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South Africa's Outstanding Sparkling Wines



Méthode Cap Classique

Table of Contents

Introduction
Recommended Producers
A Short History of South African Bubbles
The Geography of MCC
Amazing Progress in a Short Time
The Next Generation
Recommended MCC Producers
Winery Profiles & Tasting Notes
Annex: IWR Reports & Articles on South African Wine

Introduction

No wine category has changed as radically over the past few years in South Africa as sparkling wine, especially those made using the *méthode champenoise*, called Méthode Cap Classique (MCC). Visitors to South Africa are surprised by the number of labels (over 300 at latest count) and excellent quality of the wines. The number of producers and labels of MCC have grown exponentially over the past two decades, and the quality of the wines has improved, too, led by efforts of the Cap Classique Producers Association (CCPA). Exports have grown, too, and the US is the second largest export market (after the UK).

Acknowledgements.

We owe a debt of gratitude to all the producers who have taken the time to show us their wines and explain their winemaking including Jacques Bruwer, Nick Christodolou, J.P. Colmant, Liz Gerber, Jeff Grier, Johnathan Grieve, Henk van Niekerk, Takuan von Arnim, and, last but not least, Pieter Ferreira, Executive Director of the Méthode Cap Classique Producers Association (MCCPA). Pieter and the MCCPA organized the tasting of MCCs at Graham Beck Winery in February of this year. Thanks also to Zelda Shaik, Vineyard Manager at Avondale, for supervising our picking of Chardonnay for their MCC; her photo is on the cover (lower left) to this report. And a very special thanks to Michael Bampffield Duggan, owner of Wine Concepts in the Newlands district of Cape Town, who introduces us to new producers and new releases every time we visit the Cape.

We've tasted and written extensively about South African sparkling wine over the past decade, and earlier this year we took a trip to the Western Cape to discover the current lay of the land. We find today's MCCs, especially those made by wineries specializing in sparkling wine, are fresher, more refined and more complex than those we tasted several years ago. Surprisingly, prices have not risen with quality, so good quality sparkling wine is also very good value.

As the quality of MCC has risen, so, too, have the number of producers. South Africa's first commercially available *méthode champenoise* bubbly was made in 1971, almost fifty years ago. In 1992, at the time of the creation of the CCPA, there were fewer than twenty producers. Today, there are an estimated 250 producers of MCC, although many are tiny in size. Over 100 producers are members of the CCPA, accounting for 93 percent of total production and almost all the exports of MCC to other countries. A growing number of producers have a major or sole focus on sparkling wine. They include: Ambeloui, Bon Courage, Charles Fox, Colmant, Domaine des Dieux, Genevieve, Graham Beck, Huis van Chevalerie, House of Krone, Le Lude, L'Ormarins (Anthonij Rupert), Pieter Ferreira, Saltaré, and Silverthorn.

Numerous factors lie behind the quality of South African sparkling wine. Producers today use the same grape varieties as Champagne, and they source them from regions where they grow best, like Chardonnay from the limestone soils of Robertson and Pinot Noir from cool coastal areas like Elgin and Darling. They handpick fruit early when acidity levels are high and then gently whole bunch press, using only the first pressings for their sparkling wines. Then they ferment (sometimes with ambient yeasts) and age each grape variety and vineyard parcel separately, often putting a small portion in neutral oak. Winemakers then blend these different lots, including reserve wines for non-vintage cuvées, before starting the second fermentation in bottle. The best producers leave the now sparkling wine in bottle on the lees for two to five

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years or more before disgorgement and a period of post-disgorgement resting. Experience is especially important in the making of Champagne and sparkling wine. The growing experience of the Cape's sparkling winemakers, including in Champagne, combined with better fruit and improved production methods, explain the notable improvements in quality we find over the past decade or more of serious tasting of MCCs.

In this report, we tell the story of the spectacular rise of Champagne-style sparkling wine in South Africa. We start with a listing of the top producers and their best

cuvées based on our tastings over the past few years, including tastings done this year. We next describe MCC's beginnings fifty years ago, discuss the growing regions producing the best fruit, describe the practices and techniques responsible for the rising quality of MCC, present the new generation who are shepherding continuous improvements in MCC, and then profile the top producers and evaluate their wines. Overall, we're impressed with the high quality of the best South African MCC, and especially impressed with the experimentation and creativity of the winemakers and producers of MCC.

Recommended Producers

In the accompanying table we've identified the best producers of MCC based on our tastings of over the past few years. Most of the top producers specialize in MCC, and many of them make sparkling wine exclusively, including Graham Beck, which recently dropped its line of still wines in order to focus on sparkling.

Recommended South African Sparkling Wine Producers

Producer	Top Cuvées
Ambeloui	Ashley Pinot Noir/Chardonnay 4 Years on Lees
Avondale	Armilla Blanc de Blancs
Graham Beck	Cuvée Clive, Vintage Blanc de Blancs, Vintage Brut Rosé
Bon Courage	Jacques Bruère Brut Rosé, Brut Reserve
Boschendal	Prestige Cuvée Jean Le Long, Grand Cuvée
Colmant	Absolu, Blanc de Blancs, Brut Reserve
Dainty Bess	Pinot Noir Rosé
Domaine des Dieux	Claudia Brut, Rosé of Sharon
Pieter Ferreira	Blanc de Blancs, Rosé
Charles Fox	Cipher, Reserve Rosé
Genevieve	Blanc de Blancs
Haut Cabriere	Pierre Jourdan Blanc de Blancs
JC Le Roux	Scintilla Vintage Reserve
Krone	Kaaimansgat Blanc de Blancs
Le Lude	Vintage Cuvée
Anthonij Rupert	L'Ormarins Blanc de Blancs
Pongracz	Desiderius
Saltare	Brut Nature, Camille Blanc de Noirs
Silverthorn	The Jewel Box, The Green Man
Simonsig	Cuvée Royale Blanc de Blancs
Twee Jonge Gezellen	Krone Kaaimansgat Blanc de Blancs, Krone Vintage Rosé
Villiera	Munro Brut, Brut Natural Chardonnay

A Short History of South African Bubbles



South Africa's production of Champagne style (i.e., using the *méthode champenoise*) sparkling grew slowly in the latter half of the 20th century only to explode with the new millennium. Inspired by a trip to Champagne, Frans Malan, one of South Africa's most influential winemakers of the 20th century, introduced the country to *méthode champenoise* sparkling wine with Simonsig's Kaapse Vonkel in 1971. Originally made with Chenin Blanc, Pinotage, and other varieties, it has been made with Chardonnay and Pinot Noir since 1987 and is still one of the best-selling, popularly priced sparkling wines in South Africa.

The Distillers Corporation (now Distell) produced an early sparkling wine from Sauvignon Blanc grapes in 1983. But the first sparkling wines made from traditional Champagne grape varieties weren't introduced to South Africa until the mid-1980s when Achim von Arnim and Jeff Grier produced their first vintages, and Frans Malan added a Brut made with Champagne varieties to his portfolio. Von Arnim, who studied winemaking at Geisenheim in Germany, presented the Pierre Jourdan sparkler made at his Haute Cabrière estate in Franschhoek. At the time this was the only South African winery focused solely on sparkling wine. Jeff Grier made his first sparkling vintage at his family's Villiera estate. Jeff also produced South Africa's first sparkling rosé using the *méthode champenoise* in 1987 and later also produced the first zero dosage sparkling wine and the first prestige cuvée, the Monro Brut.

While Simonsig, Haute Cabrière, and Villiera introduced South Africa to locally made quality sparkling wine, it was coal magnate Graham Beck who had the financial resources to produce sparkling wine at scale. He purchased the 1850 hectare Madeba Valley farm outside Robertson in 1984 and began planting vines. But his most prescient move was to hire a young winemaker named Pieter Ferreira (see box) and charge him with developing South Africa's premiere sparkling wine program. That, he did. The first sparkling wine debuted in 1991, and today the Graham Beck winery is by far the most successful sparkling wine producer in South Africa as well as one of the few South African brands to gain widespread recognition in the US wine market.



Pieter "Bubbles" Ferreira grew up in Durban in KwaZuluNatal, the son of a wine distributor. With wine in his blood, he began an apprenticeship with Achim von Arnim making sparkling wine in 1984 at the Cabrière cellar, South Africa's first sparkling wine specialist. He worked Champagne harvests at Mumm, George Vesselle and Moët & Chandon as well as with Jack and Jamie Davies at Schramsberg in the Napa Valley. In 1990 he joined Graham Beck at the Madeba farm in Robertson with the objective of making the estate a world leader in sparkling wine production. He still serves as cellar master at Graham Beck and also makes MCC under his own label, Pieter Ferreira Cap Classique. He also advises Antony Beck (current owner of Graham Beck) on his new sparkling wine projects in Oregon and England. Pieter is a member of the Cape Winemakers Guild.

The Graham Beck investment started the ball rolling for sparkling wine. Jacques Bruwer learned to make sparkling wine during his studies at Elsenburg Agricultural College, and when he joined his family's Bon Courage winery in 1990 he quickly added a line of sparkling wine labeled Jacques Brûère (that being the old French spelling of the family name). Today, Bon Courage is best known for its sparkling wines and is one of the Cape's most important producers. About the same time, in 1990, the Desiderius Pongrácz sparkling wine was launched by Distillers Corporation (now Distell) where the Hungarian emigré Pongrácz worked as viticulturist and where Melanie van der Merwe became the first female chef de cave later in the decade. Soon thereafter, in 1991, the Twee Jonge Gezellen Estate in Tulbagh released its first sparkling wine, the 1987 Krone Borealis Brut, to critical acclaim.

