

tasting

ASSESSMENTS

CLASSIC

Chenin Blancs

144 Chenin Blancs were awarded a Star rating by the *Classic Wine* tasting panel. Details of the wines follow, as well as recommendations on value and investment wines.

TASTING PANEL



Christine Rudman
(Chair)
CWM wine taster, writer



Winnie Bowman
CWM wine taster,
writer



Carolyn Barton
Wine buyer,
Makro



Howard Booysen
Sommelier and
winemaker, Howard
Booyesen Wines



Katie Barratt
CWA diploma, Wine
Fairy – wine tour guide
and consultant

Associate Tasters: Tom Orpen, Matthew Callcott-Steven **Auditor:** Elizabeth van der Merwe

A review of the top-rated wines can be found on **page 34**.

Some Classic Value and Investment wine recommendations follow on **page 139**

To find out more about the tasting panel process and scoring scale, see **page 156**.

Prices are provided by cellars, unless indicated ARP – the Average Retail Price – and correct at the time of going to print.

For more about where to find the wines, not direct from the cellar, find retail contact details on **page 159**.

tastebuds talk

THE PANEL CHAIR'S REPORT

CHENIN BLANC

by
Christine Rudman

Experienced tasters are not easily impressed but the consensus about this Chenin line-up was that it was one of the best showings of Chenin we'd tasted, a three-day pleasure. Firstly, it was the diversity of styles, the range of wines from oaked to unoaked, from rich and full-bodied to elegant and pure; there were enough differences to keep our tastebuds not only stimulated but actually engaged, looking forward to the next experience. Carolyn: 'It was lovely that so many wines were so individual. Many didn't even fit into the Chenin Blanc Association's style categories.' Confirmed by Katie: 'Winemakers are exploring, pushing the boundaries and having fun, trying new things.'

The panel's impression was that Chenin's long-anticipated quality revolution was evident in this tasting. Christine: 'Chenin is no longer trying to copy other wines but rather finding its own expression, the creation of the best possible wine from a particular terroir or within a particular style, even if this is as a well-priced quaffer.' Over the past 10 years there had been individual handcrafted wines made that impressed international and local audiences, but what was shown here was a depth of quality, not just a few gems. There were very few faulty or ordinary wines, as the statistics confirm: nearly half (44%) of the wines were rated 3 Stars or higher. Remember, this wasn't a wine competition where producers sent in their best wines, this was a tasting of the Chenins that were on the market, a snapshot, if you like, of the category. The wines at the lower end of the ratings were marked down because of lack of varietal character; they were often picked too early, were too Sauvignon-like or were just plain dry whites.

What was remarkable, was that 19 wines (13%) were judged worthy of 4 Stars or more, which included different styles, different regions and ages. And the tasting unequivocally confirmed Chenin's ability to age: all Top Six wines were older than 2012, and 44 of the 3-plus-Star wines tasted were from vintages between 2010 and 2006. Admittedly, not all these older wines were still available for sale, but they were a telling confirmation of those producers' Chenins' ageing potential.

For far too long, Chenin has been burdened with a 'cheap and cheerful' image, no doubt compounded by the low prices still available for many of the wines on supermarket shelves. Winnie: 'Most are probably underpriced, that's the sadness.' Look at the Classic Value section of this report to see confirmation of that; when packaging costs are subtracted, the question remains how much income the producer is earning on those bottles of wine. Without guidance, consumers will stick to what they know, which is trusted

brand names and a price expectation. For example, they would probably pay more for Sauvignon Blanc than Chenin Blanc, because that pattern was set historically. And without any wine advisors in supermarket stores to give them new information, explain Chenin's changed status, that's likely to continue. Conversely, there are also those producers who have priced their wines at levels reflecting their intrinsic value, pushing them to prices equivalent to top Chardonnays or white blends. And quite right too – some Chenins have been earning ratings of 90-plus in international competitions, *Decanter*, *Wine Spectator* and other publications for long enough that it can no longer be passed off as a flash in the pan. Often available in top-end restaurants, their merits can be explained by sommeliers, or at wine show, and such wines have developed a following, even iconic status.

