

# STANDARD BANK CHENIN BLANC TOP 10 CHALLENGE – 2018 REPORT



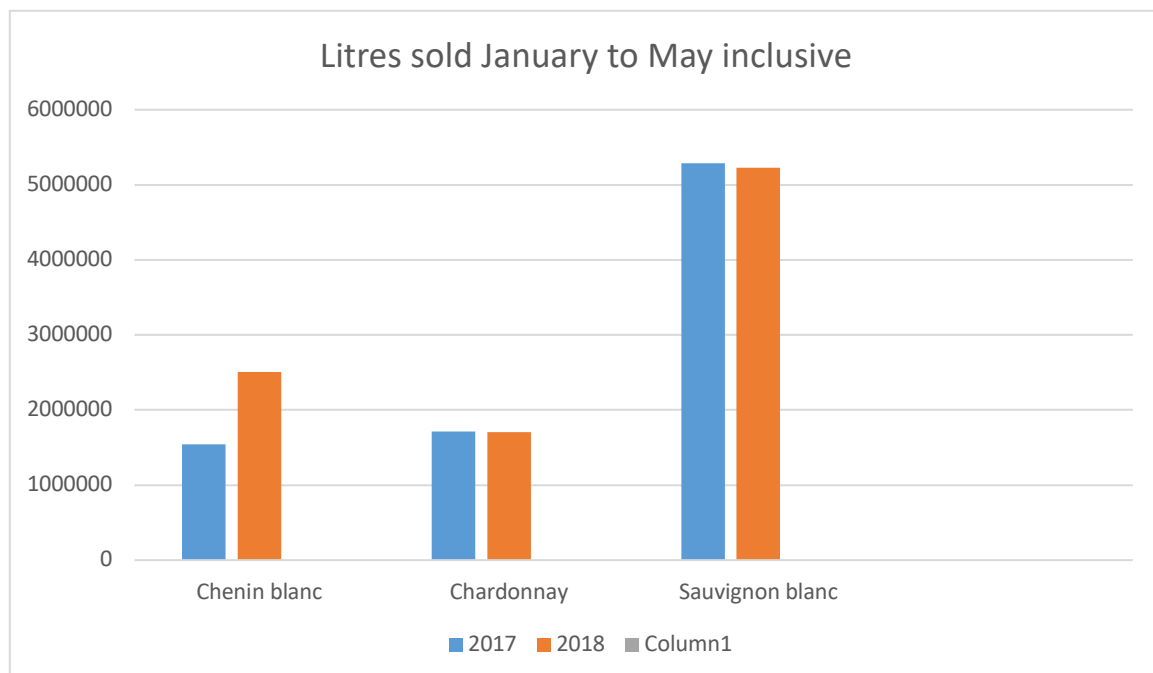
- Context

From the outside looking in, the Chenin Blanc Association is arguably the most professional of similar organisations in South Africa’s wine industry today. Not only are its events impeccably run, its communication with its members and interested parties (think journalists, influencers, sommeliers etc) is transparent, informative, up-to-date and well composed. Much of this is a factor of having sufficient funds, but the importance of leadership, vision and commitment cannot be overlooked.

There have been two instances where the excellent work done by the association, its officers and its members were highlighted this year.

The first was, because so much is in our digital economy and society, the reach and engagement achieved by its #DrinkChenin Day social media campaign. On Twitter alone, it generated 4.9 million impressions and reached 646 235 unique users. There are big name beer brands that dream about those numbers.

The second was an analysis of domestic sales for chenin blanc versus sauvignon blanc and chardonnay, for the months of January to May in 2017 and 2018. This showed that the number of litres of chenin blanc sold during the five-month period in 2018 was 62.7% up on that sold during the first five months of 2017. For sauvignon blanc, the figure was 1.1% down and for chardonnay 0.5% down.



Could the first have an impact on the second? Of course, all marketing is supposed to influence sales. But, in this case it didn't: #DrinkChenin Day was on June 17 and so didn't fall into the five-month period reviewed. Waiting for updated figures with bated breath ...

The challenge for the association is obviously to maintain the momentum, momentum initiatives such as the Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge help drive.

- The Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge 2018 judging and procedures

The judging was conducted according to a protocol detailing both the logistics and tasting procedures. This is not only good governance but ensures consistency and is a guarantee that the same procedures will be followed each year.

The wines were tasted blind with no indication of vintage, cellar treatment or technical analysis by the five-person panel, scoring done according to the 20-point system. Judges were allowed to request vintage and technical details if they felt it would assist them better understand a wine.

After the first round of judging was concluded, 27 wines were considered to show particular merit and went through to a second round where the panel could give them more detailed examination. There were seven wines that clearly achieved scores to take them into the Top 10. Five others each achieved the same score, and were reflighted and retasted. From this, three emerged as standing a little taller than the other two, and therefore made the coveted list.