By 1992 there was sufficient critical mass (fourteen) of sparkling wine producers using the *méthode champenoise* to create an industry group called the Cap Classique Producers Association (CCPA). Today there are about 253 producers of what is called the *Méthode Cap Classique* (MCC). The 103 producers who are members of the CCPA account for 93 percent of total MCC production.



Méthode Cap Classique (MCC)

is the name given to sparkling wines made using the méthode champenoise of secondary fermentation in the bottle and complying with other requirements set by the CCPA. Unlike Champagne, MCCs can be made from any grape variety.

They must be whole cluster pressed and spend a minimum of nine months in bottle on the lees (*sur latte*), which increases to a minimum of twelve months effective the 2021 vintage. The CCPA uses the same sparkling wine categories as Champagne: brut (up to 15 g/L residual sugar (RS)), extra brut (up to 5 g/L RS), and brut nature (up to 3 g/L RS). The CCPA collaborates with Amorim Cork in sponsoring the annual Amorim Cap Classique Challenge, an annual competition to identify the best MCCs. It also sponsors workshops where MCC producers taste and discuss the components of their respective MCCs. As we've seen elsewhere in the world, this type of collegial exchange is critical for continuous quality improvement.

Walker Bay and elsewhere. MCCs made from Chenin Blanc only come from warm areas. Since most South African sparkling wines are blends of fruit sourced from diverse regions, there are few examples of wines that express the terroir of a specific region.

More than any other wine region, it's Robertson that is often associated with sparkling wine, due in part to the presence of top producers of MCC like Bon Courage, Graham Beck, and Silverthorn in the eastern end of the Breede River Valley near Robertson. The soils here are rich in limestone, and Chardonnay grown in these soils is especially prized for MCC. The Bon Courage and Paul Renee sparklers are sourced from estate vineyards in the Breede River Valley. Graham Beck's Cuvee Clive, Haut Cabriere's Pierre Jourdan Blanc de Blancs and the Steenberg Chardonnay bubbly are also sourced here as are the Chardonnay and Shiraz grapes for Silverthorn's prized sparklers.

Franschhoek is another growing area popular for its Chardonnay fruit. Some of South Africa's best MCC producers—Boschendal, Colmant, Le Lude—are located here, although they mostly blend Franschhoek fruit with that of other regions. Just twenty miles north of Franschhoek on the R45 lies the Paarl wine region, another area popular for its Chardonnay and where the biodynamic producer Avondale crafts its elegant Blanc de Blancs from estate grown Chardonnay.

Cooler growing areas are especially prized for growing grapes for sparkling wine. Several producers source Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the cool highlands of Elgin and the coastal vineyards of Walker Bay. Domaine des Dieux sources from both areas. It's the cool growing conditions that led Charles Fox to locate his vineyard and winery in Elgin and Melissa Nelson to locate her Genevieve brand in Bot River. Wildeckrans also makes MCC from their Bot River estate vineyards.

Other cool growing areas are Darling where vineyards lie as close as six kilometers from the cold Atlantic. Pieter Ferreira sources Pinot Noir from Darling, and JC Le Roux's Scintilla gets Pinot Noir from Durbanville. Within Cape Town proper there are good growing conditions in Constantia and Hout Bay. Constantia Uitsig makes a single vineyard MCC in Constantia, and the boutique producer Ambeloui makes sparkling wines from their Hout Bay vineyards overlooking the nearby Atlantic.

Single Vineyard MCC

Sourcing fruit from different growing regions (districts and wards in South African parlance) and fermenting and aging them separately allows the chef de cave to select the best blend from all the various lots in the cellar. That blend is then given the second, fermentation in bottle that creates the fine bubbles of Champagne and sparkling wine. Most larger producers, both in Champagne and South Africa, blend grapes from across regions, resulting in an MCC with a Western Cape appellation. A few producers will also make MCCs from the grapes of a particular vineyard or vineyard parcel. These vineyard-specific sparkling wines

The Geography of MCC



South Africa enjoys a wide variety of conditions for growing the grape varieties that go into traditional, Champagne style sparkling wine. The calcareous soils of the Robertson region are generally recognized as ideal for growing Chardonnay, while the cool conditions of Elgin, Walker Bay and Darling are preferred for growing fresh tasting Pinot Noir. In addition, there are numerous areas with microclimates conducive to producing phenolically ripe grapes with vibrant acidity. Excellent MCCs made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir come from grapes grown in Darling, Franschhoek, Paarl, Robertson, Stellenbosch,

reveal the grape's terroir and are of particular interest to the wine connoisseur.

Single vineyard or terroir-specific MCCs are not common in South Africa. As noted above, there are several producers making MCCs from their estate vineyards and sometimes from selected parcels within those vineyards. However, there are few examples of MCCs that have as a goal expressing a particular terroir. A notable exception is the Krone Kaaimansgat Blanc de Blancs produced from a 700m high single vineyard in Elands-kloof [see box].



Kaaimansgat

The Kaaimansgat (Crocodile's Lair) vineyard is located on the slopes of the Kroonland in the Elands-kloof valley just north of Villiersdorp. It has unirrigated, old vines planted on

sandstone soils of steep foothills that see winter snow. The 31 year old Chardonnay fruit grown here ripens about a month later than most vineyards in the Cape. Rudiger Gretscher, Cellarmaster at Krone, shepherded the creation of the Kaaimansgat MCC from the first vintage in 2016. It's fermented in 25 hl foudre using ambient yeasts and sees no malo. While this is the first MCC from Kaaimansgat, several other winemakers have made single vineyard Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from this site, including Bouchard-Finlayson, Johan Meyer and Jessica Saurwein. Duncan Savage, Capensis, Lismore, and Mullineux & Leuw also use from the vineyard.

Amazing Progress in a Short time

It has been three hundred years since Dom Perignon reputedly (and falsely) exclaimed, "Come quickly, I am drinking the stars." Over the ensuing three centuries, Champagne developed the techniques and practices that make it the benchmark for sparkling wines. In contrast, South Africa's *méthode champenoise* sparkling wines are just a half century old, but its winemakers have learned quickly. The result is MCCs that compete in terms of quality with the best of the New World. While only a few brands are widely distributed outside of South Africa, they offer excellent value, too, especially compared to Champagne.

The Grapes

At the time the first MCC was made fifty years ago, there were relatively few plantings of the traditional Champagne varieties, especially Pinot Noir, so instead Frans Malan used Chenin Blanc, Pinotage and other commonly planted varieties. Fifty years later, most MCC is made from Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, and a few producers, especially Villiera, also include Pinot Meunier in their blends. Jeff Grier has even made a 100% Meunier MCC.

MCC vintners haven't entirely abandoned South Africa's more traditional varieties. Several producers make MCC from Sauvignon Blanc, Pinotage, and Chenin Blanc especially. The high acidity of Chenin Blanc and its fruity expression in South Africa make for a particularly appealing sparkler. Two outstanding examples of Chenin Blanc MCC are Ken Forrester's Sparklehorse Brut and Christa von la Chevallerie's Filia Brut Nature Kap Klassiek. The Filia is also one of the few MCCs made from grapes grown in the Swartland, in this case old gnarled, dry farmed Chenin Blanc vines certified by the Old Vine Project.

In addition to changes in the selection of grape varieties, MCC producers have changed how they source their fruit. The early producers made base wines from the fruit that was most readily available, usually their own vineyards. As discussed in the geography section of this report, today producers source grapes from the regions best suited for growing them for sparkling wine. Thus, Chardonnay is often sourced from Robertson's limestone soils, and Pinot Noir is sourced from cooler growing regions like Elgin, Hemel-en-Aarde, Darling and Durbanville.

Making the Base Wine

Since many of today's MCC winemakers have worked in Champagne, they have adopted the winemaking techniques of Champagne. They pick fruit early at relatively low sugar and low pH levels, then gently whole cluster press, usually using a pneumatic press with the juice from the most gentle pressing destined for top cuvées. The grapes from each variety and vineyard parcel are separately pressed and fermented, resulting in multiple base wines, so the winemaking team can later assemble the optimal blend. As in Champagne, most fermentation is done in stainless steel, but many producers will ferment and/or age partially in oak barrels (almost always neutral or used) to give additional complexity to the final wine. A few winemakers also use amphora (e.g., Krone Amphora Blanc de Blancs), concrete eggs, or acacia barrels (e.g., Silverthorne's new Colombard based MCC project). Some will also ferment using the ambient yeasts present in the winery or vineyard.

Blending, Aging & Disgorgement

Once the base wines are ready, typically several months after the harvest, the winemaking team prepares the blend. Given the quality of the base wines, the skills of the winemaking team are of paramount importance in assembling the best possible final blend. Blending experience and the availability of a variety of base wines contribute to the quality of the final blend. Many of the newer generation of MCC winemakers have worked or studied under experienced sparkling wine producers in South Africa, Champagne, and Germany.

