

South African Chardonnay

After poor clones and imposter imports, this grape has come a long way in 30 years, says Tim Atkin MW. When planted in the right place, it can produce world-class wines

BY THE STANDARDS of some white grape varieties, Chardonnay is a relative parvenu in South Africa. Chenin Blanc, Muscat and Semillon were probably there from the start of the Cape colony, imported from Europe, but it seems Chardonnay didn't fancy the arduous journey south. It didn't turn up until the 1920s, when it was planted in an experimental vineyard at the University of Stellenbosch. The chosen clone was a flop, but that was the material that was propagated and planted in the 1970s, when interest in Chardonnay began to develop.

It was time to get some better plant material. Faced with rigorous quarantine regulations, most producers despaired of using official channels. That was how Auxerrois came to be shipped, illegally, from Germany via Alsace. The new 'Chardonnay' vines adapted well and were widely distributed in secret – even winning international medals – until the authorities found out what had happened and ordered it to be grubbed up.

Site specifics

The first new bona fide Chardonnay clones to enter South Africa also did so under cover. Peter Finlayson, then the winemaker at Hamilton Russell, brought in some cuttings from California via neighbouring Swaziland. He, too, ended up in the dock as part of the 1986 Klopper Inquiry. But this time it was clear that, planted in the right place, Chardonnay had a future.

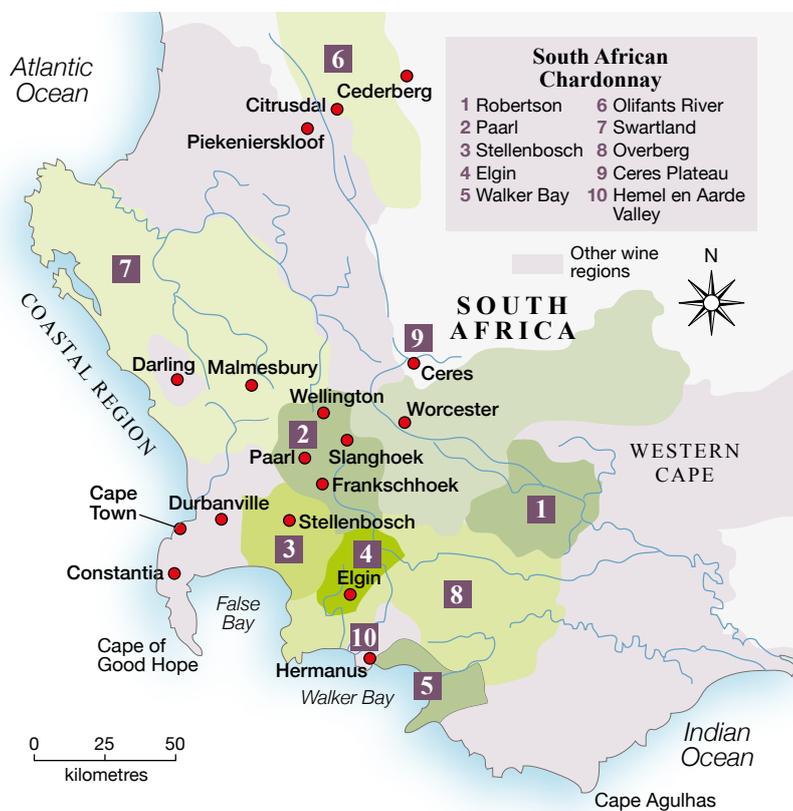
That was just 30 years ago, which shows how quickly the variety has established itself. Since 1992, producers have been free to plant where they want in the Cape – they were subject to stringent quotas before that – and that has resulted in the development of the sort of cool-climate areas, especially in Elgin, the Overberg and Walker Bay, where Chardonnay performs at its best.

Today, Chardonnay is planted in all of South Africa's wine regions from Olifants River to Paarl, the Swartland to Stellenbosch. The biggest plantings are in Robertson, where the blend of limestone soils (rare in the Cape), cool afternoon breezes and high yields have made it very popular, especially for sparkling wine production.

There are a growing number of areas where Chardonnay is at home – the Ceres Plateau is the most recent – but, for now at least, most plantings aren't in the best places. Elgin and Walker Bay, which garner the majority of medals and high scores with Stellenbosch, have only 204 hectares between them. Swartland, where it's hot enough to grow Rhône varieties, has 342ha.

Chardonnay is capable of making almost any style in South Africa – it's a chameleon grape after all – but if it's going to make a greater number of world-class wines, it needs to be planted in the right areas.

Tim Atkin MW is an award-winning writer and leading commentator on the Cape's wines, and publishes an annual report on its wines at www.timatkin.com



South African Chardonnay: know your vintages

2016 Hot weather and little rain. Good concentration with soft stone fruit flavours and some phenolics. Cooler areas fared better.
Rating: ★★★

2015 One of the best recent vintages, alongside 2009. Ageworthy wines of concentration, natural acidity and fruit purity.
★★★★★

2014 Cool, wet, late, tricky vintage, which favoured best growers and winemakers. High yields are sometimes a problem.
★★(★)

2013 A high-yielding vintage that produced Chardonnays that tend to be more savoury and European in style.
★★★(★)

2012 Drought an issue in some unirrigated areas, but overall a very good vintage, showing wines of impressive concentration. The best Chardonnays are ageing well.
★★★★

2011 Similar to 2014, but superior overall. Cool, sometimes difficult conditions produced better whites than reds.
★★★

South African Chardonnay: the facts

Total plantings 7,061ha (out of 98,597ha). Chardonnay is the fourth most planted white grape in the Cape after Chenin Blanc, Colombard and Sauvignon Blanc.

Key growing regions by area under vine
Robertson (26%), Paarl (18%), Stellenbosch (16%), Elgin (1.48%), Walker Bay (1.4%) ➤

The results

An impressive tasting highlighting the potential of cool-climate coastal regions and the great 2015 vintage. Ageability was the only sticking point, as Tina Gellie reports

AMONG MANY REGIONS making good Chardonnay, South Africa has proven here that its best are world class.

'The top wines are of international quality – they'd hold their own against anything,' said John Hoskins MW. 'And we were harsh judges. There were several more that could have squeezed into that top niche.' Tim Atkin MW agreed: 'Chardonnay is a competitive field. Perhaps because South Africa does Chenin Blanc better than anybody, you forget how good its Chardonnay can be, but the best wines are outstanding.'

It was the cool-climate, coastal region of Elgin that shone. Greg Sherwood MW said: 'South Africa has spent a long time establishing regionality for specific varieties – Cabernet for Stellenbosch, Shiraz for Swartland – and Chardonnay is definitely the variety for Elgin.' His fellow judges agreed. 'Elgin and the Hemel-en-Aarde region (the Ridge the Valley and the Upper Valley areas) are the stars,' said Atkin.

