litre French oak barrels, 30% new, maturation lasting eight months. Oak quite noticeable on the nose but the palate, though youthful, shows good structure. Lemon cream flavour, relatively smooth textured with moderate acidity.

90

Buitenverwachting 2015

Price: R150

Total production: 18 000 bottles

Abv: 14.72%

Fermented and matured for 11 months in French oak, 50% new. Particularly leesy on the nose but also notes of citrus and white peach. Full bodied and thick textured with a gently savoury finish.

90

Longridge Organic 2015

Price: R155

Total production: 30 000 bottles

Abv: 13.5%

Fermented and matured for 12 months in French oak, 30% new. Lime and lemon, some yeasty complexity plus a definite spicy note on the nose. Lovely clean fruit and fresh acidity on the palate – very well balanced.

90

Rustenberg Five Soldiers 2014

Price: R320

Total production: 6 500 bottles

Abv: 14%

Fermented and matured for 15 months in 300-litre French oak barrels, 70% new. Citrus, vanilla and spice on the nose. Rich and full with layers of flavour, thick texture and moderate acidity – a very modern rendition of the variety.

90

Sumaridge 2014

Price: R242

Total production: 8 500 bottles

Abv: 13.31%

Fermented and matured for nine months in French oak, 30% new. A top note of potpourri before lemon and lunchbox orange plus hints of toasty oak and honey. Rich and viscous in texture. Already shows some evolution but delicious.

90

Thelema 2014

Price: R130

Total production: 39 000 bottles

Abv: 14%

Fermented and matured for 10 months in 228-litre French oak barrels, 35% new. A hint of reduction plus plenty of citrus. Very pure fruit, oily texture making for nicely coated acidity before a savoury, almost saline finish.

COMPLETE SCORES A – Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Almenkerk 2015	Elgin	88
Ataraxia 2014	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	92
Bartinney 2015	Baghoek	89
Bartinney Hourglass 2015	Banghoek	91
Boschendal Appellation Series Elgin 2014	Elgin	87
Bouchard Finlayson Kaaimansgat 2015	Overberg	87
Bouchard Finlayson Missionvale 2014	Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	90
Buitenverwachting 2015	Constatntia	90
Capensis 2014	Western Cape	90
Chamonix Reserve 2015	Franschhoek	91
DeMorgenzon Reserve 2015	Stellenbosch	95
De Wetshof Bateleur 2014	Robertson	93
De Wetshof The Site 2014	Robertson	87
Delaire Graff Banghoek Reserve 2015	Banghoek	93
Delaire Graff Terraced Block Reserve 2014	Banghoek	88
Eikendal 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Evidence 2015 (Sophie & Julien Schaal)	Elgin	91
Fleur du Cap Unfiltered 2015	Western Cape	88
Glen Carlou Quartz Stone 2015	Paarl	88
Groot Constantia 2015	Constatntia	95
Hamilton Russell Vineyards 2015	Hemel-en-Aarde Valley	87
Hartenberg 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Hartenberg The Eleanor 2014	Stellenbosch	89
Haskell Anvil 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Iona 2015	Elgin	94
Jordan Barrel Fermented 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Jordan Nine Yards 2015	Stellenbosch	88
Julien Schaal Moutain Vineyards 2015	Elgin	89
Kershaw Elgin Clonal Selection 2015	Elgin	94
Kershaw Deconstructed Groenland Mountain Bokkeveld Shale CY548 2015	Elgin	93
Kershaw Deconstructed Groenland Mountain Koffieklip CY96 2015	Elgin	91
Kershaw Deconstructed Lake District Bokkeveld Shales CY95 2015	Elgin	95
KWV The Mentors 2015	Walker Bay	89
Longridge Organic 2015	Stellenbosch	90
Longridge Clos du Ciel 2014	Stellenbosch	91
Matthew Van Heerden Signature Wines 2015	Western Cape	91

Meerlust 2015	Stellenbosch	89
Môreson Mercator Premium 2015	Franschhoek	89
Mulderbosch 2015	Stellenbosch	87
Newton Johnson Family Vineyards 2015	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde Valley	87
Newton Johnson Southend 2015	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde Valley	88
Niel Ellis Whitehall Elgin 2015	Elgin	88
Oak Valley Elgin 2015	Elgin	91
Paserene 2014	Elgin	89
Paul Cluver Estate 2015	Elgin	89
Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2015	Elgin	91
Radford Dale 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Restless River Ava Marie 2014	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde Valley	89
Rustenberg Five Soldiers 2014	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	90
Rustenberg Stellenbosch 2015	Stellenbosch	92
StellenRust Barrel Fermented 2015	Bottelary, Stellenbosch	91
Sterhuis Barrel Selection 2015	Bottelary, Stellenbosch	94
Sumaridge 2014	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde Valley	90
Thelema 2014	Stellenbosch	90
Tokara Reserve Collection Stellenbosch 2015	Stellenbosch	95
Uva Mira The Single Tree 2015	Stellenbosch	93
Warwick White Lady 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Waterford Single Vineyard 2014	Stellenbosch	87
Vergelegen Reserve 2015	Stellenbosch	91
Yardstick 2014	Western Cape	91