After the final blend is decided, sugar and yeast are added to begin the second fermentation in bottle. The result of the second fermentation is a bone dry wine with spent lees remaining in the bottle. Extended aging on the lees in bottle contributes the leesy, toasty character one often associates with Champagne. Research shows that

it takes about 18 months of time on the lees for this toasty character to appear, and the better Champagne producers give their wines at least 24 months on the lees, although the mandated minimum is just 12 months.¹ The mandated minimum in South Africa is 9 months, although the CPPA has proposed raising that to 12 months beginning 2021.

Time on the lees in bottle is one of the important elements affecting the quality of MCC and other sparkling wines, and the best producers give their wines at least 24 months. Several MCC producers now give their top cuvées extended time on the lees as we note in the tasting notes below. For example, Avondale, Bon Courage, Boschendal, and Colmant give their top cuvées seven years on the lees, and many other producers give them at least four years.

Once the lees aging is completed and the sparkling wine disgorged, it's time to add the sugary dosage (*liqueur d'expédition*) required to balance the acidity in the wine. The ripe fruit produced in the Western Cape doesn't require much sugar, and dosage levels of the better MCCs are relatively low, typically less than 9 grams per liter (9 g/L). Wines with lower dosage levels, including zero dosage or brut nature, are becoming increasingly popular among South Africa producers, as they are in Champagne.

The New Generation

The pioneers of sparkling wine in South Africa are now being succeeded by a new generation of producers and winemakers. In the case of family wineries, children and grandchildren of the pioneers are taking over management and winemaking duties. In addition, There are numerous new sparkling wine ventures being established. We profile some of the more outstanding members of the new MCC generation below.



Emma Bruwer Growing up on her family's wine farm (Springfield), Emma has real winemaking roots. After

graduating from Stellenbosch University in 2015, she worked local harvests at Le Lude and Jordan as well as harvests in California and New Zealand. Upon return to the Cape, she became assistant winemaker at Le Lude, and when Paul Gerber left was named lead winemaker in 2019.



Paul Gerber Currently chef de caves at Colmant, Paul previously made the sparkling wine at Le Lude where he was instrumental in raising that cellar to one of South Africa's leading producers of Champagne style sparkling wine. He joined Le Lude after graduating in Viticulture and Oenology at Stellenbosch in 2009. He is currently pursuing his master's degree on the use of cork as a closure in the making of sparkling wines in collaboration with Stellenbosch University and the Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne. He has also worked harvests in Franciacorta and Le Mesnil sur Oger.



Rudiger Gretscher is the cellar master at Krone. After graduating from the Stellenbosch University wine program, Rudiger became assistant and then lead winemaker with Marc Kent at Boekenhoutskloof. Rudiger has been Production Director at South Africa's major distributor Vinimark since 2009 and responsible for overseeing all of its wine production (including Krone). He also makes the wines at South Africa's premiere biodynamic winery, Reyneke. Inspired by the grower Champagnes of France, Rudiger decided to make South Africa's first single vineyard, grower Champagne, the Krone Kaaimansgat.

¹ The Champagne requirement is 15 months aging in bottle, 12 months of which must be on the lees.



Nathan Valentine & Xander Grier were recently hired to help make the wines at Villiera. Nathan graduated from the Elsenburg winemaking program in 2013, after which he worked vintages at Chandon in California, Domaine Grier in France, and De Morgenzon in Stellenbosch. He joined Villiera as full time winemaker in late 2016. Xander is a 2010 graduate of the Food Science program at Stellenbosch University. He has worked several vintages abroad in Tasmania, France and the US and also served as consulting winemaker at Highlands Road in Elgin before joining La Vierge in Hemel-en-Aarde for 3 vintages. In 2017 he moved to Villiera as full time winemaker with a focus on MCCs. Xander also has his own wine project, Stand Alone Wines, specializing in Pinot Noir from Hemel-en-Aarde.



Pierre de Klerk received his degree in Viticulture and Oenology at Stellenbosch in 2003 and then gained winemaking experience abroad and in the Cape, working harvests at Duckhorn in the Napa Valley, Château de Panery in France, and Rust en Vrede and Haskell Vineyards in Stellenbosch before making wine at Zevenwacht for 5 years. He joined Graham Beck as winemaker in 2010.



John Loubser studied winemaking at Elsenburg and worked at Moreson, de Wetshof, and Graham Beck before being offered the position of Cellar Master at Steenberg in 2001. He started his own winery Silverthorn specializing in MCC in 2003 and in 2016 left Steenberg to dedicate himself full time to making sparkling wine. He became a member of the Cape Winemakers Guild in 2005.



Melissa Genevieve Nelsen first entered the wine industry in sales and marketing in Elgin, but after moving to a farm in Bot River and finding a special source of Chardonnay grapes nearby she decided to try her hand at making MCC. Her first vintage (2008) was released in 2010. Dedicated to making only MCC, her focus is principally on Chardonnay from just one growing region (Bot River), but in 2019 she also began making a sparkling rosé from Syrah grapes she found growing on the farm and vineyard she recently purchased.



Carla Pauw studied winemaking at Stellenbosch University, after which she worked harvests in Bordeaux, New Zealand and Spain before returning to the Cape to become winemaker at Anura Vineyards in 2000. She began her own, MCC-focused label Saltare in 2003 and in 2010 devoted herself full time to Saltare.



Charl Schoeman did his Master's Degree in viticulture and enology at Stellenbosch University, graduating in 2012. He subsequently did harvests at Langhorne Creek and the Coonawarra Valley in Australia and at Dry Creek Vineyards in Sonoma County. After a harvest at Wellington Wines, he took a winemaking position at Simonsig Wine Estate where he was named lead winemaker for the white and sparkling wine portfolio in 2018. He has also done internships at Vieux Chateau Certan and Le Pin in Bordeaux.



Philip "Hakkies" Viljoen studied Oenology and Viticulture at Elsenberg like many other top South African winemakers, graduated in 2013. He subsequently did harvests at Langhorne Creek and the Coonawarra Valley

in Australia and at Dry Creek Vineyards in Sonoma County. In 2015 he joined the winemaking team at Bon Courage. He has been awarded the prestigious Diners Club Young Winemaker of the Year award.



Takuan von Arnim continues the family focus on sparkling wine (under the label Pierre Jourdan) at Haute Cabrière, established by his father Achim von Arnim in the early 1980s. He studied viticulture and winemaking at Germany's Geisenheim wine school, graduating in 1998, and further honed his skills working in cellars in Germany, France and Australia before returning to South Africa in 2004. He assumed the position of cellar master at Haute Cabrière in 2013.



Christa von la Chevallerie studied at Geisenheim in Germany where she learned to make sekt and also spent time in Prosecco and Champagne. Upon returning to South Africa she worked with Rosa Kruger to resuscitate her family farm's old bush vines and in 2011 made her first MCC named Fila. Before dedicating herself full time to her own winery she made wine at Steenberg and DGB.

Winery Profiles and Tasting Notes



Don Winkler and Mike Potashnik, Co-Publishers

In this section of the report we provide profiles of the producers whose MCCs we tasted on our trip to South Africa earlier this year as well as our comments and ratings on their wines. We tasted over 60 MCCs for this report. They were tasted with producers at the wineries, at a special tasting organized by the MCCPA, and at our Cape Town office.

The tasting notes and ratings are organized by producer with notes on the vineyards and production methods. Given the recent economic turmoil and rapid changes in exchange rates, we've listed retail prices in South Africa. At the time of our tastings, one dollar was equivalent to about fifteen South African Rand. When known, we list the US or UK importer. European consumers can also purchase many of these wines through CAPREO.com.

Ambeloui One of only two wineries located in the Hout Bay appellation, the vineyard at Ambeloui was planted by Nick Christodoulou almost three decades ago with the first vintage in 1997. Today Nick has retired, but the making of the Ambeloui MCC remains a family affair. Son Alexis took over the winemaking in 2013, and production has increased to about 750 cases, most of which is sold upon release at the winery. UK Importer: House of Townend

Ambeloui 2015 Ashley 4 Years on Lees Hout Bay 92 Nick Christodoulou first introduced us to his sparkling wines several years ago, and we've drunk them on a regular basis ever since. In our opinion, the 2015 Ashley with extended aging on the lees is the best yet. It retains the freshness we've always found in these MCCs, but the additional lees aging contributes toasty lees notes that complement and enhance lemon and apple fruit notes. It's creamy and balanced with a pleasing chalky note on the finish.

Avondale John and Ginny Grieve produced their first vintage from this Paarl wine estate in 1997. Today their son Johnathan Grieve manages the wine estate, and Corné Marais makes the wine, including the Armilla MCC. Avondale's vineyards are farmed using biodynamic practices and are certified organic. The Armilla MCC was first produced in 2009.

Avondale 2012 Armilla Blanc de Blancs Paarl 91 With two years in tank on the lees and another five years on the lees in bottle under crown cap, the 2012 Armilla is complex and nuanced. Toasty lees, citrus, and orchard fruit fragrances show on the nose. The palate is very fresh, bright and mineral like with dense lemony flavors, finishing bright and long with excellent clarity. All organic/biodynamic cultivated Chardonnay from the estate, whole bunch pressed, about 10 percent matured in French oak for about a year. Includes a portion of reserve wine. About 7 years on the lees with a dosage of 4 g/L and post-disgorgement aging of 3-6 months. Excellent South African bubbly! **Avondale 2011 Armilla Blanc de Blancs Paarl 92** A handcrafted Blanc de Blancs showing ripe Chardonnay fruit in a beautifully balanced style. Fresh and bright, this MCC is broad on the palate with notes of lemon curd, yellow stone fruit and toasty lees. New World in style with its exuberant fruit, this is the perfect pairing for roast chicken and wild fowl. Impressive! Made from organic grapes whole bunch pressed, fermented 90/10 in stainless steel and French barriques and blended with a portion of reserve wine, then left on the lees for 24 months before the second fermentation. Seven years on the lees sur latte. Just 11.5% alc. We also tasted the 2009 vintage of this MCC, and our notes are similar to those for 2011. This is a very well crafted sparkling wine that obviously develops more complexity with age.