Sherwood added that coastal Overberg and Walker Bay also showed well in this tasting, as did pockets of Stellenbosch. On the latter, he said: 'There is always great potential in Stellenbosch, but for Chardonnay it is very much vintage dependent. They do have this beautiful jasmine and juicy honeyed lemon style of Chardonnay, especially with old-vine fruit, and if they can retain good acidity the wines are outstanding.' Hoskins said the uneven result for Stellenbosch could also be down to the fact it was a large and varied region with a higher concentration of big, commercial producers.

The judges found South Africa's stylistic reputation as being halfway between the Old World and New World was upheld in this tasting. 'Producers have understood there's a need to not be in the "old" New World of heavy, oaky Chardonnay, but neither should they be clichéd by launching into a ubiquitous "new" New World, modern, ultra-sulphidic style with 12.5% alcohol wines that lack joy and any Chardonnay character,' explained Hoskins.

'People will only recognise in a few years' time how great these top wines are' Greg Sherwood MW

Atkin said it was encouraging to see 'less new oak, alcohol, malolactic fermentation, batonnage and less-worked styles', meaning the best wines showed excellent freshness, balance and elegance. Sherwood also appreciated the reduced oak use. 'With such concentration and purity of site-specific fruit, less is definitely more when it comes to oak,' he said.

The only question mark the tasters had over the wines was their ageability. The 2015s, a critically acclaimed 'supercharged' vintage, 'were surprisingly developed and looked like coming to their peak within a year or two', said Hoskins. He'd advise consumers to drink these wines within the next five years. 'By and large, these aren't Chardonnays I'd be tucking away for 10 years in my cellar,' agreed Atkin. 'But in many ways that doesn't matter – they're delicious now!'

Sherwood was mindful that there were some 2015s, made in tiny quantities on strict allocations, that weren't submitted to this tasting – or had sold out – that would easily cellar well for two decades thanks to their ripe, powerful fruit concentration. But he did agree that the two 2012s and many 2013s and 2014s were tiring, and not as vibrant as they should be.

In terms of value, our experts were unanimous: these wines are incredibly well priced for the quality. 'People will only recognise in a few years' time how great these top wines are. They'll look back on this tasting and say: "goodness we could have got those for nothing", and they'll be £50 by then,' said Sherwood. 'Even at Recommended level,' added Hoskins 'they're solid, drinkable wines that, if £15 or less, are a great buy.'

The scores

120 wines tasted

Exceptional

0

Outstanding

7

Highly Recommended

47

Recommended

48

Commended

9

Fair

9

Poor

0

Faulty

0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release South African Chardonnays priced at £8 or above.

Outstanding 95–97pts



Ataraxia, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Walker Bay 2015

Decanter average score: 96/100pts **Individual judges' scores:** Tim Atkin MW 96 John Hoskins MW 96 Greg Sherwood MW 95

£23.95 Alexander Wines, Bancroft, Harrods, Hawkshead Wines, Majestic, St Andrews Wine Co, Swig, Slurp, The Circle Wine Co, The Oxford Wine Co, The Vineking Kevin Grant is one of only a handful of Chardonnay specialists in South Africa. He made his name with the variety at Hamilton Russell where he worked for 10 vintages before leaving to set up Ataraxia in 2004. While he waited for his own vineyards to mature, he supplemented them by buying fruit from elsewhere in the Walker Bay until 2013.

Tim Atkin MW Classy winemaking. White flowers and vanilla cream on the nose, with elements of struck match reduction. It is pithy with crunchy acidity, a stony and citrusy tang and an undertone of toast.

John Hoskins MW The nose is creamy but not heavy and the palate is equally impressive with just enough biscuity richness while still being subtle and lively. Complexity and charm – you can't ask for much more.

Greg Sherwood MW A lovely pure peach stone nose with hints of green apple zest. Expertly judged oak flows across a wonderfully salty, briney palate with tart sour plum acidity and pithy, mineral fruit complexity.

Drink 2017-2022 Alcohol 13.5%



Neil Ellis, Whitehall, Elgin 2015

95 TA 95 JH 95 GS 95

£20.99 Berkman Wine Cellars

Neil Ellis is one of the Cape wine industry's gentler giants. But the soft voice and approachable manner are backed by a brilliant intellect and the ability to track down some of the best vineyard parcels in the country and turn them into outstanding wines. Whitehall is one of two Elgin Chardonnays he makes with son Warren, and shows his understanding of the grape and its potential to produce ageworthy wines.

TA Super fresh and zesty nose. Focused, pithy and Puligny-like palate with balance, minerality and citrus zing. A high-class wine.

JH Ultra clean and creamy, but not in a heavy way. The palate has similar charm; it is not too weighty and finds balance in its ample succulence and easygoing juiciness.

GS Dusty, taut, mineral qualities to the nose; this wine is immediately lean, fresh and linear. It shows real intent and pedigree. Minerally supercharged with a chalky, grippy, phenolic finish and the length to carry it through.

Drink 2017-2022 Alc 13.5%



Thelema Mountain Vineyards, Sutherland, Elgin 2015

96 TA 96 JH 96 GS 95
£11.95-£12.95 Cranbrook Wines, Great Western Wine, Noel Young, Swig, The Tasting House, Vin Cognito

Gyles Webb has been making great wines, both red and white, in South Africa for so long (since 1983, to be precise) that it's easy to overlook his achievements. Aided by long-term winemaker Rudi Schultz and his son Thomas, he makes very different styles of Chardonnay in Elgin (crunchy and well defined) and Stellenbosch (ripe and textured). Webb was a pioneer in Elgin, now an outstanding area for the variety.

TA An alluring meaty, aromatic, reductive nose – complex stuff. It is dense, smoky and mineral, as well as long and savoury with tangy acidity. This has lovely focus and a fine, tapering finish. Very classy!

JH Struck match complexity comes through to the fore; it is modern and very expressive. A truly fine Chardonnay. Spice and tightly wound richness combines with excellent freshness underpinning the whole.

GS It is hard to deny the complex nose of struck match reduction on this wine, which mingles with green pears and dusty granitic minerality. Lean and austere, just like a young premier cru Burgundy: super linear with rapier acidity. Serious stuff – I love it.

Drink 2017-2023 Alc 13.5%



Paul Cluver, Estate, Elgin 2015

95 TA 96 JH 95 GS 95

£14.75-£15.49 Christopher Piper, Frontier, Gerrard Seel, Hailsham Cellars, House of Townend, RS Wines, The Wine Society

Grape growing on this Elgin apple farm dates back to the early 19th century, but the Paul Cluver brand was more recently established by the eponymous neurosurgeon in the 1990s and is now overseen by his son, also Paul, and winemaker Andries Burger. Chardonnay (with Pinot Noir and Riesling) is the focus here. This is only the 'basic' Cluver Chardonnay, but it demonstrates the grape's potential in Elgin.

TA South Africa meets white Burgundy: superb! It is focused, pithy, elegant and long with a fine acid backbone and citrus, mineral notes. The creamy lees and subtle oak integration really put this a cut above.

JH Zingy and fresh with subtle oak aromas. The palate has all that and more – firmness without austerity, the holy grail for modern Chardonnay producers. A very impressive example.

GS Exquisite precision, purity and intent; very bold and confident. Tart acidity, lean, fleshy palate, and a long distinguished finish. Excellent!

