

JUDGES' FEEDBACK 2024

DRY WHITE – Panel 1

The blended class showed many attractive and interesting wines. In the wooded class a large variety was blended.

The styles varied from tropical to green, with vegetative aromas on nose and palate. Numerous Sauvignon Blanc-dominated blends showed well, as did those with Sémillon.

Wooded blends showed many with dominant wood-character without noteworthy fruit. Those with good wood-fruit balance stood out. Blends once again varied from tropical, vegetative to full-style Chenin Blanc/Chardonnay. Both these classes showed well, but the wooded blends had more complexity.

The Colombar class was good, but only a few stood out, with those showing good aromas rewarded above those with only tropical on the nose.

DRY WHITE – Panel 2

The Other White Cultivars and Viognier, Sémillon and Nouvelle showed well, with good wood in some. Faulty wines were limited. The Rosé and Blanc de Noir classes were disappointing with a few exceptions; some had a brown tinge. The dryer muscats and blends generally performed better against the sweeter classes. The colour was very good in general.

CHARDONNAY

The quality of both wooded and unwooded Chardonnay impressed – although young, the character reflected the winemakers' expertise in all the wines. The wooded class led the way, being more developed with lower acidity, resulting in more gold winners in this class.

CHENIN BLANC

Generally, the 2024 Chenin Blanc wines were good, with a large proportion of silver medals. A substantial increase in unwooded entries indicated that producers had higher expectations here.

The unwooded class yielded a variety, from elegant lighter styles, fruity tropical, to more complex and full wines. The majority were lighter, and elegant in style, sometimes lacking some palate weight. Much fewer faults than before, indicating more attention to sample-preparation. Only a few did not receive awards. The

unwood gold winners were of outstanding quality, representing a variety of styles – with much more fruit complexity, palate weight and balance than the rest.

The wooded class also showed large style variation. The choice of wood in relation to style needs to be looked at – several wines could not handle the wood while some were more suited to being unwooded.

The gold winning wooded wines showed a combination of strong topical fruit to more elegant styles with good wood-integration – also with attractive fruit intensity on the palate.

The Chenin Blanc entries were generally of good quality and the top ones showed what Chenin Blanc can offer in various styles.

SAUVIGNON BLANC

The young Sauvignon Blanc wines were generally good, but the effect of a challenging year climatically was clearly evident. Fruit was somewhat subdued, but the palates were nicely concentrated and elegant. The potential of different styles was clearly visible – elegant, light, as well as fuller structure, some outspoken tropical, as well as attractive tropical and greener flavours. The winners certainly displayed diverse Sauvignon Blanc styles.

RED BLENDS

The wines were thinner than in previous years, lower alcohol and no really big wines. Here and there lacking balance. Too much wood use or the same wood as in the past, but somewhat unbalanced, as fullness was lacking. Some, however, displayed good fruit and potential. Fewer gold awards than last year; substantially more were in the silver and silver outstanding class. Wines rated 86 - 90 that just lack something to achieve gold occurred more than before.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Unwooded wines: Well made, good balance in fruit, concentration, tannin and length. Very high average quality, good sample selection. Fewer than a handful of faulty wines, which was very satisfying, but can still improve.

Wooded wines: The overwhelming feeling was of good quality, balance and depth. Fewer faulty wines found in this class – showing a very good class and that even little use of wood considerably improves the wines.

PINOTAGE

Unwooded wines: Altogether 33 wines were tasted in the unwooded Pinotage class, showing clean, well-made wines. The pure red fruit impressed and once more proved Pinotage's accessibility at an early stage as a cultivar.

Wooded wines: The panel tasted 61 wines in this class and the wines were exceptionally good. Big wines with intense colour, abundant clean fruit, ripe integrated tannins with good palate length. Good full body, yet well-balanced. The gold winners are exceptional examples of high quality Pinotage.

MERLOT

The panel was generally excited about the Merlot class, which just appears stronger year after year; impressive style diversity – with a distinctive jump from silver medal winners to top golds. In some cases, pH was a bit high, resulting in a degree of soapiness on the palate. Only four faulty wines were found – a particularly good sign. Good colour was noticeable, as well as dominant use of American wood. Generally, a very good class with excellent wood-treatment and good integration already. The wooded samples showed good fruit concentration, fruit and volume, with excellent structure.

SHIRAZ

The panel was highly impressed by these wines. The unwooded wines showed attractive aromatic profiles with intense, dark fruit, while the wooded samples reflected good balance and wood-integration. The versatility of Shiraz was again beneficial in this challenging year, proving that Shiraz is well-suited to South Africa.

OTHER RED CULTIVARS

The general quality was good, the best in many years. Most wines received silver, and bronze was limited. The wines that received gold were of very high standard. The combination of good colour, flavour and mouthfeel is a sign of a very promising, exceptionally good vintage. Generally good use of wood, but some wines were overwooded or the wine style did not suit the wood.

Cinsault: Particularly good colour, fruity and good palate. On average very good, both unwooded and wooded performed well.

Cabernet Franc: A very good class. This variety shows big potential for the South African market. Full-bodied, dark and good flavours, varying from minty, red fruit to blueberry. Unwooded and wooded classes both showed well, and the South African wine industry can invest in this variety if planted in selected areas.

Pinot Noir: Not as good as the other red classes. The wines showed over-aging, brown colours and too much extraction. Winemakers may be trying to get too much

colour and made the wines in too much of a classic red style – in both wooded and unwooded classes.

Any Other Single Red Cultivar: This class included Carignan, Roobernet, Tannat, Durif and some port cultivars. Notably, many Durif wines were entered. The wines had good colour and flavour. The wooded wines were good.

Mourvèdre: Dark, savoury, spices and good structural wines, both wooded and unwooded classes were good.

Malbec: A surprise! The wines were dark-coloured, with typical cultivar traits and flavours, from boiled sweets to blueberry, plummy with dark rich colours. Both wooded and unwooded classes of very high standard.

Petit Verdot:

Both the wooded and unwooded classes showed well. Lots of flavour, good colour and a good example of what this cultivar can do in South Africa.

Ruby Cabernet: Both wooded and unwooded classes of very high standard. The Ruby Cabernet vineyards are getting older; so the wines improve, probably resulting in the big reds tasted. A few golds were awarded in this class.

NATURAL SWEET, NLH / CAPE STYLE

Interesting class – some extraordinary wines but also some lacking length and complexity.

The Noble Late Harvest, unwooded class had some excellent examples, with depth combined with great length. Not much wood picked up in the wooded class, perhaps from only a brief period in wood – not on the same level as the unwooded competitors.

With Port, confusion still exists about Ruby and Vintage differences. Brilliant wines with deep colour and big tannin structure, which will take some time to become tawny. Quality overall better than last year and great depth and concentration was achieved.

This may be the year of fortified wine with real complexity – wines that will easily mature well for 20 years and more.

DESSERT WINES

The 2024 harvest was characterised by very low yields per hectare. This contributed positively to the Jerepigo style wines. The extraction of flavour, but especially colour in the Red Muscadel, was exceptional. Despite the high extract, the winemakers still made very fruity and delicate wines. It was also noticeable that there is more and more focus on making a lighter style of White Muscadel, resulting in nice floral and fruity wines that are typical of Muscadel.