Graham Beck Wines This esteemed MCC-only winery produces some of South Africa's best sparkling wines. Graham Beck purchased the Madeba farm, then an orchard, in 1983. The sparkling wine effort is led by Pieter "Bubbles" Ferreira, who joined Graham Beck over 30 years ago with the mandate to make world class sparkling wine. About 75% of the fruit comes from estate vineyard planted on Robertson's limestone soils. Reserve wines are aged in Austrian-made French oak vats. Malo is kept to a minimum. Pieter is cellar master, while Pierre de Klerk oversees the winemaking, and Pieter Fouché manages the 467 acre Madeba vineyard in Robertson's Breedriver Valley. Annual production about 170 thousand cases; the US is the most important export market, and 87 percent of all South African MCC sold in the US is from Graham Beck. The US importer is Beck Family Estates.

Graham Beck NV Brut Western Cape (R169) 89 This inexpensive sparkler offers excellent drinking pleasure for the price. A 50/50 blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir, it sees 15-18 months on the lees in bottle, which lends an aroma of freshly baked bread to the nose. The mouth feel is creamy with good acidity and a clean, chalky finish. RS 8.5 g/L

Graham Beck NV Brut Rosé Western Cape (R169) 90 The nonvintage Brut Rosé is Graham Beck's top selling wine in the US market and for good reason. It combines exuberant fresh, juicy strawberry, raspberry, and cherry fruit with a creamy mouth feel and consumer-friendly pricing. The palate is fruit rich without being sweet as natural acidity is balanced by about 9 g/L residual sugar. It's a 50/50 blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Graham Beck 2015 Blanc de Blancs Brut Western Cape (R299) 92 Showing fresh orchard fruit with hints of lemon and brioche, the vintage is a big step up from the non-vintage Blanc de Blancs. It's especially bright and fresh on the palate with a suave texture. 100% Chardonnay half fermented in neutral oak and with about 4 years on lees in bottle. RS 5 g/L

Graham Beck 2014 Vintage Rosé Western Cape (R299) 92 The Vintage Rosé has always been one of our favorite rosé MCCs, and the 2014 vintage is excellent. With its onion skin hue, it offers a refined bouquet of minerals and cherry skin. On the palate, it's broad and full with a delightful creamy texture and Pinot dominated flavors complemented by leesy notes. A blend of 86% Pinot Noir from Stellenbosch and 14% Chardonnay from Robertson with 5 years on the lees.

Graham Beck 2014 Cuvée Clive Western Cape (R800) 94 Cuvée Clive is Graham Beck's prestige cuvée and one of the best MCCs made, in our opinion. It's 100% Chardonnay sourced from two blocks on the Madeba farm, and it's 100% barrel fermented. It's an elegant wine that combines finesse with outstanding freshness. The bouquet is graceful with a fine perfume of minerals, almonds, and flowers. The sense of refinement and freshness continues on the palate. The Cuvée Clive spends a minimum of 5 years on the lees and has less than 5 g/L residual sugar. Delicious now, it should age and evolve beautifully.



Bon Courage Estate
Established in 1983 by the Bruwer family, this Robertson winery now has 150 ha of vines located between the Breede River and the Langeberg mountains.

Cellarmaster Jacques Bruwer produced his first MCC with the 1993 vintage, naming the line of sparkling wines in honor of his French Huguenot ancestors who hailed from the Loire Valley. Although the estate makes a wide variety of wines, MCC is Jacques' preference. The MCCs are made from estate fruit grown in the Breede River Valley, use only the first cuvée from whole bunch press, go through full malo, and spend extended time in bottle sur lie. One of South Africa's premiere sparkling wine producers. Jacques is the cellar master, and Philip Viljoen is winemaker at Bon Courage. UK Importer: Laithwaite's Wine

Bon Courage 2011 Jacques Bruère Blanc de Blancs Robertson (R195) 91 Shows an open nose of poached pear, citrus and toasted grain aromas that are mirrored on

a fresh and creamy, dry palate with good overall finesse. Finishes bright and long. Sourced from a southeast facing single vineyard at 19.6°, whole bunch pressed with the first cuvée fermented for MCC in stainless steel and kept on the lees for 8-10 months, then blended with 10% base wine from barrel. Matured on the lees in bottle for an additional 84 months and disgorged October 2018. RS 6.7 g/L 11.5% alc.

Bon Courage 2012 Jacques Bruère Brut Reserve Robertson (R195) 91+ This 60/40 blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay is made similar to the Blanc de Blancs with about 84 months on the lees. It shows a refined, fruity nose complemented by a toasty lees note. On the palate, the Pinot Noir lends a firm backbone that frames a rich, dense palate of orchard fruit, shortbread, and a note of toasted hazelnut, finishing with a firm grip and lingering sense of freshness. RS 4.8 g/L 11.75 alc.

Bon Courage 2011 Jacques Bruère Cuvée Brut Rosé Robertson (R195) 93 Light bronze apricot color. Scents of tangerine and strawberry cream. Bright on the attack with pure flavors of citrus, berry, cherry skin accented by a light toasty note on a well-balanced, voluminous palate, finishing dry with a lingering hint of sweet fruit. An excellent, fruit driven sparkling rosé. A blend of 80% Pinot Noir and 20% Chardonnay aged in bottle sur lie for 5 years with 6.6 g/L RS and 11.7% alc.



Boschendal, one of South Africa's most picturesque wineries and a South African pioneer of méthode champenoise, is today recognized for its outstanding sparkling wines. Currently (since 2019) at the MCC helm is the talented young winemaker, Eisenburg grad Danielle Jacobs, who joined Boschendal as assistant winemaker in 2017. Unfortunately, we only tasted the entry level NV Brut, but in earlier tastings at Boschendal we've tasted their Grand Cuvée and Jean Le Long cuvées made by former winemaker Liz Gerber (who has moved on to become cellar master at Distell's Nederburg winery) and found them to be very very good. Boschendal was founded by French Huguenot Jean le Long in 1685 and is one of South Africa's oldest wine estates. Jacques Viljoen is the cellar master at Boschendal. US Importer: Cape Wine Ventures (DGB), Atlanta GA

Boschendal NV Chardonnay Pinot Noir Brut (R169) 88
Aromatically light but fresh, this Brut is an easy drinking, inexpensive MCC. There's fruit and light yeasty notes on the palate and a dry finish. A blend of 61% Chardonnay and 39% Pinot Noir with a minimum of 12 months sur lie. RS 8 g/L 12% alc.



Colmant.
J.P. Colmant emigrated from Belgium to Franschhoek in 2002. After meeting Pieter

Ferreira, he soon embarked on his MCC venture, planting 5 ha of vines and convincing consulting winemaker Nicolas Follet of Champagne to join him and released his first sparkling wines in 2008. Paul Gerber, renown for the MCCs he made at Le Lude, joined Colmant late in 2019, so we can expect the already very impressive MCCs made there to only get better. Like the traditional Champagne houses, Colmant puts the focus on blending; all the Colmant sparkling wines include reserve wines and are, thus, non-vintage. Annual production about 4 thousand cases. US Importer: Kysela Pere et Fils

Colmant NV Brut Reserve Western Cape (R239/US\$44)

91+ A blend of 52% Pinot Noir and 48% Chardonnay with a minimum of 30 months on the lees, the Brut Reserve is fresh and bright with incisive aromas of lemon citrus, green apple, and toasty lees. There zesty acidity on the palate and a nice Champagne like complexity of flavors of fruit, lees, and oak. Finishes with a firm, stony cut. About 10% of the base wine was fermented in French oak, and the blend Includes about 20% reserve wines. Spends a minimum of 28 months sur latte. **Colmant NV Chardonnay**

Blanc de Blancs Western Cape (R299/US\$47) 92 Not only is this one of South Africa's best blanc de blancs, it's also an excellent value. Orchard fruit, toasted grain and leesy notes show on the nose, themes repeated on the super fresh and bright palate. It has a creamy mouth feel, excellent integration of fruit, oak, and lees, and a prolonged finish. A blend of Chardonnay from Elgin, Franschhoek, and Robertson, 15% of which is barrel fermented, with up to 20% reserve wine aged in neutral oak and 45 months on the lees. **Colmant NV Absolu**

Western Cape (R595) 94 All Chardonnay from Franschhoek and Robertson, Absolu sees extended time on the lees and less than 3 g/L dosage. It reveals a stony, mineral like nose with touches of citrus and toast and a super fine mousse. The bone-dry palate continues the theme with a dry, chalky texture, lemon and brioche notes. Intense and focused, it's surprisingly light on its feet. 15% of the base wine is fermented in neutral French oak barrels, and the final blend includes 15% of reserve wines. Spends 85 months on the lees. Not yet imported to the US. **Colmant NV Brut Rosé Western Cape (R239/\$44) 91** Showing fresh red berry/cherry aromas with a light citrus accent, this is a most appealing sparkling rosé. It offers a lively palate with crisp acidity and a suave, creamy texture with flavors that mirror the nose. The finish is firm with lingering red berry notes. A blend of 75% Pinot Noir (10% macerated on the skins) and 25% Chardonnay with 24 months on the lees; includes 15% reserve wine and 15% barrel fermented base wine. 12% alc.