Particular points were made by the panel on oaking, residual sugar, wild yeast ferments, oxidative winemaking and acidity. Only a few wines were deemed over-oaked; there was admirable balance in the majority, as well as a diversity of styles, from leesy/lightly oaked through to a fuller, bolder treatment when the wine's ripeness and high extract could handle it. And no longer did wooded wines overshadow unwooded ones – there were enough examples of wines so joyously fruity that oaking them would have been a travesty; they stood proudly on their own. Chenin is one of the few varieties that can accommodate some residual sugar without tasting sweet, because the high natural acidity converts it into a tangy, almost sweet/sour taste, adding to the palate appeal. The high-rated wines ranged from dry to off-dry and both had merit, but the panel was surprised that there seemed to be a reversal of the recent trend towards off-dry, big showy wines. There were many more full-bodied dry wines than expected. Unlike most white varieties, Chenin also seems to benefit from oxidative winemaking, and there were a number of impressive examples.

Generally, the wines were found to have a good acid balance; whether natural or added, the acidity supported the fruit and in most cases didn't intrude. What was the surprise, in analysing the results, was finding that every one of the Top Six wines had been fermented without the use of commercial yeast. Their own natural yeast population in the vineyard and cellars was sufficient to not only carry the fermentation through to its conclusion, but as the tasting notes show, give a very good result.

Much to celebrate therefore; many aspects contributed to Chenin's good showing in this tasting, including, from Howard: 'Winemakers are trying to get more concentration and they're concentrating on the vineyards.'

THE TOP SIX CHENIN BLANCS



5 STARS



Kanu KCB 2009

The only 5 Star awarded and the oldest wine among the Top Six, proving beyond a doubt that good Chenin can age. KCB (Kanu Chenin Blanc) in the name differentiates it from an unwooded version. Golden-hued, with roasted nuts and baked apple, a showy wine with oak and some sweetness but the effect is sumptuous because of the perfect balance of all the elements. Care in the making, six hours skin contact, natural ferment, eight months in 100% new barrels (mixed wood) and a dash of Noble Late Harvest in the final blend. **R85**

Tel +27 (0)21 865 2488, www.kanu.co.za



Teddy Hall Hendrik Bieboww Auction Reserve Chenin Blanc 2011

A wine made in miniscule quantities for the Cape Winemakers Guild Auction, with the name in the title referring to an incident in the early 18th century. Using only free-run juice, natural ferment in barrels and no stirring of the lees, winemaker Teddy Hall has captured an array of fruity notes, Bosche pears and melon, marmalade, to match the ginger biscuit effect of the oak. There is good acidity to refresh the palate, be food-compatible and promise a long cellaring future.

R186

Tel +27 (0)83 461 8111
www.teddyhallwines.com



4½ STARS



De Trafford Chenin Blanc Four V NV

A one-off blend of barrel-fermented Chenin from four vintages, 2008 to 2011, using six barrels that had an individual character, worthy of special selection. Pale gold. Lovely perfumed layers of lemon cream, melon and shortbread, with a mineral note on the finish. A complex, elegant wine, attesting to excellent fruit and deft cellar handling, which is what one would expect from Chenin veteran David Trafford. There is some development but the impression is of gentle evolution; the wine is still years off its peak.

R180

Tel +27 (0)21 880 1611, www.detrafford.co.za



4 STARS



Radford Dale Renaissance Chenin Blanc 2011

From the flagship range of The Winery of Good Hope, no stranger to Chenin accolades, due in part to limited production and 50-year-old unirrigated bush-vine vineyards. Whole-bunch pressed and natural ferment in mainly older Burgundian barrels, with care taken to preserve the fruit and elegance. Lime and litchi notes, a soft biscuit overlay, at the core a minerality, strengthening on the finish. Dry, elegant, an attractive roundness.

R200

Tel +27 (0)21 855 5528,
www.thewineryofgoodhope.com/radford-dale



Star Hill Chenin Blanc 2010

A first appearance in the Top Six line-up, with a unique provenance, coming from a 723-metre vineyard in the Langeberg Mountains. Another older-vintage Chenin, this one impressed the panel with its pale lemon-gold colour and its limy acidity woven throughout the concentrated clementine preserve flavours. French barrel-matured for 10 months, the oak was integrated, adding a toasted brioche richness to the complex layers. There was a cool-climate intensity in the wine that promised further ageing potential.

R70

Tel +27 (0)28 572 1610
www.starhillwines.com



Rudera De Tradisie Chenin Blanc 2010

One of four Chenins available from this producer, the name here referring to the traditional way the wine is made: no destemming of the bunches, a wild yeast ferment in barrel, no fining or filtration. The fruit was a prominent feature, Golden Delicious apples and fresh yellow stonefruit, with oak in support, coming through as buttered toast. A luscious, harmonious wine, all the elements are integrated, with just enough acidity to keep it fresh, hold it in good condition for another few years.

R99

Tel +27 (0)21 852 1380
www.rudera.co.za