



## Top South African white wines: Best value for under £20 per bottle

Heading to the western Cape for inexpensive and superb white wines



By **James Lawrence** | Yahoo! Contributor Network – Wed, Aug 28, 2013 10:59 BST

In little over 20 years, South Africa has risen to the ranks of first division wine producing country and is now a firm favourite on restaurant lists and in wine merchants across the UK. The wines tend to offer an extremely reliable fruit-driven style, but also with ever increasing balance and finesse as winemakers grapple with the historical problems of over-oaking and extraction. All in all, there has never been a better time to drink South-African!

Over the past decade the Cape's talented winemakers - which is where the vast majority of quality South-African wine emanates from - have invested considerable amounts into their vineyards, wineries and research labs. The main focus of their efforts has been on producing world-class reds that can command world-class prices, such wines are usually based on blends of Bordeaux varieties (Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot) and are prestigious and expensive. In fact, the most noticeable trend in the Cape region over the past decade has been the aggressive substitution of white grapes for red, leaning to market demands. The top Cape reds - Vergelegen V for example - are certainly impressive but tend to retail for between £40-50 and so don't really offer great value anymore.

However, where the Cape does triumph in the value department is in the whites - the best of these are wines of indisputable style and complexity, often at prices below £20. For wines as fine as these, such a price is a complete bargain and I would say that today South-Africa should be your first choice when looking for an affordable top-class white wine for that special occasion. In contrast, whilst the Chardonnay based wines of Burgundy can be sublime, even an entry level Puligny Montrachet for example may start at £30. Australia and California also produces great whites, but rarely at prices that most of us would consider good value. If South-Africa does have a close competitor, then it is arguably Chile which is another source of value for both reds and whites.

So where should the savvy consumer head to in the white category? The Cape's premier white grape is Chenin Blanc, which is still the most widely planted variety. Top-class Cape Chenin typically has attractive aromas of apple, citrus and honey which develops into figs, lanolin and spice with bottle age. Producers are increasingly using oak to great effect, adding an extra dimension of richness and depth without spoiling the ripe, pure fruit character that good Chenin gives. The best examples tend to originate from the old bush-vine plantations in the Stellenbosch zone, where you will find a wine of real style and substance at an amazing price. It really is one of the few affordable 'fine wines' left in the world.

Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc are also thriving in the cooler vineyard locations across the Cape and again offer that established New World fruit-driven style, with balance, elegance and poise to boot. Many fine examples can be found at the £10-12 mark. But perhaps the most interesting development has been the emergence of uniquely stylised Cape blends, with the acclaimed Maestro white from Stellenbosch's De Morgenzon estate being the current leader. Their 2012 wine, a blend of

Viognier, Chenin Blanc, Chardonnay and Roussane is astonishingly rich and complex, and won both a Decanter Gold Award and a regional trophy for being the best in its class in May this year. So, with all these awards it should be very expensive, right? Well, at £14.99 it's not dirt cheap, but incredible value nonetheless considering the quality on offer.

There are many great Cape whites that today vie for your attention, but I've selected my top 5 for value for money below - enjoy!

#### **2011 Vergelegen Chardonnay - RRP £10.00**

Where to buy: <http://www.sawinesonline.co.uk/vergelegen-chardonnay-2011.html>

Legendary estate Vergelegen continue to produce one of the regions' best value Chardonnays, although they are admittedly really famous for their Bordeaux intimation wine - V. Their Chardonnay, however, retails for about £40 less but is every bit as classy, offering complex citrus and tropical fruit notes, with a lovely creamy texture and crucially not a hint of being over-oaked. Fantastic!

#### **2011 Ken Forrester Reserve Chenin Blanc - RRP £10.99**

Where to buy: <http://www.sawinesonline.co.uk/ken-forrester-reserve-chenin-blanc-2011.html>

Former restaurateur Ken Forrester is one of the Cape's leading Chenin advocates, producing a range of wines including his much lauded FMC Chenin Blanc top label. His Reserve Chenin is over half the price but equally as delicious, displaying honeyed, quince flavours interwoven with melon and citrus fruit. A great wine at an unbeatable price.

#### **2012 De Morgenzon Maestro white - RRP £14.99**

Where to buy: <http://www.sawinesonline.co.uk/demorgenzon-maestro-white-2012.html>

The deserving winner of two Decanter awards this year, De Morgenzon's Maestro white is a Rhone Valley style blend with the infusion of vibrant, ripe New-World fruit and texture from the oak fermentation and lees ageing. Interestingly, estate owner Hylton Appelbaum insists on playing baroque music to select plots of vines in his vineyards - if the Maestro is anything to go by then he should turn up the volume. Just don't ruin them with some Westlife Hylton!

#### **De Trafford Four vintage Chenin Blanc - RRP 19.99**

Where to buy: <http://www.sawinesonline.co.uk/de-trafford-chenin-blanc-four-v-nv.html>

A highly respected boutique wine farm in Stellenbosch, De Trafford is run by husband and wife team David and Rita who produce one of the Cape's true originals - a Non Vintage Chenin reserve. A blend of four different vintages, their flagship Chenin Blanc is superb and has a depth and intensity rarely found in the Cape. Complex, refined and with great length, save this for a special occasion.

#### **2011 De Morgenzon Reserve Chenin Blanc - RRP £18.99**

Where to buy: <http://www.majestic.co.uk/De-Morgenzon-Chenin-Blanc-zid20248>

De Morgenzon, which means the morning sun in Afrikaans was taken over by Wendy and Hylton Appelbaum in 2004, who have since turned this breathtaking mountain farm into one of the Cape's leading estates. Resident winemaker Carl van der Merwe crafts a top-notch Chenin that benefits from oak fermentation and lees ageing - expect gorgeous tropical fruit notes, a rich palate and velvety texture, balanced out by generous acidity. Simply divine.