Constantia Uitsig. The modern history of this estate began in 1988 when it was purchased by David and Marie McCoy. Under their ownership Constantia Uitsig has become an outstanding tourist attraction and is producing high quality premium wines, including a blanc de blancs MCC from estate fruit. Andre Rousseau, viticulturist and winemaker, has played an important role in the development of this winery during the past decade.

Constantia Uitsig 2016 Brut Constantia 88 This all Chardonnay Brut offers notes of bread dough and apple on the nose. There's rich fruit on a lively palate with notes of ripe apple and quince. Sourced from a single vineyard parcel that's almost three decades old; 10% fermented in oak with full malo and 36 months sur latte. RS 6.9 g/L, 11.5% alc. Danna de Jongh has been winemaker since 2018, but this sparkler was made by Jacques du Plessis



Dainty Bess Owned by Jane Ferreira Eades, this tiny MCC producer makes just one wine, and that it does in small quantities. Grapes are sourced from vineyards in Elgin and Wellington, whole bunch pressed, kept on the primary lees for 22 weeks followed by secondary fermentation and 35 months on the lees in bottle before disgorgement. The winemaker is Corné Marai, who also makes a distinguished MCC at Avondale, and the wine is made at the Graham Beck cellar in Robertson.

Dainty Bess 2015 Pinot Noir Rosé Western Cape (R260)

90 Named after a hybrid tea rose, Dainty Bess is pale pink rose petal in color. This 100% Pinot Noir sparkling rosé is notable for its briskness and purity. It begins with very appealing lively precise aromas of fresh red berries and proceeds to a focused, crisp, clean palate with just a hint of toasty lees. Persistent, flavorful finish, too. Sourced from vineyards in Elgin and Wellington, whole bunch pressed, kept on the primary lees for 22 weeks followed by secondary fermentation and 35 months on the lees in bottle before disgorgement. The winemaker is Corné Marai, who also makes a distinguished MCC at Avondale, and the wine is made at the Graham Beck cellar in Robertson. RS 9.2 g/L, 12.5% alc.

Delaire Graff Estate Established in the early 1980s by John Platter, the creator of South Africa's top wine guide, this 42 ha estate with 20 ha of vines was purchased in 2003 by Laurence Graff. Located on the crest of the scenic Helshoogte Mountain Pass outside Stellenbosch, a new gravity flow winery was built in 2008. The winemaker is Morné Vrey, a member of the Cape Winemakers Guild, who has done harvests in St. Emilion, Germany, and New Zealand. US Importer: Broadbent Selections

Delaire Graff NV Sunrise Brut Western Cape (R190) 89

Showing a floral and fresh fruit nose, this sparkler is bright and fresh with firm acidity, green apple and melon flavors, and a pleasing chalky finish. A blend of 58% Chenin Blanc from Stellenbosch with the addition of 36% Chardonnay from Elgin and 6% Cabernet Franc from Stellenbosch,

fermented, blended and matured in stainless for 7 months before 15 months aging on the lees in bottle. RS 8.1 g/L 12.7% alc.

Domaine des Dieux. Owner Sharon Parnell helped start this young winery in 2002 with 20 ha of vineyards in Walker Bay and Elgin; the Claudia Brut was first released in 2010. The MCC's are the first to be produced in the Hemel-en-Aarde Valley and are the winery's flagship wines. MCC represents about 45% of the winery's total 15 thousand case production.

Domaine des Dieux 2013 Claudia Brut Walker Bay (R195)

89 The Claudia Brut offers a leesy citrus nose with a light earthy note. It's bright and light on the palate with a full mousse and flavors of ripe orchard fruit. A blend of 81% Chardonnay and 19% Pinot Noir from vineyards in Hemel-en-Aarde and Botrivier; 57 months on the lees in bottle. RS 8 g/L, 11.5% alc.

Domaine des Dieux 2011 Rosé of Sharon Walker Bay (R249) **91** The Rosé of Sharon is a 58/42 blend of Pinot Noir (Champagne Clone 52C) and Chardonnay that spends a minimum of 36 months on the lees. It's bright and clear with red berries on the nose. It's very dry with excellent balance and a creamy mouth feel. RS 3.2 g/L, 12% alc.



Pieter Ferreira South Africa's "Mr. Bubbles", chef de caves at Graham Beck for over three decades, has embarked on his own, eponymous project, which is managed by his wife and business partner Ann Ferreira. The first release was the 2012 vintage, and the iconic Platter's Wine Guide named it New Winery of the Year. Ann provided us with samples of the 2013 vintage during our MCCPA tasting

held at Graham Beck earlier this year, and we brought them back to the US for tasting. These MCCs clearly belong in the very top quality range of South African and New World sparkling wines. They're produced in small quantities, so don't expect them to be imported to the US soon.

Pieter Ferreira 2013 Blanc de Blancs Western Cape (R385)

94 The 2013 Blanc de Blancs is the most elegant sparkling wine we've yet tasted from South Africa. This Extra Brut (RS 3.9 g/L) offers an abundant mousse of pinpoint bubbles with a lively bouquet of precise lemon citrus accented by a note of freshly baked bread. The palate is a marvel, creamy in texture with striking depth and purity and lovely fresh citrus, apple and pastry cream flavors complemented by a rich shortbread note. Finishes long, rich and pure with lemon notes kicking in again. As good as it is now, this is a youthful wine that should acquire additional levels of complexity with more time in bottle. All Chardonnay sourced from vineyards in Robertson and Darling with 72 months sur latte and an additional 12 months on the cork after disgorgement. 12.2% alc **Pieter Ferreira 2013 Rosé Western Cape (R385)** **93** The rosé is especially lively and refreshing. Pink grapefruit and a hint of Turkish delight appear on the nose, while the palate is brisk and dry with light red cherry/berry and a touch of mandarin. The finish is particularly clean with a laser-like focus. All Pinot Noir

sourced from vineyards in Elgin and Slanghoek with 72 months on the lees in bottle.



CHARLES FOX
CAP CLASSIQUE WINE ESTATE
ELGIN SOUTH AFRICA

Charles Fox. Charles and Zelda Fox searched for the best terroir for making MCC and in 2005 purchased a 33 ha fruit farm at 230-300m elevation in Elgin and planted 6.3 ha (now 9 ha)

of Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier vines in 10 distinct blocks on soils of clay over weathered shale. First released in 2012, the wines show the winning combination of cool-climate Elgin fruit and the skills of consulting winemaker Nicolas Follet of Reims who applies his skills in Champagne and Franciacorta in addition to South Africa. The reserved wine is aged in French oak. The wines are amazingly good for such a young winery. Production about 30 thousand bottles, mostly vintage but non-vintage production began in 2018.

Charles Fox 2013 Cipher Elgin (R625) **93** Cipher is the flagship cuvée at Charles Fox, first made in the 2011 vintage. It reveals a fine perfume of roasted nuts, shortbread and citrus. There's striking depth and brightness on a full, broad palate with rich flavors of brioche and lemony citrus and a hint of tart tatin. Priced like French Champagne and a very worthy competitor. A vineyard and barrel selection blend of 60% Chardonnay (30% barrel fermented), 30% Pinot Noir, and 10% Meunier with 5+ years on the lees. RS 6.3 g/L, 12.5% alc.

Charles Fox NV Reserve Rose Elgin (R269) **90** This is an especially bright and crisp rosé showing red berries on the nose and palate along with toasty lees notes. It's refreshing and clean with a modest amount of residual sugar. A blend of 85% Pinot Noir, 10% Chardonnay and 5% Meunier that spends a minimum of 24 months in the bottle sur lie. Charles Fox issued its first non-vintage MCC in 2018.

Genevieve. Founded by Melissa Genevieve Nelson in 2008 with a first release of the Genevieve Blanc de Blancs in 2010, this small MCC-dedicated producer makes just two wines, both sparkling. In 2019 Melissa acquired the Klein Botrivier farm that will provide fruit for future releases. In addition to the wine tasted here, she also makes a zero dosage MCC. Annual production is about 1650 cs.

Genevieve 2015 Blanc de Blancs Brut Bot River (R259)

89 Showing bright citrus with touches of melon and ripe apple on the nose, the Genevieve Blanc de Blancs is nicely balanced with good depth on a chalky palate. Grapes sourced from a Bot River parcel, picked at 19°B, whole bunch pressed, fermented in stainless steel with 3 years on the lees in bottle before disgorgement. RS 5.9 g/L, 12.5% alc.



Haut Cabrière French Huguenot Pierre Jourdan was granted this farm back in 1694 and named it after his hometown Cabrière. Fast forwarding to 1982, Achim von Arnim purchased a portion of this estate on the side of Franschhoek Mountain and began planting Chardonnay with the goal of making a South African version of Champagne, and the first Brut was sold in 1986. In 2013 Takuan von Arnim took over winemaking responsibilities from his father. Today the family's 30 ha vineyard is still planted to just two varieties—Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. The sparkling wines are mostly done in an easy quaffing style and are priced accordingly. The Blanc de Blancs is a big step above the others in terms of finesse and flavor.