Drink 2017-2023 Alc 13% ➤

The judges

Tim Atkin MW



Atkin is an award-winning wine writer, photographer, broadcaster and taster, who became a Master of Wine in 2001. His website www.timatkin.com includes an in-depth

annual report on the South African wine scene. Atkin has been visiting and writing about the Cape since 1991 and is regarded as one of the leading commentators on its wines.

John Hoskins MW



Hoskins was born into a family of hoteliers and wine finally drew him into the business; in 1994 he became the first person in the restaurant industry to become a Master of Wine. That year he

also bought the hotel-restaurant The Old Bridge in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, which now includes an on-site wine shop.

Greg Sherwood MW



Sherwood is general manager of fine wines at London's Handford Wines – a specialist in South African wines among others – where he has worked since 2000. He became a Master of Wine in

2007, the fourth South African to do so.

Outstanding (continued) 95–97pts



Paul Cluver, Seven Flags, Elgin 2015

95 TA 94 JH 94 GS 96

£34.95 Frontier

The involvement of Burgundian consultant Martin Prieur is much greater on the two Seven Flags wines than on any other part of the range at Paul Cluver. On Prieur's advice, the Cluvers have been steering their top Chardonnay away from oak towards a wine that has a real sense of place. This comes from two vineyards planted side by side in 1987 and sees only 25% new barrels, complemented by a little bit of malolactic fermentation for texture.

TA Aromatic, youthful and complex, this big, rich wine is very well structured with excellent acidity and focus, as well as being playfully leesy and textured.

JH Apple – a frequent characteristic of Elgin wines – and zesty lemon aromas leap from the glass. The palate has meringue elements alongside the lemon too. It is crisp but soft, lively but friendly, exuding grace and elegance.

GS Exotic aromas mix with creamy lemon butter, herbs and citrus zest alongside layers of wet slate minerality. It has a taut palate, linear acidity, subtle but impressive freshness and big concentration. This is benchmark Chardonnay at its best – wow!

Drink 2017–2022 Alc 13%



Rustenberg, Stellenbosch 2015

95 TA 96 JH 95 GS 94

£13.50–£14.99 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Dunells, Frontier, Gerrard Seel, James Nicholson, Lea & Sandeman, Village Vine, Waitrose

Rustenberg is one of the most beautiful and historic estates on the majestic Simonsberg. Traditionally, it has specialised in red wines, most notably Peter Barlow and John X Merriman. Its most famous Chardonnay is its sumptuous Five Soldiers release, but under cellarmaster Murray Barlow, who took over from his father Simon in 2001, the regular



Richard Kershaw, Clonal Selection, Elgin 2014

95 TA 96 JH 95 GS 94

£30 Berry Bros & Rudd, Philglas & Swigot

The only South African-based winemaker to have started his wine career in an Oddbins shop, Richard Kershaw is an English Master of Wine who's a Chardonnay obsessive, making multiple bottlings from a variety of clones and soil types. This cuvée combines three Burgundian clones (95, 96 and 76) in a single wine, sourced from nine separate parcels. Given the lower acidity levels of the 2014 vintage, Kershaw dialed back on the malolactic to 5%.

TA An ultra-smoky and reductive Chardonnay made in that complex, indescribable Coche-Dury style. It is focused with incredibly subtle oak and succinct acidity, leading to a wonderfully satisfying finish.

JH A splendid integration of oak aromatics linger around the nose and the fruit ripeness on the palate is handsomely balanced with freshness, not over the top. This is a modern Chardonnay that is not being forced into a cliché.

GS A dusty, briny nose unfolds celestially onto fleshy and opulent fruit. Spices intertwine with minerals and swirl around chalky melon notes which are everlasting in the mouth.

Drink 2017–2022 Alc 13%

Stellenbosch release has been on an upward curve, with wild yeasts and 100% malolactic adding texture.

TA An impressive Stellenbosch Chardonnay that wouldn't look out of place in Corton Charlemagne with its complex leesy characters. This wine combines power with restraint, richness with acidity, due in part to expertly handled oak.

JH A mosaic of smoke and flint characters add considerable interest to this charming wine. The intensity is palpable, and the flavour and aroma characteristics last a lifetime in the mouth.

GS Plush aromas of buttery lemons, biscuits and honeydew melon translate well onto the palate. These broad and rich flavours are supported by a subtle acid backbone and some crunchy green fruits. Very quaffable!

Drink 2017–2021 Alc 14%

Highly Recommended 90–94pts



Newton Johnson, Family, Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2015

94 TA 94 JH 94 GS 94

£23–£24.99 The Solent Cellar, Vincisive, Vin Est, Wine Trust 100

Youthful and creamy but also firm and serious. There is high acidity but it is not green. Dried lemon peel, wet straw and musk flavours. A smart wine. **Drink** 2017–2022 **Alc** 13%



Cape Chamonix, Franschhoek 2015

93 TA 93 JH 93 GS 92

£16.99 Widely available via UK importer ABS Wine Agencies

The spiced honey and vanilla notes make for a promising start which then adapts into lemon biscuits and ice cream. This fleshy palate is backed up by tangy acidity and the finish is pleasantly tart. **Drink** 2017–2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Migliarina, Elgin 2014

93 TA 93 JH 92 GS 94

£14.95 Vincisive

A classy wine which has a waxy, toasty component and a splendid butterscotch texture. On top of that it also has tart green melon fruit and a greengage zing with a slight herbal edge. **Drink** 2017–2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Crystallum, Clay Shales, Overberg 2015

92 TA 93 JH 91 GS 92

£29.99 Carruthers & Kent, Handford, Hedonism Wines, The Secret Cellar, The Wine Reserve

An initially restrained nose blossoms onto dried herbs and crushed rocks. The toast and yeast notes come through at the back and complement the rich, lemony concentration, which finishes with a mineral flourish. **Drink** 2017–2021 **Alc** 14.5%



Thelema Mountain Vineyards, Stellenbosch 2014

94 TA 94 JH 94 GS 94

£14.95 D Byrne & Co, Great Western Wine, Hailsham Cellars, The Tasting House

An aspirational style that shows restraint and a lean mineral edge but also a leesy, honeyed complexity. The chalky, modern, sinuous palate is flecked with hints of barley sugar. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14%



Julien Schaal, Elgin 2015

93 TA 94 JH 90 GS 95

£14.50 Alexander Wines, Bargain Booze, Corks Out, Handford, Love Wine, The Vintner, The Wine Reserve

Lime and grapefruit underpin what appears to be a serious, brooding wine. This is followed by sweet melon, sweet-and-sour plums and taut saline acidity on an intense, green apple finish. **Drink** 2017–2023 **Alc** 14%



Richard Kershaw, Clonal Selection, Elgin 2015

93 TA 94 JH 94 GS 90

£30 Handford

A mini Meursault in style with a melange of smoky green fruit like crunchy pear, melon and apple. It is young and will evolve in a few years but it already has that nutty, honeyed, creamy complexity. **Drink** 2017–2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Domaine des Dieux, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Walker Bay 2013

