

A sunburst graphic with numerous thin, light-colored rays emanating from a central point, creating a starburst effect.

THE  
**CHRISTIAN  
EEDS**

**CABERNET  
SAUVIGNON**  
REPORT

2015

## KEY FINDINGS

Has the success of Syrah and the Rhône blends coming out of the Swartland skewed the picture as to what's going on at the top end of the South African wine industry as a whole? An international commentator has barely to set foot at Cape Town International Airport before he or she is whisked off to Riebeek Kasteel and environs for a tasting which might well mean that what's going on in other red wine categories is getting short shrift.

The Cab Report is now four years old and my sense is that the category has never looked better. There were 13 wines out of 60 which rated 90 points or higher on the 100-point scale and it's difficult to imagine a similar-sized flight of Shiraz producing a much better result.

If advances in Shiraz are being largely driven by Swartland winemakers, then Cab remains a Stellenbosch forte – out of the top 13, 10 feature grapes sourced solely from this district while 40% of the fruit for the Spier Woolworths Reserve 2012 is from there (the other 60% from Darling) with only the Nederburg II Centuries 2010 (Paarl) and La Bri Limited Release (Franschhoek) breaking the pattern.

Also of interest is how much the 2012 vintage features with 10 of the top 13 from this year. When renowned UK wine critic Jancis Robinson MW was out here in January, she remarked that the fundamental challenge for viticulturists right now was to “close the gap” between the two curves of sugar ripeness and phenolic ripeness (the former progressing quicker over time than the latter) and it does seem that the favourable growing conditions which 2012 provided contributed significantly to wines of excellence.

Is my general bullishness about the category entirely justified? It has to be said that there are still a lot of wines selling for around the R200-a-bottle mark (expensive in the local context) with scores in the low- to mid-80s and this is undoubtedly below par. However much it might pain the traditionalists out there, wines showing a “green” character are not permissible but equally drowning over-ripe fruit in plenty of oak isn't the solution either.

The best wines, or at least the wines this panel is inclined to reward, combine luscious fruit and textual generosity without sacrificing freshness. While they can certainly be enjoyed much earlier than the wines of yesteryear, the verdict is out on whether or not they will age as well. Attention to overall chemical balance on the part of the winemaker means that there's no inherent reason why these new-wave Cabs should not mature with benefit, but the reality is wines, no matter how premium, are now rarely cellared for any length of time and are drunk younger and younger.

That one caveat aside, what's really exciting is that however good this year's line-up, even better is probably just around the corner. The point is that there's a lag time between critical feedback and being able to see the effect of improvements implemented in either the vineyard or the cellar. The trajectory of the learning curve that the South African wine industry has been on ever since political transformation circa 1994 remains steep which means quality gains are still relatively easily had.

## **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, a Cape Town firm which brokers and cellars fine wine.

We tasted blind, scoring done according to the 100-point system.

## **TASTING NOTES**

### **93**

Waterford 2012

Price: R195

Total production: 28 000 bottles

Abv: 13.9%

88% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5% Merlot, 5% Cabernet Franc, 2% Petit Verdot. Matured for 19 months in French oak, 37% new. Red and black fruit, an attractive herbal note plus some subtle oak character. Medium bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins, the finish long and savoury. Great purity and focus. Drink now – 2022.

### **92**

Le Riche 2012

Price: R180

Total production: 18 000 bottles

Abv: 14.44%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 22 months in French oak, 20% new. Red and black fruit, violets and attractive oak notes. Relatively medium bodied with good fruit expression, fresh acidity and fine tannins – finishes long and dry. Possesses real elegance.

### **91**

De Trafford 2012

Price: R265 (due for release in July 2015)

Total production: 7 104 bottles

Abv: 14.85%

85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12% Merlot, 3% Shiraz. Matured for 22 months in French oak, 45% new. A floral top note before red and black fruit, spice and toasty oak. Sweet and super-rich on the palate with smooth tannins. Atypical but appealing. Drink now – 2020.

### **91**

Graham Beck The Coffeestone 2013

Price: R250

Total production: 9 600 bottles

Abv: 14.73%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 20 months in French oak, 100% new. Lovely red and black fruit plus attractive oak character on the nose. The palate shows both breadth and depth – rich but balanced. Starts sweet, ends savoury. Modern in the best sense. Drink now – 2021.

## 91

Laibach The Widow's Block 2012

Price: R235

Total production: 3 000 bottles

Abv: 14%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 16 months in French oak, 50% new. Red fruit, violets, pencil shavings and vanilla. Medium bodied with bright acidity and fine tannins – ends long and dry. A wine of real poise. Drink now – 2022.

## 91

Nederburg II Centuries 2010

Price: R280

Total production: 6 400 bottles

Abv: 14.9%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 30 months in French oak, 100% new. Red and black fruit, some tea leaf and vanilla. Bold but balanced – good fruit concentration, fresh acidity and appropriate tannic grip. Drink now – 2018.

## 91

Oldenburg Vineyards 2012

Price: R200

Total production: 13 600 bottles

Abv: 14.34%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 19 months in French oak, 50% new. An attractive herbal top note before red and black berries and oak spice. Relatively medium bodied with good fruit expression and freshness before a pleasantly austere finish. Classically styled. Drink now – 2022.

## 91

Rust en Vrede Single Vineyard 2012

Price: R850

Total production: 3 020

Abv: 14.39%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 20 months in French oak, 100% new. The nose is still very primary with notes red and black berries plus vanilla. Excellent fruit concentration, fresh acidity and nicely grippy tannins. Precisely made – big and intense but balanced. Drink now – 2020.