Haut Cabrière NV Pierre Jourdan Blanc de Blancs (R335)

91 Sourced from Robertson vineyards from the 2010 base vintage, this is the estate's flagship wine. It was 40% matured in French oak for 5 months prior to the second fermentation and was finally disgorged in 2019 after having spent over 8 years sur latte. It's an MCC worth contemplation with lemon and herbal scents and tart tatin like notes on a rich, plump palate, finishing dry. Takuan says future versions of this sparkler may see more base wine time in oak and a bit shorter time on the lees. RS 2.5 g/L, 12% alc.

Haut Cabrière NV Pierre Jourdan Brut Western Cape (R145)

88 The Brut is an easy drinking, aperitif style sparkler showing an effusive fragrance of ripe pear and melon. The mouth feel is creamy with a red cherry accent. A blend of 85% Chardonnay and 15% Pinot Noir. RS 4.2 g/L, 12% alc.

Haut Cabrière NV Pierre Jourdan Belle Rosé Western Cape (R145)

88 This 100% Pinot Noir sparkling rosé is a lovely party wine. It offers attractive red berries on the nose, and the palate is soft and easy to drink with lingering sweet berry flavors. Perfect for wedding cake, too. RS 5.1 g/L, 12% alc.

Haut Cabrière NV Pierre Jourdan Belle Nectar Demi-Sec Rosé Western Cape (R145)

87 The off-dry Belle Nectar is for those who like their sparkling wines with a bit of sweetness. The bouquet is appealing with notes of rose petal and watermelon. Red berries show more on the palate. Leaves a lingering sense of sweetness. RS 39 g/L, 12% alc

Huis van Chevallerie The only premium MCC producer located in the Swartland, the foothills of the Paardeberg to be precise, Christa von la Chevallerie worked with old vine guru Rosa Kruger to resuscitate the 20 hectares of 44 year old dry farmed bush vines on the family's Nuwedam farm and then proceeded to make one of South Africa's most unusual and special sparkling wines. Her MCCs are made without dosage. The regular bottling sees 20 months on the lees, while the Reserve reviewed sees 30 months. 90 percent of the production at Huis van Chevallerie is sparkling. Christa von la Chevallerie is the winemaker.

Huis van Chevallerie 2015 Filia Brut Nature Kap Klassiek Swartland

90 This unusual MCC made from a 40 year old bush vine Chenin Blanc vineyard [a Certified Heritage Vineyard] is bone dry, but the rich fruit character of

Chenin still shines through. There's a nice leesy element to complement the fruit and great acidity that enlivens the wine. All Chenin Blanc from estate fruit with 20 months sur latte.

The House of J.C. Le Roux. This is South Africa's first cellar dedicated entirely to making sparkling wine. Part of the large Distell Ltd family, it's named after the prominent French Huguenot, Jean Le Roux, who emigrated from Normandy to the Devon Valley outside Stellenbosch in 1704, which is where the Le Roux House is located today. It made its first sparkling wine, a Sauvignon Blanc, in 1983, and its first Pinot Noir based MCC in 1985. Scintilla, its flagship MCC, was first made in 2003. The 2014 vintage was a gold medal winner in the 2019 Cap Classique Challenge. Elunda Basson, now the cellar manager at Steenberg, made the MCC reviewed here.

J C Le Roux 2014 Scintilla Vintage Reserve Western Cape (R282)

91 The Scintilla tête de cuvée is a delicate MCC with aromas and flavors of orchard fruit, smoky oak, and toasted hazelnuts. It has a refined, creamy texture and excellent mid-palate depth, finishing with slightly harsh wood tannins. It's young and will benefit from more time in bottle. A blend of 70% barrel fermented Chardonnay and 30% Pinot Noir sourced from two prime vineyard blocks, the Chardonnay in Stellenbosch and the Pinot Noir in Durbanville, and harvested at 18-20°B in January 2014. Fermented with Puisse de Mousse yeast with partial malo and aged in bottle on the lees for 36+ months. RS 4.7 g/L, 11.2% alc.

Kleine Zalze This winery is part of a lifestyle real estate development just outside Stellenbosch, a project of Kobus Basson. It includes a golf course, first class restaurant, a Cape Dutch style lodge and 80 ha of vines. RJ Botha is the winemaker, and Alastair Rimmer is cellar master. In addition to the NV Brut reviewed here, Kleine Zalze makes a vintage brut and a non-vintage brut rosé. Annual production is about 400 thousand cases.

Kleine Zalze NV Brut Western Cape (R160) **90** This is a well made Brut with a lemon curd nose. It reveals a crisp attack and is full in the mouth with fresh, bright notes of lemon citrus. Finishes clean and long. A blend of 60% Chardonnay from Robertson and 40% Pinot Noir from the False Bay area picked in the early morning, pressed whole bunch with free run juice vinified in stainless steel; aged in bottles on the lees for 10 months. Outstanding value!

Koelenhof Winery Primarily a custom crush producer with more than 70 private clients, this Stellenbosch estate also makes wines under its own label. The De Vries family started this estate in 1941 and began bottling its own wine in 1974. It's known for offering good value for money. Nicholas Husselman is lead winemaker.

Koelenhof 2018 Pinotage Western Cape (R140)

86 An unusual MCC made from the Pinotage grape, this sparkler has and herbal/yeasty nose. It's very dry, even austere, on

the palate showing delicate fruit notes and a clean, short finish. The perfect sparkler for making mimosas.



Krone The largest producer of MCC in South Africa, Krone makes only MCC at its Twee Jonge Gezellen wine estate in Tulbagh with vineyards on the eastern slopes of Saronsberg Mountain. This estate has a long history, and the 300 year old underground cellar is still in use. The cool temperatures of the site and high acidity of the grapes allows Krone to do malo when fermenting. The

brand is named after Nicolas Charles Krone, who introduced cold fermentation to South Africa at this estate. The first Krone Borealis MCC from the 1987 vintage was released in 1991. All Krone MCCs are vintage dated. Krone was purchased by Vinimark, South Africa's largest distributor, in 2012. Rudiger Gretschel is the cellar master, and Stephan de Beer is lead winemaker. US Importer: Maritime Winetrading Collective

Krone Borealis 2018 Vintage Cuvée Brut Tulbagh (R144)

87 Introduced by a leesy nose, the Vintage Brut reveals notes of lees, citrus, and cidery apples on the palate. Finishes dry. An easy sipping, low alcohol bubbly. A blend of 73% Chardonnay, 27% Pinot Noir; only the free run juice is used for the primary fermentation. RS 8.2 g/L, 11% alc.

Krone 2018 Rosé Vintage Cuvée Brut Tulbagh (R144)

87 Like the Vintage Brut, the Vintage Rosé reveals fresh bread dough notes on the nose. The palate offers fresh red berries on a fruity but dry palate. 87% Pinot Noir and 13% Chardonnay with 9+ months on the lees. RS 8.1 g/L, 11% alc.

Krone 2016 Kaaimansgat Blanc de Blancs Elandskloof (R500)

93 The Kaaimansgat is the first single vineyard MCC to be produced in South Africa, and 2016 is its debut vintage; it's a 4 ha, cool climate (above the snow line) parcel of 31 year old vines located at 700 m in Elandskloof. Fermented in 25 hl foudre, it's made in a more oxidative style than most South African sparklers. It reveals a complex, terroir driven nose of citrus and herbs, while the palate shows notes of roasted grain complementing orchard fruit flavors with a steely mineral accent. An original sparkling wine with 36 months sur latte. Whole bunch pressed with only the free run juice, the first 500L per ton, used for the MCC; fermented with ambient yeasts in upright wooden vats with no malo. RS 3.3 g/L, 11% alc.



Le Lude Established by Nic and Ferda Barrow in 2009, Le Lude's maiden vintage was 2012. The estate vineyard is 3.4 ha, but grapes are also sourced from Robertson,

Bonnievale and Franschhoek. Le Lude makes just 10 thousand cases annually, all sparkling. The winemaking avoids malolactic fermentation, and there's no lees contact after the primary fermentation. Their top cuvée (not tasted here) is Agrafé, which spends the secondary fermentation under cork rather than the more common crown cap. Stellenbosch grad Emma Bruwer has been the winemaker since 2019; the wines reviewed here would have been made by the previous winemaker, Paul Gerber. As remarkable as the quality of these MCCs is their high prices. UK Importer: Hard to Find Wines

Le Lude NV Reserve Brut Western Cape (R290) **89** Light yeast and citrus scents show on this bright, fresh sparkler and are mirrored on the attack. There's not a lot of staying power, and the finish is cava-like dry, making it an excellent mixer for Sunday morning mimosa. A blend of 55% Chardonnay and 45% Pinot Noir matured a minimum of 36 months on the lees before disgorgement. A small portion of the Chardonnay is oak fermented. RS 6 g/L, 12% alc.

Le Lude 2013 Vintage Cuvée Brut Franschhoek (R1195)

93 The 2013 Vintage Cuvée is a refined and balanced sparkler that shows exceptional freshness. It's a youthful wine with a muted bouquet of lemon flowers, but it shows a nice mélange of citrus and orchard fruit on a dry and focused palate. A blend of 64% barrel fermented Chardonnay and 36% Pinot Noir sourced from several areas and matured 72 months sur latte. RS 6.0 g/L, 12% alc. Disgorged March 28, 2019.