92 TA 94 JH 91 GS 92

£14.95 Stone Vine & Sun

Surprisingly developed already, this has smoky gunflint aromas which lead tantalisingly onto sweet honey, truffle oil and mushrooms. There is enormous complexity here – a joint venture between sweet lemon acidity and savoury limestone. **Drink** 2017–2018 **Alc** 13.5%



Tokara, Reserve Collection, Stellenbosch 2015

94 TA 94 JH 94 GS 94

£20 Alexander Wines, Cheese Wine, Ex-Cellar, SH Jones

This is very Burgundian in style and has toasty, savoury oak influences on top of honeyed biscuits, crème brûlée and condensed milk characters. The palate flows through well, surfing on cogent acidity and a mineral edge. A mini Meursault! **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14%



La Couronne, Barrel Fermented, Franschhoek 2014

93 TA 94 JH 91 GS 93

£14.99 Hard To Find Wines

A dusty lemon peel nose is complemented by lots of stalky spice and green apple purée. It is aiming to please its target market. Fine-toned acidity gives a refreshing finish. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Cape Chamonix, Reserve, Franschhoek 2015

92 TA 93 JH 91 GS 91

£22.99 Widely available via UK importer ABS Wine Agencies

Alluring lemon butter, green apple, buttered toast and subtle crème brûlée characters meld together elegantly on the palate. It is fresh and linear with classy acidity in a tightly wound, unyielding style. **Drink** 2017–2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Julien Schaal, Evidence, Elgin 2015

92 TA 91 JH 91 GS 94

£21.99 Alexander Wines, Bacchanalia, Handford, Spen Valley Wines, Swig, The Halifax Wine Co

Bold oak gives honey and cream characters to the palate with grey slate and green melon complexity underneath. Limes and lemons spring to mind, and this is where greatness happens. In a few years this will come together perfectly. **Drink** 2017–2022 **Alc** 14% ➤

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Highly Recommended (continued) 90-94pts



Lismore, Greyton, Overberg 2014 92 TA 93 JH 90 GS 93

£22 Great Wines Direct, Hailsham Cellars, Luvians, The Vineyard Cellars, Uncorked, Wined Up Here, Wine Man
A successful modern style that is lees-rich yet refreshingly mineral. Beeswax and acacia tones alongside wet chalk and river stone characters blended with cool-climate limey acidity. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Oak Valley, Elgin 2014 92 TA 93 JH 90 GS 93

£17.99 Castelnau Wine Agencies
A characterful nose full of nuts and caramel melded with smoky, granitic notes. Hints of lemon butter and white peach opulence come through the tangy acidity. This has super depth, a herbal touch and vibrant honeyed spice. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Restless River, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Walker Bay 2014 92 TA 94 JH 91 GS 92

£32 Harvey Nichols, Swig
Ambitious winemaking. Oak mixes with wax and resin. Sour plums, melons and a briny, sea spray note all contribute to its rasping mineral style. Very grown up; parental guidance recommended! **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 13%



Storm, Vrede, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2015 92 TA 91 JH 94 GS 91

£34 Indigo Wine
An intricate medley of flavours spring forth: cinnamon and vanilla oak first, then pear fruit. Baking herbs, dried mint and lemon peel make a late appearance and mineral limestone brings up the rear. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 13%



Bon Courage Wine Estate, Prestige Cuvée, Robertson 2015 91 TA 92 JH 91 GS 90

£11.39 AC Gallie, Alexander Wines, Clear Black, Ex-Cellar, Love Wine, Sandhams, The Cheddar Vine, Society of Vintners
A full-bodied wine with hints of vinyl, melon and pear drops layered upon straw and earthy flavours. It is both spicy and floral with a long, wet-chalk finish. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



Cape of Good Hope, Serruria, Elandsloof, Overberg 2015 91 TA 93 JH 88 GS 92

£23.50-£26 Berry Bros & Rudd, Highbury Vintners
Jasmine and wax aromas meld into flavours of pear, citrus and cinnamon. Fragrant cream soda and dusty bonbons make an appearance, followed swiftly by a pretty, honeydew melon finish. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 14%



Creation, Art, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Walker Bay 2015 91 TA 90 JH 92 GS 92

£50 Bibendum PLB
An Old World style full of apple skins and crushed slate. The palate opens up onto butter and honey with aniseed and jasmine notes tickling the sides. Cinnamon spice kicks in at the back and it finishes with gravelly restraint. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 14%



Journey's End, Stellenbosch 2014 91 TA 91 JH 92 GS 90

£14.80-£20.95 GP Brands, Just in Cases, Winedirect
A great example of Stellenbosch Chardonnay. Honeyed oak and peachy sweetness mingle with a butterscotch and rich lemon butter character. The lees notes add welcome texture in a hedonistic, crowd-pleasing style. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Glenelly, Estate Reserve, Simonsberg, Stellenbosch 2014 91 TA 93 JH 90 GS 90

£15.95 Frontier, Gerrard Seel, Lea & Sandeman
An aromatic wine showing pastry notes and apple skins, then dried mint and oregano mix with baking spices. Evidence of early picking gives a lighter, gentler mouthfeel, but there is plenty of structure for a wine with such low alcohol. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 12.5%



Hamilton Russell, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2015 91 TA 93 JH 89 GS 91

£23.50-£25.99 Amazon UK, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Handford, Harrods, Hennings, Majestic
Restrained mineral-laden nose that is fruit shy. Lemon peel and tart apple give a lively and zesty palate that has a certain chewiness and a salty, phenolic finish. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



Hartenberg, Stellenbosch 2015 91 TA 93 JH 89 GS 92

£12.95 Bancroft, St Andrews Wine Co, The VineKing
Clean and linear in a pure, Chablis-like style, this Stellenbosch Chardonnay is dusty and nutty with smoky oak and a taut, mineral-edged palate. The whole package is a little chunky, but it is commercial and hugely enjoyable. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Iona, Elgin 2015 91 TA 93 JH 92 GS 88

£16.99 Alliance Wine, Cambridge Wine Merchants, DVine Cellars, Handford, Hennings, The Solent Cellar, Traders Wine Bar
Lifted and lively, this wine has some struck match reduction and a charming lemon biscuit and limestone personality. It is young and crisp with a sweet lemongrass finish. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13%

Highly Recommended (continued) 90-94pts



Julien Schaal, Renaissance, Elandsloof, Overberg 2015 91 TA 92 JH 90 GS 91

£22 ABS Wine Agencies, Alexander Wines, Ex-Cellar
A worked style of Chardonnay that has exotic notes of bright pear and sweet plum. There are reductive vinyl notes coming through, a splash of lime cordial and some spicy oak in the background. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 13%



La Vierge, Zezebelle, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Walker Bay 2015 91 TA 93 JH 88 GS 92

£18.60 The Wine Teasary
A sulphite lift and yellow stone fruits give this wine a taut, linear frame. The use of oak is stylish and sleek. There is not particularly high acid, but there's a firmness and solidity about the whole wine. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 14%