The judging panel comprised five judges – including one international judge – and an associate, whose score was not considered but who was there to learn and to contribute to the discussion. It must be noted that the associate performed particularly well this year. Panel members were:

- Cathy van Zyl MW (Chair)
- Richard Kershaw MW
- James Pietersen (Wine Cellar)
- Tinashe Nyamudoka (Test Kitchen)
- Simon Field MW
- Associate Judge: Spencer Foudaumiére (formerly at Burrata)

- Key findings and commentary

There were 159 entries from 99 producers in this year's Challenge. This is up on the 136 entries in 2017, the 124 in 2016 and the 126 for the 2014 Challenge, and also tops the previous high of 145 entries received for the 2015 Challenge.

Of the 160 entries in the 2018 Challenge, 113 wines – or 71% – were wooded, and 46 wines – or 29% – unwooded. This year, the number of wines bottled under screw cap topped 50%, there was one plastic cork, 62 natural corks (39%) and 16 Diam corks (10%).

As always, the quality on the judging table on the day is of such a standard that it is more a case of which wines to leave out of the top 10, rather than which to include, a fact highlighted this year more so in 2017 as a second 'final' judging round was required to arrive at the final list.

Judges preferences aside, there are still wines that show more oak influence than others, and there are those that are possibly too fresh and fruitful. The majority of these are exceedingly well done but there were others in this year's competition that had sauvignon blanc-esque aromas and flavours, and a handful that had been bottled too young and still showed fermentation esters.

The publication of the 2018 Top 10 Challenge list brings the total number of producers to have made an appearance over the five-year history to 27.

Excitingly, there are five producers debuting in this year's top 10, and two producers each making their fifth appearance (this was also the case in 2017 and highlights the judges' claim that the standard is so high, any number of wines could have made it on to the Top 10 on the day). One of these has made the list every year, but with different wines, while the other 'made up' for the 'year skipped' with two wines on the list in one year.

The average price of the top 10 wines in 2018 is R200, which might cause some consumers to hold on tight to their wallets. However, the lowest priced wine on the Top 10 Challenge list for 2018 will set the consumer back just R70 and the next least expensive R90, while there are two topping R265 and one at R375. In comparison, the average price of the top 10 wines in 2015 and 2016 was R124 a bottle.

Again, one of the characteristics of this year's Top 10 Challenge 2018 wines is the dominance of older vineyards. While one of the winners comes from 12-year old vines, the others come from vines that are older than 27 years. Indeed, the oldest vineyard in the line-up is 65-years old. (Please see the individual winners' write ups for details.)

Further, grapes for the 2018 Top 10 Challenge wines come from widespread vineyards including Cederberg, Stellenbosch including Bottlery and Faure, Darling, Elgin, Durbanville, the Swartland specifically Voor-Paardeberg, Perdeberg, Malmesbury, Tygerberg, Slanghoek, Wellington and Botriver.

Also interesting is the relatively narrow band of residual sugars in the wines, as well as the low average: 2.3g/l to 4.7g/l with an average of 3.63g/l. One could say that this bucks the trend towards 'enhancing appeal with a little sweetness' but – with four wines over 4g/l sugar, that's a claim we shouldn't make. Total acidities ranged from 5.3g/l to a never-in-this-taster's-life-experienced 8.8g/l, with an average of 6.46g/l. Again, with 8.8g/l in the set of numbers, no conclusions should be drawn. The average alcohol was 13.9% with a low of 13% and a high of 14.74%.

Again, the one question that must be asked following the announcement of the 2018 list is 'Where are the unwooded wines?'

Of the 33 individual wines that have made it to in the five years of the Challenge's history, only one has been unwooded. After much deliberation, the association, its non-executive directors and its members (represented by the committee) agreed that there would not be a 'quota' system put in place, and that unwooded and wooded would be judges side-by-side on the day.

- The Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge list for 2018

Cederberg Private Cellar Five Generations Chenin Blanc 2016  
DeMorgenon Reserve Chenin Blanc 2017  
Jean Daneel Wines Signature Chenin Blanc 2016 (debut)  
Leopard's Leap Culinaria Chenin Blanc 2016  
Mulderbosch Vineyards Chenin Blanc Steen op Hout 2017 (debut)  
Slanghoek Wynkelder Legends Barrel Fermented Chenin Blanc 2016 (debut)  
Spier Wines 21 Gables Chenin Blanc 2017  
Stellenrust 53 Barrel Fermented Chenin 2017  
Wellington Wines La Cave Chenin Blanc 2016 (debut)  
Wildekrans Barrel Select Chenin Blanc Reserve 2017 (debut)

- Analysis of the Top 10 Challenge list over the five-year history

*Two wines feature in the Top 10 four years in a row:*

Perdeberg The Dry Land Collection Courageous Barrel Fermented Chenin Blanc (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

Spier 21 Gables Chenin Blanc (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018)

*One producer features in the Top 10 five years in a row:*

Spier with 21 Gables (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018) and Private Collection for Woolworths (2014)