Anthonij Rupert L'Ormarins Anthonij Rupert, son of South African entrepreneur Anton Rupert, attended the Geisenheim wine school in Germany and at the end of the 1970s took the helm of the Rupert family's vineyards and winemaking operations and created the foundation of Anthonij Rupert Wine. Johann Rupert manages the business today, after his brother Anthonij's untimely death in 2001. Anthonij Rupert Wine owns four farms with 210 ha of vines. Zanie Viljoen is principal winemaker for the L'Ormarins MCC brand. Anthonij Rupert Wine makes four different MCCs under the L'Ormarins label; only the Blanc de Blancs is reviewed here.

L'Ormarins 2013 Blanc de Blancs Western Cape (R220)

92 This is a well made Blanc de Blancs with good complexity and packed with flavor. Toasty lees, pear and quince show on the nose, and, on the palate, orchard fruit appears again complemented by notes of brioche and toasted nuts, all enhanced by vibrant acidity. Finishes very dry with a chalky texture. The Chardonnay fruit is predominantly sourced from the Altima vineyard. Altima is located in Elandskloof valley north of Villiersdorp at 600-900m elevation with decomposed shale soils and huge diurnal temperature variations conducive to high natural acidity.

The fruit is 20% barrel fermented and spends about 4 years sur latte and another 8 months after disgorgement before being released. 12.5% alc

Wonderfontein Wine Farm In 2008 Henk and Monica van Niekerk moved to the Wonderfontein Wine Farm with the goal of producing high quality sparkling wine. Wonderfontein has been owned by the Marais family since 1884, and Monica is the 4th generation to live there. Their first vintage of MCC was released in 2013 at the same time with their newly born son Paul René lending his name to the brand. [Paul René is also the name of Monica's grandfather.] Located just outside Robertson on the Breede River, Wonderfontein has 290 ha of vines. Stefan Bruwer is the winemaker. Annual production is just one thousand cases.

Paul René 2016 Brut Robertson (R210) 89 Showing a lovely open nose of fresh orchard fruit, the Brut is bright and lively on the palate, finishing on a light toasty lees note. All Chardonnay sourced from the Wonderfontein's limestone soils, fermented in stainless with full malo and aged 27 months in bottle on the lees. **Paul René 2016 Rosé Robertson (R210) 90** This is a lively, easy to drink sparkling rosé that begins with appealing scents of red cherry skin. Very fresh, brisk and pure on the palate with hints of red cherry and berries. Dry and perfumed in the mouth with lingering fruit extract on the finish. A blend of 75% Pinot Noir and 25% Chardonnay sourced from the estate with 27 months on the lees. RS about 7 g/L.

Saltaré. Christoff and Carla Pauw started this Stellenbosch winery specializing in MCC in 2003. They source fruit from five vineyards across the Cape. Carla Pauw is the owner and winemaker at Saltaré. Total production about 2200 cs, 70% of which is sparkling. US Importer: Pascal Schildt Selections

Saltaré NV Brut Nature Western Cape (R215) 93 Our favorite zero dosage MCC, the Brut Nature reveals a very appealing and open nose of nougat, citrus and fresh baked baguette. Chalky dry in the mouth, the palate has notes of toasted almonds, dried stone fruit, and honeycomb. Finishes very long with excellent finesse. Quite Champagne-like in character. A blend of 59% Pinot Noir from the Helderberg and 41% Chardonnay from Robertson, about 20% reserve wine. Spends 18+ months on the lees with no added SO₂. RS 1.7 g/L, 12% alc. Disgorged January 2019.



Silverthorn. This boutique winery specializes in MCC. John Loubser, formerly Cellar Master at Steenberg, makes the wines. In our experience, these sparklers keep getting better with every vintage. Fruit is sourced from relatively old vines on the 4.5 ha estate vineyard as well as from

Darling (for Pinot Noir). A specialized sparkling wine cellar was built in 2019, so 2020 is his first harvest in his own cellar. John makes three cuvées, including the all Chardonnay Green Man, which has a portion of barrel fermented base wine, the Shiraz-based Genie rosé, and the top of the line Jewel Box with extended lees aging. All three are superb, Champagne style sparklers, that reveal John's dedication to his craft. Current production is about 3 thousand cases.

Silverthorn NV The Genie Robertson (R250) 90 With a blush onion skin color, this Shiraz based sparkling rosé reveals notes of strawberry cream and rose water on the nose. The palate is creamy yet dry with flavors that resemble the bouquet and a crisp finish. Comes from two different pickings, whole bunch pressed, with 16 months on the lees in bottle. Picked at 19° balling. RS 8.6 g/L 11.9% alc. **Silverthorn 2016 The Greenman Robertson (R280) 91** Showing notes of fresh bread and pear on the nose, the all Chardonnay The Greenman follows with a full flavored palate of pear and apple complemented by leesy notes and lemony acidity. From fruit harvested in mid-January at 19° balling; whole bunch pressed and fermented in stainless (a small proportion done in barrel). Matured a minimum of 24 months in bottle on the lees and disgorged at the end of 2019. RS 7 g/L, 12% alc. 1100 cases made. **Silverthorn 2015 The Jewel Box Western Cape (R350) 93** This is one of South Africa's most refined sparkling wines offering a lively, precise bouquet of almonds and citrus, a finely textured mousse, and a fresh, creamy palate with good mid-palate depth and overall finesse. There's bright acidity, good structure, and a beautiful, lingering finish. A blend of 70% Chardonnay and 30% Pinot Noir (from Darling). The Chardonnay was fermented in a mix of stainless and old barrels, and the final blend included a portion of reserve Chardonnay matured 12 months in old French oak. Spends a minimum of 38 months on the lees. RS 4.5 g/L, 11.8% alc. Just 250 cases made.



Simonsig. French Huguenot Jacques Malan first set foot in the winelands of the Cape in 1688. Ten generations of Malans later, Frans Malan began bottling wine under the Simonsig Estate label in 1968. He became one of the modern pioneers of South African wine, producing the first *methode champenoise* wine (Kaapse Vonkel) in 1971. Today, Debbie Thompson is the cellar master and Charl Schoeman makes the bubbles. Simonsig's prestige cuvée is the Cuvée Royale, a worthy competitor to many Champagnes.

US Importer: Quintessential Wines UK Importer: SA Wines Online Ltd

Simonsig 2018 Kaapse Vonkel Brut Western Cape (R149)

88 The first sparkling wine made in South Africa using the Champagne method, the Kaapse Vonkel is fresh and leesy on the nose with notes of orchard fruit. Surprisingly dry on the palate showing a mélange of pear and citrus with a hint of red fruit. A blend of 55% Chardonnay, 43% Pinot Noir and 2% Meunier with a portion of the Chardonnay fermented in used oak barrels; it does not go through malo. Spends about 2 years on the lees. RS 3.8 g/L, 12.2% alc. Well priced.

Simonsig 2018 Kaapse Vonkel Rosé Brut Western Cape (R149) 88 An excellent quaffing rosé that's considerably better than most Prosecco-like rosés costing considerably more. Introduced by scents of vibrant, red berries that are picked up again on the palate with good acidity. Overall, an appealing, uncomplicated MCC. Made of 76% Pinot Noir and 24% Pinotage. Over 200 thousand cases produced. RS 5.2 g/L, 12.2% alc

Simonsig 2014 Cuvée Royale Blanc de Blancs Stellenbosch (R350) 92

An excellent sparkling wine with exemplary textural finesse, the Cuvée Royale reveals a nose of citrus and flint with touches of almond and shortbread. The attack is dry, fresh and bright, and the palate is creamy and focused with good mid-palate intensity. A vineyard selection of the best Chardonnay, whole bunch pressed, 70% barrel fermented, with 48+ months sur latte. RS 4.9 g/L, 12.5% alc.

Simonsig 2014 Kaapse Vonkel Satin Nectar (R149) 87 The demi-sec Satin Nectar is a sweet bubbly with aromas and flavors of Turkish Delight and candied almonds. A bit sweet to drink on its own. Try with creamy white cheeses or biscotti but avoid pairing with sweet desserts. Blend of 55% Chardonnay, 44% Pinot Noir and 1% Meunier fermented in stainless with a portion of the Chardonnay fermented in used French oak; no malo. RS 39.5 g/L, 11.8% alc.

Spier Owned by the Enthoven family since 1993, Spier is both a major tourist draw and a significant Stellenbosch producer of premium and super premium wine with 650 ha of estate vineyards. Sparkling wine is a small part (1%) of total production with just two bottlings. Unfortunately, we were able only to taste the entry level MCC. The Brut RD, not reviewed here, spends 102 months sur latte and reputed to be outstanding. Cape Winemaker Guild member Jan Smuts is cellar master, and Heidi Dietstein makes the MCCs. US Importer: Total Wine

Spier 2017 Chardonnay Pinot Noir Brut Stellenbosch (R160)

88 This is a pleasant, fruity bubbly showing light sweet apple fruit notes on the nose and palate. There's good acidity and a dry finish, but the sample we tasted lacked vibrancy. A blend of 60% Chardonnay and 40% Pinot Noir, 10% barrel fermented in 400L used oak barrels, with 24 months on the lees. RS 6.8 g/L, 13% alc.