Moreson, Mercator, Franschhoek 2014 91 TA 91 JH 91 GS 91

£17.99 Museum Wines
A very pure Franschhoek Chardonnay that has quite marked acidity and a saline undertone. The fruit concentration levels are done to perfection; there is lovely biscuity complexity but also a fresh crunchy finish. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Rustenberg, Five Soldiers, Simonsberg, Stellenbosch 2014 91 TA 93 JH 91 GS 90

£27.95 Frontier, Gerrard Seel, Hailsham Cellars, James Nicolson, Majestic, Portland Wine Co, Swig
Immediately impressive on the nose: toasty and creamy with pistachio and walnut complexity. Ticks all the boxes for classic oaked Chardonnay. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



Whalehaven, Conservation Coast, Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2015 91 TA 91 JH 90 GS 92

N/A UK www.whalehavenwines.co.za
Seductive nose of honeysuckle, nectarine and lemon blossom leading to impressive concentration on the palate. With soft clean acidity and a porcelain texture, this will develop in a few years time. **Drink** 2017-2023 **Alc** 14%



Aaldering, Stellenbosch 2015 90 TA 88 JH 93 GS 90

£18.78 Uvinum
Sweet vanilla spice protrudes from the glass in an aromatic Old World style. There are some pear drop flavours but mostly chalky, stony tones with a hint of almond. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



Boekenhoutskloof, Porcupine, Western Cape 2015 90 TA 87 JH 93 GS 89

£8 New Generation McKinley
A lifted nose of musk and green apple sherbet unfolds onto a cool palate full of toast, melon and plum skin complexity with a sweet pineapple undertone. It is quite unctuous but with a gentleness of texture and understated elegance. **Drink** 2017-2018 **Alc** 13%



Capensis, Western Cape 2014 90 TA 88 JH 91 GS 90

£74.80 Hedonism
An aspiring wine that has a big lick of oak spice at the start, which bubbles over into caramelised green apples and figs and a flash of boot polish. The palate is a touch hot, but there is real marzipan and buttery complexity. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 14.5%



Creation, Walker Bay 2015 90 TA 89 JH 92 GS 90

£21.26 GP Brands
Floral and attractive, this is full of sweet vanilla-pod oak spice with an easy charm. It has some pear and nectarine fruit and while not wildly complex it is entirely delicious. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



DeMorgenzon, Reserve, Stellenbosch 2015 90 TA 91 JH 89 GS 89

£19.95 Dunells, Frontier, Gerrard Seel, Hailsham Cellars, Halifax Wine Co, Slurp
This is a mealy, toasty example of oaked Chardonnay. The palate is jam-packed with green apple, honeydew melon and pithy white pears that is possibly a little too ripe. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 14%



Excelsior Estate, Stablemate, Robertson 2015 90 TA 90 JH 90 GS 90

£8 Christopher Piper
Gunflint and pebbles are complemented by a citrus tang followed by zippy acids and underpinned by understated oak. A smartly made wine with a lightness of texture despite the 14% alcohol. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



Glenelly, Glass Collection, Stellenbosch 2015 90 TA 92 JH 91 GS 87

£12.95 Frontier, Dunells, Gerrard Seel, Promotion Wine, Satchells
A shy wine that shows subtle, peppery, herbal spice elegantly balanced by vanilla and cinnamon. There is stylish oak integration and it may well come out of its shell in a couple of years. **Drink** 2017-2021 **Alc** 13.5% ➤

Highly Recommended 90–94pts



Hartenberg, The Eleanor, Stellenbosch 201
90 TA 91 JH 89 GS 89

£23.95 Bancroft, Loki Wines

This wine is nothing short of beguiling. Packed with sweet peach blossom, kiwi and melon fruit, it is alluring and seductive with plenty of stuffing. Baking spices and a fresh, limey backbone complete the package.

Drink 2017-2020 Alc 14%



Julien Schaal, Confluence, Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2015 90 TA 91 JH 90 GS 89

£22 ABS Wine Agencies, Alexander Wines, Ex-Cellar Tangy, tart, sour plums and green apples combine with a creamy, mealy note. Perhaps picked young and then given some malolactic fermentation. This is an attempt at serious Chablis that provides a satisfying alternative.

Drink 2017-2020 Alc 13%



Meerlust, Stellenbosch 2015
90 TA 90 JH 89 GS 92

£20-£21 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Davy's, D Byrne & Co, Eton Vintners, Fortnum & Mason, Harvey Nichols, Partridges, Philglas & Swiggot, The Tasting Room Brackish oyster shell aromas transform into caramelised green figs and quince confit. It is rich and open-hearted, the lasting impression being fruit salad and spiced apple purée.

Drink 2017-2020 Alc 13.5%



Moreson, Dr Reason Why, Franschhoek 2015
90 TA 91 JH 89 GS 89

£12.99 Museum Wines

A great Chardonnay to find in a wine bar – complex leesy nose of baking spices, combined with fennel and pear. The finish is just a tad tart, but this should come together in the bottle. Drink 2017-2020 Alc 14.5%

'The top wines are of international quality – they'd hold their own against anything'
John Hoskins MW



Morgenhof, Simonsberg-Stellenbosch, 2014
90 TA 93 JH 90 GS 88

£13.49 North & South Wines, Stone Wines

A dignified, well-framed Chardonnay with honeyed orange peel concentration. It is tight and serious at first, but the palate is actually rather open – full of wax, vanilla and peach skins. Drink 2017-2020 Alc 14%



Mulderbosch, Stellenbosch 2015
90 TA 92 JH 89 GS 89

£12.99 Armit Wines

Lifted green apple bonbons play around the nose, and the palate is well stocked with tangy pithy pear and a few crumbly biscuits. The wine is understated, but builds on the palate. Drink 2017-2020 Alc 13%



Springfield Estate, Wild Yeast, Robertson 2014 90 TA 90 JH 88 GS 92

£14.75 slurp

The nose is exotic and spicy, with a Muscat-like quality. This builds into fig, melon and white peach notes with an hint of limestone. The caramel, malty finish will appeal to classic Chardonnay drinkers. Drink 2017-2020 Alc 14%



The Winery of Good Hope, Radford Dale, Stellenbosch 2015
90 TA 90 JH 88 GS 91

£18 The Smiling Grape Co, The Wine Society, Wholefoods

Lime peel and lemon zest are predominant characters alongside waxy pear skin notes. It is a worked example that is spicy and toasty yet lean and subtle. Drink 2017-2021 Alc 13%



Uitkyk, Simonsberg-Stellenbosch 2015
90 TA 88 JH 89 GS 92

£13.99 Ministry of Drinks

Distinctly evolved for a 2015, this shows spicy, savoury aromas. It is electric and energetic with yellow citrus and tart green apples adding to its zip, with the most gentle butterscotch finish. Drink 2017-2019 Alc 14%



Vondeling, Voor Paardeberg, Paarl 2015 90 TA 91 JH 90 GS 90

£13.50 Red Squirrel

A slightly reduced nose moves onto a refreshing stony palate complete with honeysuckle and melon sweetness. Gentle and elegant with a herby mineral edge, this will improve and evolve over a year or two.

