Introduction

Chenin blanc is SA’s most planted vine and with good reason. The brandy producers took advantage of its great yields, but its wide range of aroma profiles and good acidity leans itself to all styles of wine; from MCC, young fresh wines, rich and ripe wines (wooded and unwooded), all the way to sweet dessert wines. The latter is produced in a various creative natural ways, but essentially consists of squeezing “nectar” from the grapes. Very small quantities are produced as the weather plays a big role and the yields are small.

Top quality, award winning wines are produced in this sweet category; to name a few; Perdeberg Winery makes a Natural Sweet Chenin; Nederburg, Badseberg and Ken Forrester produce outstanding Noble Late Harvests; and De Trafford and Mullineux some beautiful Straw Wines.

Nonetheless, the market for these wines is small and the general consumer seems to be either oblivious to its existence or plainly does not understand it. This poses a risky situation and the question arises whether enough is done to promote these wines in its potential context?

Clearly more should be done to showcase this category and obtaining the chemical and sensory profiles, is step one.

Experimental design

The objectives were to analyse natural sweet Chenin blanc wines on a chemical and sensory level. This is the first study in this category and thus laying the foundation. The consumer perception and preference is critical to the industry and studies on these subjects are in the pipeline.

Results

The figure shows a clear sensory distinction between the different natural sweet Chenin styles.

The wines differ in appearance (gold), ripe fruit and other aromas, taste (sweet, acidic) and mouth feel (smooth and viscous).

An extensive list of descriptive terms associated with these sweet Chenin styles were compiled. A flavour wheel for sweet Chenins is in the pipeline.

Conclusions

- The first sensory descriptor lexicon was generated for Natural Sweet Chenin blanc wines.
- Intensive sensory profiling of Natural Sweet Chenin blanc was initiated.
- Data towards chemical database for SA wines were generated.
- Extended data sets can be used for correlation analysis.
- Further studies on consumer perception and preference could give insight on marketing opportunities.