Steenberg Vineyards A first class winery located in the classic (and original) growing area of Constantia in the Cape Town suburbs, Steenberg's terroir is cool climate, ideal for growing fruit for sparkling wine. Elunda Basson is the new winemaker at Steenberg, and she brings with her extensive experience making MCC at JC LeRoux, so the future looks sparkling at Steenberg. Former winemaker JD Pretorius would have made the wine reviewed here; he is now the new winemaker at Warwick. Importer: Beck Family Estates

Steenberg NV 1682 Chardonnay (R205) 89

A straightforward, uncomplicated sparkler, the 1682 Chardonnay is fresh and dry showing citrus and green apple. The nose is lemony with a leesy note, the palate is pleasantly dry, and the finish is clean. The Chardonnay fruit comes from Robertson and spends a minimum of 12 months on the lees after the secondary fermentation. RS 7.4 g/L, 12% alc.

Tanzanite Owner and winemaker Melanie van der Merwe purchases prime Robertson fruit and rents cellar space to make MCC under her own label, founded in 2003 with sales beginning in 2006. She studied Viticulture and Oenology at Stellenbosch where she was the only female student in her class (1994) and did internships in Champagne with chefs de cave Michel Pansu at Louis Roederer, George Blanc at Moët & Chandon and Thierry Gasco at Pommery. She became sparkling winemaker at JC LeRoux in 1998 and later for the entire Distell group where she was responsible for the production of 600 thousand cases of sparkling wine and 80 thousand cases of MCC, including the special cuvées JC Le Roux Scintilla and Pongracz Desiderius for which she has received numerous awards. Annual production is about 1400 cases. US Importer: Kysela

Tanzanite NV Brut Breede River Valley (Robertson) (\$39)

92 The Tanzanite Brut is exceptionally fresh and vibrant. The nose reveals lemon, chalk and floral notes on nose. Exuberant on the palate with leesy notes complementing citrus and orchard fruit. 80% Chardonnay and 20% Pinot Noir from sustainably cultivated fruit grown in the Breede River Valley. **Tanzanite NV Brut Rosé Breede River Valley (Robertson) (\$39) 90** The Brut Rosé opens with vibrant scents of red berries. It's very nicely balanced with brisk acidity, tangy red berry/pomegranate fruit, and a softly textured palate. Finishes on a crisp, refreshing note. A blend of 60% Pinot Noir and 40% Chardonnay from Robertson, handpicked and whole bunch pressed in small lots with yields of 450-480L/ton, then cool fermented using Prise de Mousse yeast followed by full malo; minimum of 24 months on the lees in bottle with hand riddling.

Vergelegen This historic estate, granted to Governor van der Stel in 1700 by the Dutch East India Company, is today owned by Anglo-American PLC, which purchased it in 1987 and replanted the vineyards. Today it has 120 ha of vineyards, about 60% Cabernet Sauvignon with a total production of 40 thousand cases, about half exported to the UK. The winemaker is André Van Rensburg, one of the Cape's most colorful and passionate winemakers. The US importer is Black Hawk Imports.

Vergelegen 2015 MMV Brut Reserve Stellenbosch 90

Showing a light citrus nose, this sparkler offers a fine mousse and clean orchard fruit complemented by notes of freshly baked baguette on the palate. There's good acidity and a long, fruity finish. About 400 cs produced. Made from old vine Chardonnay grown on the estate, pressed gently in a small wood basket press, fermented and aged 12 months in neutral oak with frequent battonage before going through a second fermentation and 3+ years on the

lees. 7 g/L RS Only sold at the winery.



Villiera is another of South Africa's stellar, pioneering producers of sparkling wine, thanks to the talents of winemaker and Cape Winemakers Guild honoree Jeff Grier and his cousin, viticulturist Simon Grier. The

Tradition Brut Rosé was the first bottle fermented rosé produced in South Africa, in 1987. Villiera's vineyards were planted in 1983 and today total about 170 hectares under vine. Today, Jeff's son Xander Grier takes the sparkling winemaking lead. Villiera is a certified member of the Old Vine Project, and the vineyards are IPW (Integrated Production of Wine) certified. The farm has not used insecticides for over 15 years and a flock of 1000 Peking ducks are responsible for natural pest control. Total production is about 110 thousand cases, 35% of which is sparkling. US Importers: Fairest Cape Beverage, Cape Ardor, Red Wolf Imports

Villiera 2013 Munro Brut Stellenbosch (R279) 91/2 Toasty lees with ripe fruit notes show on the bouquet. Crisp and bright on the attack and very fresh and youthful on the palate with prominent notes of hazelnut, toasted grain, and orchard fruit. A terroir driven sparkler showing the smoky influence of decomposing granite soils. Still youthful and will benefit from additional cellaring. Sourced from estate vineyards, 61% Chardonnay, 30% Pinot Noir and 9% Pinot Meunier; half the Chardonnay was barrel fermented. At least 72 months on the lees in bottle. RS 9 g/L, 12.1% alc. **Villiera NV Tradition Brut Rosé Stellenbosch (R139) 89** This inexpensive sparkling rosé is fresh, focused and a delightful aperitif beverage. Lively aromas of red berry and cherry show on the nose with a hint of yeasty bread dough. The attack is bright, followed by flavors of red cherry skin and raspberry. Finishes clean with lingering red berry fruit notes. A blend of 35% Pinot Noir, 30% Chardonnay, 30% Pinotage, and 5% Pinot Meunier. Whole bunch pressed with only the Cuvée used for MCC. About 18 months contact on the lees. The color comes from about 2% red Pinotage wine. Great value! RS 8.g g/L, 12% alc.



Wildeckrans Wine Estate

Gary and Amanda Harlow family own this one thousand ha wine estate located in the Botrivier Valley among fields of indigenous rhenosterbos. It has about 70 ha of vines and subscribes to the Old Vines Project as well as the South African Biodiversity and Wine Initiative. Winemakers Braam Gerike and Andre Olkers make a wide variety of wines, including MCCs made with

non-traditional grape varieties.

Wildeckrans 2015 Chenin Blanc Bot River (R140) 88

Showing attractive Chenin fruit and light notes of yeasty

bread dough on the nose, this Chenin Blanc based sparkler is fresh with notes of sweet stone fruit on the palate. Nothing very complex here but easy drinking with a pleasing mousse and dry finish. The fruit for the MCC is handpicked in the early morning at 18.5° balling, gently pressed, and left on the lees for 18 months. 12% alc. [R225 on web site]

Annex: IWR Reports and Articles on South African Wine

Reports

Report #55: Wines of South Africa: White Blends & Old Vines
Report #30: The Wines of South Africa
Special Report: Exciting Sparkling Wines of South Africa
Special Report: South African Chenin Blanc
Special Report: South African Value Wines

Articles

2020

De Krans: Outstanding Port-Style Wines from Calitzdorp
Mullineux Wines of the Swartland: It's All About the Soils
Avondale: A Natural Leader in South Africa's Paarl Wine Region

2019

The Wines of Babylon's Peak in South Africa's Swartland
Top Chenin Blancs from South Africa
Vergelegen: Modern Wines from a 300 Year Old Estate
The Chenin Blancs of Breedekooft Wine Valley
Graham Beck: Exclusive Focus on Premium Sparkling
Richard Kershaw Lifts Elgin to New Heights
Art-Food and Wine at Quoin Rock
Keermont Vineyards of Stellenbosch Revisited

2018

Warwick Wine Estate of Stellenbosch
Samantha O'Keefe's Terroir Wines from Greyton's Lismore Winery

2017

Eben Sadie's Very Old Vine Wines from South Africa: The 2015 Vintage
De Martino and Sadie Family: Old Vine Cinsault from Two Outstanding Winemakers in Chile and South Africa

2016

Boschendal's Single Varietals from Cool, High Altitude Elgin Vineyards
The Wines of Duncan Savage: Cape point Vineyards and Savage Wines
AA Badenhorst of the Swartland: New Releases
Mullineux's Rapidly Rising Star: A Review of Current Releases
Eighth Wonder: Wines from a New South African Winery

2015

Wild Fire in Constantia's Vineyards
IWR 10th Anniversary Retrospective: South African Wines
Steenberg Winery of Constantia: History in a Glass

2014

South Africa's Eagles' Nest: Flying High
Jean-Philippe Colmant's Superb South African Sparklers

2013

Miles Mossop Wines of Stellenbosch
Book Review: Wines of the New South Africa
Great Winemakers: Andrea and Chris Mullineux of the Swartland

2012

New Releases from Neil Ellis in South Africa
Fresh 2011 Rosés from South Africa: Boekenhoutskloof, Fairview, Goats do Roam
Wines from the Cederberg Wilderness Area
Top Ten South African Red Wine Values Under \$20
Top South African White Wine Values Under \$20
Bellfield: A South African Boutique Winery in Elgin

2011

The Wines o Blaauwklippen Valley in Stellenbosch: Kleinood, Keermont, & de Trafford
Tasting Sangiovese in South Africa with Ntsiki Biyela of Stellekaya
Six Hats Fair Trade Wines from South Africa: Super Value with Equity
The 2011 Vintage: First Releases from Chile and South Africa
Constantia Wyn and the U.S. Founding Fathers
South African Sparklers: Simonsig Wine Estate MCC

2010

South African Chenin Blanc: Some of the Best
Southern Hemisphere Sauvignon Blanc Tasteoff
Shannon Vineyards: South African Viticulture at its Best
The World Cup of South African Wines by the Glass