Drink 2017-2020 Alc 14%



Yardstick, Western Cape 2014
90 TA 90 JH 88 GS 92

£19.95 Dreyfus Ashby

A clever wine that has an admirable harmony between floral aromas, musky savoury flavours, tangy acidity and good viscosity. Creamy lees notes give it the weight, but the palate is linear and fresh to counteract this.

Drink 2017-2020 Alc 13%

Recommended 86–89pts

Wine	Score	TA	JH	GS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
De Wetshof Estate, Bon Vallon, Robertson 2016	89	88	89	89	Pineapple and stone fruit are the predominant characters, with a touch of lemon butter. The palate is zippy and almost spritzy.	14%	2017-2019	£10.50	Ellis of Richmond, SA Wines Online, Half Wine
Domebya, Coastal Region 2013	89	90	87	89	The nose combines butter and lemon rind. The palate jumps out with quince and truffle oil and a hint of pepper in a Grüner Veltliner style.	13.5%	2017-2020	£13.50	Lea & Sandeman
Eikendal Vineyards, Stellenbosch 2015	89	87	89	91	Saline, crunchy energy lights up your palate instantaneously along with a high-toned vanilla edge, although the acidity is a touch green and sappy.	13%	2017-2020	£13.99-15.99	Enotria & Coe, Majestic
Fleur du Cap Unfiltered, Western Cape 2015	89	89	89	88	A full-flavoured Chardonnay that is on the rich side, but it is well balanced with slate and apple skin complexity.	14.5%	2017-2018	POA	SA Wines Online
Hof's, Reserve, Robertson 2014	89	89	84	93	Honey and lees tones mingle with dried fruit strudel and barley sugar in a botrytis-like style. It is a distinguished wine for sure.	13.5%	2017-2019	£16.99	The Savanna
Jordan, Barrel Fermented, Stellenbosch 2015	89	91	87	90	Ripe and open with banana and butter characters mixed with caramelised figs and toffee apples. A stylish, modern wine that refreshes the palate.	14%	2017-2020	£12.55-£15.25	Widely available via UK importer ABS Wine Agencies
Jordan, Nine Yards, Stellenbosch 2015	89	89	89	88	Heavy and developed for a young Chardonnay, but the palate is on the right side of big and buttery with a dash of alcohol on the finish.	14%	2017-2019	£29	Widely available via UK importer ABS Wine Agencies
Kleine Zalze, Vineyard Selection, Western Cape 2016	89	88	88	90	Fruity and enticing, this is nicely balanced between solid acidity, stone fruit and caramelised apples with a dried mint leaf touch on the finish.	13.5%	2017-2018	£12.20	Flagship Wines, Brooksby Wines, Dulwich Vintners, The Whalley Wine Shop, The Wine Reserve
La Bri, Franschhoek 2015	89	90	87	89	A high-acid wine that is clean and tight with vanilla-pod sweetness complemented by dried herbs and a tart green apple freshness.	12.5%	2017-2020	£13	Butlers
Lanzerac, Jonkershoek Valley, Stellenbosch 2015	89	91	89	88	Spiced apple and pear characters make for a bright, young and vibrant wine showing the concentration of its vintage. Very drinkable!	14%	2017-2019	£11.99	Hard To Find Wines
Seven Springs, Overberg 2014	89	90	90	87	Soft, mealy and easygoing with a sweet nose of buttered popcorn. The palate is a little too toasty perhaps, but there's a nice core of lemon zest acidity.	13%	2017-2020	POA	Le Vignoble, Newton Wines, North South Wines
Stellenbosch Vineyards, Credo, Stellenbosch 2012	89	91	88	89	Nose is developed, as you would expect from a 2012, with a sweet, savoury, almost botrytis-like note. Waxy, lanolin notes feature in an enjoyable style.	14%	2017-2018	POA	www.stellenboschvineyards.co.za
Vergelegen Estate, Reserve, Stellenbosch 2014	89	90	88	89	Simple honeysuckle and white flower aromas flow onto a lean, spicy palate with nicely worked lees integration.	14.5%	2017-2019	£18.49	Bodnant, Bouquet Wines, Constantine Stores, Hailsham Cellars, Noble Green, Roberts & Speight, SH Jones
Warwick Estate, White Lady, Simonsberg, Stellenbosch 2015	89	91	89	88	A restrained herbal nose opens out onto a lemony fresh palate. It has a fleshy mouthfeel, but the acidity is rather angular.	14%	2017-2020	£17.49	Constantine, Fenwicks, Four Walls, Hailsham Cellars, Hedonism, Liquorice, Paul Adams, Raeburn, SH Jones, Windermere Wines
Whalehaven, Conservation Cst, Upper HeA, Walker Bay 2014	89	89	88	89	Sea-breeze aromas and flavours run through this wine, with a little lick of lemon butter and a faintly bitter edge.	14%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.whalehavenwines.co.za
Bon Courage Wine Estate, Unwooded, Robertson 2016	88	88	89	88	Muscat-like notes come from the nose, then there's orange zest and a dusting of apple bonbons on the palate with a touch of salty interest.	13%	2017-2020	£10.49	AC Gallie, Alexander Wines, Love Wine, Society of Vintners
Klein Constantia, Constantia, Coastal Region 2014	88	89	85	91	Feels more full bodied than the 13.5% alcohol would imply. This is cool and crunchy with butterscotch oak coming through in a decent commercial style.	13.5%	2017-2020	£23	Dulwich Vintners, Philglas & Swiggot, Winedirect
Kloovenburg, Barrel Fermented, Swartland 2015	88	87	87	89	A distant lactic, cheesy note on the nose evolves into apple sherbet and honeydew melon with a white peach tang.	13%	2017-2020	POA	Bibendum PLB
Lanzerac, Mrs English, Jonkershoek, Stellenbosch 2014	88	89	89	87	A forward style that is already quite waxy and oily. A mélange of limestone and honeycomb show it is already at its peak.	13.5%	2017-2018	£30	Hard To Find Wines
Matthew Van Heerden, MVH, Western Cape 2014	88	88	86	90	Earthy, rooty, reductive notes come through here, and for a wine of only 13% alcohol it is plump and juicy but also crisp underneath.	13%	2017-2019	£23.95	Vincisive, Vin Est, Vin Cognito
Rietvallei, Classic, Robertson 2016	88	89	88	88	A peachy Chardonnay with little apparent oak influence. Dusty slate and pithy melon give it plenty of drinkability.	13%	2017-2020	N/A UK	www.rietvallei.co.za
Rietvallei, JMB, Robertson 2015	88	89	85	89	Charming quince and caramelised fig sit alongside a stony note. A well-rounded palate that is balanced and not overdone.	13.5%	2017-2019	£16.99	Ellis of Richmond
Seven Springs, Unoaked, Overberg 2014	88	88	88	89	Candlewax and a touch of reduction on the nose. This is simple but well done in a Chablis-like mould but perhaps showing its acidity too much.	12.5%	2017-2020	£14.49	Newton Wines, North South Wines, TJ Wines
Vergelegen Estate, Stellenbosch 2014	88	87	88	89	This wine is not very concentrated but it is displaying creamy, spicy fruit with a flash of clove and lemon.	14%	2017-2020	£11.99	Latitude Wines, Houltts, SH Jones, Stewart Wines, Trinas Wines
B Vintners, Strandwolf, Stellenbosch 2015	87	87	86	88	An opulent nose of greengage and cream soda. This is trying hard to be modern and fresh, yet the oak is a touch confected.	12.5%	2017-2020	£20	Alliance Wine, Artivsin, Hailsham Cellars, Harper Wells, The Solent Cellar
Babylonstoren, Simonsberg-Paarl, 2015	87	87	88	86	Breezily fresh with a salty tang, this has a mineral-laden palate with a sweet and sour edge to it.	14%	2017-2019	£17	Le Vignoble

Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	TA	JH	GS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Crystallum, The Agnes, Western Cape 2015	87	86	88	88	Savoury butterscotch aromas entwine with lemon and honey initially and then it finishes with tension and mineral phenolic grip.	13.5%	2017-2019	£22.99	Carruthers & Kent, Handford, Harper Wells, Hedonism, The Secret Cellar, The Wine Reserve
Demorgenzon, DMZ, Western Cape 2015	87	88	85	88	The nose is quite tight, but in the mouth quince and pear fruit sit on top of crushed gravel and pebbles leading to an aniseed finish.	14%	2017-2018	£10.95-£11.49	Dunells, Frontier, Gerrard Seel, Great Grog, RS Wines, The Wine Society
Durbanville Hills, Rhinofields, Durbanville, Tygerberg 2015	87	87	87	87	Despite quite high alcohol levels, the palate is medium bodied with a phenolic lift and a tickle of spicy oak.	14%	2017-2019	£11.39	SA Wines Online
Glen Carlou, Paarl 2015	87	87	88	86	A slightly oak-dominated Chardonnay is brought back with a zip of peppery lemon oil and savoury yellow fruit nuances.	13.5%	2017-2018	£12.50-£13.99	Drinkmonger, Dunells, Hailsham Cellars, Liberty Wines, The Secret Cellar
Glen Carlou, Quartz Stone, Paarl 2015	87	89	85	88	A difficult wine to detail as it has a lot of subtlety. Lemon and herbs eventually show through, with a dash of toast at the end.	13%	2017-2018	£19.99	Drinkmonger, Dunells, Hailsham Cellars, Liberty Wines, The Secret Cellar
Glenwood, Vignerons Selection, Franschhoek 2015	87	87	88	87	This has plenty of aromatic power, with some overt sulphites coming through underneath the oily, mineral palate.	14%	2017-2019	£14.99	Hard To Find Wines, Newton Wines
Holden Manz, Barrel Fermented, Western Cape 2015	87	88	85	87	A full and fat Chardonnay with unctuous weight beneath the greengage fruit and leading to a caramelised tropical finish.	14.5%	2017-2018	£24.99	Campbells, Cape Wine & Food, Chez Vin, Hennings, Salut, Soho Wine, T Wright, The Vineking, Le Vignoble, Woodwinters
JH Meyer, Elgin 2015	87	86	85	89	Some oxidative notes filter through the sweet, rich lemon and butterscotch characters, ending on a briny, sweet-and-sour plum note.	13.5%	2017-2019	£18	Indigo Wine
KWV, Cathedral Cellars, Western Cape 2015	87	84	88	89	This carries its 14% alcohol well and provides a decent amount of commercial fruit in a vigorous style.	14%	2017-2019	POA	North South Wines
La Couronne, Unwooded, Franschhoek 2015	87	87	87	87	Honeyed and waxy, this is quite evolved for a 2015. It may have been picked early to retain its acidity, and this adds a herbal tea element.	12.5%	2017-2019	£8.99	Hard To Find Wines
Le Riche, Stellenbosch 2015	87	86	88	88	A plummy reductive nose opens onto green apple and pear purée but it is still rather tightly wound so might open in a year or so.	14%	2017-2020	£11.99-£12.99	Moke Fine Wines
Stellenrust, Stellenbosch 2015	87	84	88	88	A bony minerality surrounds this wine and works well alongside the yellow peach and melon fruit, but the finish is a touch tart.	13.5%	2017-2019	£9.50	Bibendum, The Fine Wine Co, Winedirect
Amares, Western Cape 2014	86	84	84	90	Wet wool and honeysuckle notes on the nose combine with an exotic buttery palate that has both sweet and sour elements.	12.5%	2017-2019	£14.95	Theatre of Wine, Vin Cognito, Vin Est, Vincisive
Diemersdal, Unwooded, Durbanville, Tygerberg 2016	86	84	86	87	The flavours here are laden with pastille fruits and boiled sweets. It is a youthful, easy-drinking example.	13.5%	2017-2020	£9.95	AC Gallie, Love Wine, Laytons
Durbanville Hills, Durbanville, Tygerberg 2015	86	88	84	86	White citrus blossom, lime peel and wet chalk enter boldly with plenty of glycerol weight, but it finishes slightly shy.	14.5%	2017-2018	£8.20-£9.25	GP Brands, Matthew Clark
Fleur du Cap, Western Cape 2015	86	84	85	88	Youthful green apple flavours are topped with toasty oak and a drizzle of honey. A drink-now, commercially viable example.	14%	2017-2018	POA	SA Wines Online
Groote Post, Unwooded, Darling 2016	86	85	86	87	Very pretty jasmine and honeysuckle blossom give this a very perfumed nose, reminiscent of Sauvignon Blanc. Simple and perfectly likeable.	14%	2017-2018	£10.99	Hennings, Francis Fine Wines
Indaba, Western Cape 2015	86	84	86	87	This has a bright lifted nose and a faintly tropical quality that gives a cordial-like character. Quiet but certainly quaffable.	13.5%	2017-2018	£8.49	Frontier, Gerrard Seel, Hailsham Cellars, Quaff, Wilks & Co
Neethlingshof, Unwooded, Stellenbosch 2016	86	82	87	88	An uncomplicated example of unoaked Chardonnay that displays boiled sweets and jasmine characters, giving it a mainstream but well-made feel.	13%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.neethlingshof.co.za
Rietvallei, Natural, Robertson 2016	86	86	85	88	A forward, accessible style that has a bristling nose of green apples leading onto a very moreish honeyed palate.	13%	2017-2020	POA	Ellis of Richmond
Sumaridge, Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2013	86	86	84	88	The nose is a little heavy here, with notes of honey and custard and a waxy almond fruit character. The acidity is fresh but a little angular.	14%	2017-2019	£19-£22	Bon Coeur, Mr Wheeler
Waterkloof, Circumstance, Stellenbosch 2015	86	84	87	88	A touch oxidative with its appley green fig character. This wine is a little jumbled up but still quite sleek.	14%	2017-2019	£17.99-£18.99	Blackker Hall Farm Shop, Boutinot, Harper Wells