## 91

Vergelegen V 2011

Price: Not yet released.

Total production: 9 600 bottles

Abv: 14.53%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 21 months in French oak, 100% new. Red berries and some attractive herbal character. Relatively medium bodied with succulent fruit, fresh acidity and fine tannins. A wine of particular elegance. Drink now – 2021.

## 90

La Bri Limited Release 2012

Price: R195

Total production: 4 200 bottles

Abv: 14.3%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 24 months in French oak, 56% new. Cassis plus attractive oak. Full but balanced with luscious fruit, bright acidity and properly ripe tannins – very well made in a modern idiom. Drink now – 2020.

## 90

Spier Woolworths Reserve 2012

Woolworths price: R129.95

Total production: 10 900 bottles

Abv: 13.94%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 18 months in French oak, 60% new. Red and black fruit, pencil shavings and cigar box. Medium bodied with lovely pure fruit, fresh acidity and fine tannins – admirably unassuming. Drink now – 2020.

## 90

Stark-Condé 2012

Price: R165

Total production: 15 546 bottles

Abv: 14.5%

85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 9% Petit Verdot, 3% Cabernet Franc, 2% Malbec and 1% Merlot. Individual components matured for 18 months in French oak, 35% new. A further four months in barrel after the blend was made. Red and black fruit plus plenty of toasty oak. An opulent example with lots of sweet fruit and smooth tannins. Drink now – 2018.

## 90

Warwick Blue Lady 2012

Price: R250

Total production: 3 200 bottles

Abv: 13.96%

100% Cabernet Sauvignon. Matured for 27 months in French oak, 60% new. An enticing nose of red and black fruit, crushed herbs and subtle oak. The palate is sweet-fruited with smooth but not slippery tannins. Made to impress. Drink now – 2012.

## COMPLETE SCORES A - Z

Name	Wine of Origin	Score
Arendsig Inspirational Batch 2014	Robertson	82
Bartinney 2012	Stellenbosch	84
Bartinney Reserve 2012	Stellenbosch	87
Belfield Magnifica 2011	Elgin	85
Boekenhoutskloof 2012	Franschhoek	85
Cederberg 2013	Cederberg	85
Cederberg Five Generations 2012	Cederberg	89
Dalla Cia 2012	Stellenbosch	84
David Finlayson GS 2012	Stellenbosch	76
De Trafford 2012	Stellenbosch	91
Diemersfontein Woolworths 2012	Wellington	84
Edgebaston 2012	Stellenbosch	83
Eikendal 2013	Stellenbosch	85
Ernie Els Proprietor's 2012	Stellenbosch	87
Flagstone Music Room 2012	Western Cape	84
Fleur du Cap Unfiltered 2012	Stellenbosch	84
Glen Carlou Gravel Quarry 2010	Paarl	88
Goedverwacht Maxim Limited Release 2011	Robertson	87
Graham Beck The Coffeestone 2013	Stellenbosch	91
Groot Constantia 2013	Constantia	87
Guardian Peak Lapa 2012	Stellenbosch	87
Hartenberg 2011	Stellenbosch	87
Jakob's Vineyards 2012	Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge	80
Jordan 2012	Stellenbosch	84
Kanonkop 2012	Simonsberg Stellenbosch	85
Knorkhoek Pantére 2012	Simonsberg Stellenbosch	85
KWV The Mentors 2013	Coastal Region	84
La Bri Limited Release 2012	Franschhoek	90
Laibach The Widow's Block 2012	Simonsberg Stellenbosch	91



Le Bonheur 2011	Stellenbosch	82
Le Riche 2012	Stellenbosch	92
Le Riche Reserve 2012	Stellenbosch	84
Meerlust 2011	Stellenbosch	87
Nederburg II Centuries 2010	Western Cape (Simonsberg-Paarl)	91
Neil Ellis 2012	Stellenbosch	83
Neil Ellis Vineyard Selection 2012	Stellenbosch	89
Oldenburg Vineyards 2012	Stellenbosch	91
Restless River 2011	Upper Hemel- en-Aarde Valley	84
Rickety Bridge Paulina's Reserve 2012	Franschhoek	82
Rudera 2012	Western Cape	84
Rudera Platinum 2013	Stellenbosch	84
Rust en Vrede Estate Vineyards 2013	Stellenbosch	85
Rust en Vrede Single Vineyard 2012	Stellenbosch	91
Spier 21 Gables 2012	Stellenbosch	87
Spier Woolworths Reserve 2012	60% Darling, 40% Stellenbosch	90
Spier Woolworths The Hutton Single Vineyard 2013	Groenekloof	85
Springfield Méthode Ancienne 2009	Robertson	82
Springfontein Terroir Selection 2010	Walker Bay	85
Stark-Condé 2012	Stellenbosch	90
Stark-Condé Three Pines 2012	Jonkershoek Valley	80
Stony Brook Ghost Gum 2011	Franschhoek	87
Strydom 2012	Stellenbosch	87
The Stellenbosch Reserve Ou Hoofgebou Cabernet Sauvignon 2013	Stellenbosch	88
Thelema 2011	Stellenbosch	85
Vergelegen 2009	Stellenbosch	82
Vergelegen V 2011	Stellenbosch	91
Vergenoegd 2008	Stellenbosch	85
Warwick Blue Lady 2012	Simonsberg- Stellenbosch	90

Waterford 2012	Stellenbosch	93
Webersburg 2012	Stellenbosch	89