Commended 83-85pts

■ Balcia Wines, Inge, Cape South Coast 2014 85, 13.5%, 2017-2018, N/A UK www.balciaiwines.com
 ■ Haskell, Anvil, Stellenbosch 2014 85, 12.5%, 2017-2019, £25.50 Lea & Sandeman ■ Robertson, Constitution Road, Robertson 2015 85, 14%, 2017-2019, £15 Wimbledon Wine Cellar ■ Val de Vie, Barista, Western Cape 2016 85, 13%, 2017-2018, £9 New Generation McKinley ■ Groote Post, Kapokberg, Darling 2015 84, 13.5%, 2017-2019, £12.99 Hennings, Francis Fine Wines ■ La Motte, Franschhoek 2015 84,

12.5%, 2017-2020, £13.99 Raisin Social ■ Rickety Bridge, Franschhoek 2015 84, 14%, 2017-2018, £10.99 Cape Wine & Food ■ Topiary, Franschhoek 2015 84, 14%, 2017-2018, £21.95 Atlas Fine Wines, Compass Wines, Frontier, Gerrard Seel, Harvey Nichols, Hermitage Cellars, Ten Acre Wines ■ Simonsig Estate, Stellenbosch 2015 83, 13.5%, 2017-2018, £11.99 Alexander Wines

Fair 76-82pts

■ Cape Chamonix, Unoaked, Franschhoek 2016 82
 ■ Dorrance, Cuvée Anais, Western Cape 2013 82

■ Glen Carlou, Unwooded, Paarl 2016 82 ■ Nelson Creek, Nelson Estate, Paarl 2014 82 ■ Springfontein, Wild Yeast, Walker Bay 2012 82 ■ Alvi's Drift, Reserve, Worcester 2014 81 ■ Bergsig, Breedekloof 2013 81 ■ Vriesenhof, Stellenbosch 2014 81
 ■ Glenwood, Grand Duc, Franschhoek 2014 80

For full UK stockist details, see p111

My top three

Tim Atkin MW

■ **Ataraxia, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Walker Bay 2015** Just the third vintage made with fruit from Kevin Grant's own farm, but it's typical of the style he has been perfecting for more than a decade with grapes from elsewhere. A Chardonnay masterclass. **96 Drink** 2017-2022

■ **Paul Cluver, Estate, Elgin 2015** The Chardonnays from Elgin's best producer are especially exciting in 2015. This is priced below its Seven Flags release, but is just as impressive. Long and refreshing, it's still youthful and will age further in bottle. **96 Drink** 2017-2023

■ **Richard Kershaw, Clonal Selection, Elgin 2015** First made in 2011, this remarkable Chardonnay has established itself as one of the Cape's finest. There's more malolactic in 2015, but otherwise, the wine comes from the same eight sites. **94 Drink** 2017-2022

My top three

John Hoskins MW

■ **Thelema Mountain Vineyards, Sutherland, Elgin 2015** How can this be under £13?! This is where South Africa rules the roost – exceptional, unbeatable value in the mid-price tier. Struck match complexity, modern and expressive, fine and well balanced. **96 Drink** 2017-2023

■ **Paul Cluver, Estate, Elgin 2015** Elgin was, unsurprisingly, the strongest region in the tasting. This is a bargain, achieving firmness without austerity – the Holy Grail for modern Chardonnay producers. **95 Drink** 2017-2023

■ **Storm, Vrede, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2015** The Hemel-en-Aarde Chardonnays were less charming than those from Elgin, but often more serious. This was classic: pithy texture, taut structure, clearly young and closed but with so much potential. And only 13%! **94 Drink** 2017-2021

My top three

Greg Sherwood MW

■ **Migliarina, Elgin 2014** Carsten Migliarina's precise, classic, Old World wines appeal to sophisticated drinkers. This had premier cru Chablis written all over it, with beautiful dusty minerality and salty, briny, chalky freshness. A rising star. **94 Drink** 2017-2022

■ **Richard Kershaw, Clonal Selection, Elgin 2014** British Master of Wine Kershaw has been at the forefront of the Cape's resurgence in premium cool-climate Chardonnay. The typicity of his mineral-laden vineyards, complex, Burgundian struck match reduction and fleshy opulence, make his wines highly collectable. **94 Drink** 2017-2022

■ **Storm, Vrede, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Walker Bay 2015** Hannes Storm has thrilled with his Pinot Noirs, and now he's pushing the boundaries with Burgundian-style Chardonnay. Fine fruit purity, limestone minerality, dried herb and citrus peel complexity. Worth the effort to track down. **91 Drink** 2017-2021

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

Expert summary: Tim Atkin MW

A few surprises and a few disappointments, but an essentially successful tasting that showcased the quality of Chardonnay in the Cape – especially Elgin and the 2015s



Tin Atkin MW is an award-winning writer and leading commentator on the Cape's wines and publishes an annual report on its wines at www.timatkin.com

THIS LARGE, GENERALLY impressive tasting proved two things: first, the excellence of the 2015 vintage, which many regard as one of the greatest ever in South Africa; and second, the growing quality of Chardonnay. The variety is much less widely planted here than Chenin Blanc, but on this evidence is every bit as good.

The tasting was dominated by Elgin, which supplied five of our seven top wines. When you consider that this predominantly fruit-growing region didn't get into the modern wine game until the 1980s, and that its plantings of Chardonnay account for only 1.48% of the national total, its dominance was even more impressive; it had a further six wines among the 47 Highly Recommendeds.

The other areas that stood out were Stellenbosch and Walker Bay, which includes the Hemel-en-Aarde region and its three wards – the Valley, the Ridge and the Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley. These are considered the three best Chardonnay regions in the country.

Almost all the other good areas were represented, from Overberg to Robertson, Franschhoek to Paarl. Only Ceres, which is tiny, was not. Multi-regional blends (labelled Western Cape or Coastal Region) also made an appearance, led by the Cape's most ambitious, pricey Chardonnay, Capensis, sourced from five regions.

Most of what I'd rate as South Africa's top Chardonnay producers – Ataraxia, Cape Chamonix, Creation, Crystallum, DeMorgenzon, De Wetshof, Hamilton Russell, Hartenberg, Iona, Kershaw, Lismore, Neil Ellis, Newton Johnson, Oak Valley, Paul Cluver, Restless River, Storm, Thelema and Tokara – did well. The notable absentees were Clos du Ciel, Longridge and Matthew van Heerden.

The surprises, for me, included a few discoveries – La Couronne from Franschhoek and Migliarina from Elgin – and some wines that tasted better than I expected: Bon Courage, Excelsior, Journey's End, Moreson and Uitkyk. Sumaridge and Topiary underperformed, on the other hand. Such is blind tasting.

The youngest wines in the line-up were from the tricky 2016 vintage, which showed poorly. It would have been nice to taste more mature wines, particularly from 2012, with just two entered; to be taken seriously, Cape Chardonnay has to prove that it can age. **D**

Elgin had five of our top seven wines; its Chardonnay plantings account for only 1.48% of the national total