*Two producers feature in the Top 10 four years in a row:*

DeMorgenzon (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Perdeberg (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

*Five appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:*

Spier (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Stellenrust (2014, 2015, 2 x 2017, 2018)

*Four appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:*

DeMorgenzon (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018)

Perdeberg (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

*Three appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:*

Kleine Zalze (2014, 2 x 2016)

Leopard's Leap (2015, 2016, 2018)

*Two appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:*

Bellingham (2014, 2016)

Cederberg Private Cellar (2017, 2018)

KWV (2014, 2015)

Rijk's (2014, 2016)

Simonsig (2014, 2015)

*One appearance in the Top 10 Challenge:*

Aetermitas (2015)

Allee Blue (2016)

Boschendal (2016)

Boutinot (2015)

Fleur du Cap (2017)

Jean Daneel Wines (2018)

L'Avenir (2015)

Mulderbosch (2018)

Nederburg (2017)

Remhoogte (2014)

Slanghoek Wynkelder (2018)

Spice Route (2017)

Villiera (2014)

Wellington Wines La Cave Chenin Blanc 2016 (2018)

Wildeckrans Barrel Select Chenin Blanc Reserve 2017 (2018)

Windmeul (2017)

- Tasting notes

**Cederberg Private Cellar Five Generations Chenin Blanc 2016  
R225, David Nieuwoudt**

Alc 14%  
RS 3.8g/l  
TA 6.7g/l  
pH 3.48  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 11 months – 33% new  
Vines 12 years old  
WO Cederberg

Bright and full of verve with tropical fruit, lemon peel and citrus bouquet and flavours, a saline hint and rich, long finish overlain with vanilla detail.

**DeMorgenzon Reserve Chenin Blanc 2017**  
**R375, Carl van der Merwe**

Alc 14.4%  
RS 3.7g/l  
TA 5.9g/l  
pH 3.34  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 10 months – 20% new  
Vines 46 years old  
WO Stellenbosch

Complex ginger spice nose, hint crème fraiche and white peach and nectarine; layered complexity from interplay oak and fruit, enlivening acidity, dry and pithy conclusion.

**Jean Daneel Signature Chenin Blanc 2016**  
**R269, Jean-Pierre Daneel**

Alc 14.5%  
RS 2.6g/l  
TA 6.2g/l  
pH 3.41  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 12 months – 20% new  
Vines Between 35 and 65 years  
WO Western Cape (Stellenbosch, Malmesbury, Perdeberg)

Initially quite closed, opens up to yellow cling peach and spice nose, very well-composed with a rich and vanilla-driven palate lifted by bright fruit and fresh acidity.

**Leopard's Leap Culinaria Chenin Blanc 2016**  
**R90, Renier van Deventer**

Alc 13.5g/l  
RS 3.3g/l  
TA 6.5g/l  
pH 3.29  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 9 months – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fill  
Vines Average age 20 years  
WO Western Cape (Voor-Paardeberg)

Very expressive, honey and white peach with orange and other citrus aromas, beautifully textured with a decent grip and satisfying dryness.

**Mulderbosch Chenin Blanc 'Steen Op Hout' 2017**  
**R70, Adam Mason**

Alc 13.5%  
RS 2.3g/l  
TA 5.3g/l  
pH 3.61  
Oak 100% stainless steel fermented, 28% aged in barrel – 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> fill  
Vines 60% 30+ years, 40% 20-29 years  
WO Western Cape (Stellenbosch, Darling)

A slow burner, needs time to unfold and show its charm. Wet stones and faint orange blossom, some passion fruit, bright acidity with lovely weight and lingering mineral finish.

**Slanghoek Legends Barrel Fermented Chenin Blanc 2016**  
**R196, Nico Grundling**

Alc 13.8%  
RS 4.7g/l  
TA 5.4g/l  
pH 3.51  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 26 months – 100% new  
Vines 29 years old  
WO Slanghoek

Charming and elegant, jasmine delicacy on classy fresh orchard fruits, purposeful, well-integrated and exceedingly long with deftly handled oak.

**Spier Wines 21 Gables Chenin Blanc 2017**  
**R198, Jacques Erasmus**

Alc 14.74%  
RS 4.6g/l  
TA 6.0g/l  
pH 3.40  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 14 months – 60% new  
Vines 33 years old  
WO Coastal (Tygerberg)

Pretty with apple blossom, orange and bruised apple, but ripe and very structured on the palate, well-handled oak detail and steely palate, rich but exceedingly fine.

**Stellenrust 53 Barrel Fermented Chenin Blanc 2017**  
**R200, Tertius Boshoff**

Alc 14.1%  
RS 4.4g/l  
TA 7.9g/l  
pH 3.21  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 9 months  
Vines 53 years old  
WO Stellenbosch

Initially restrained, opens to marzipan and white orchard fruit, florals; is vibrant and bright with integrated oak and a pleasant 'off-piste' bitter lift and salinity on the finish.

**Wellington Winemakers Selection La Cave Chenin Blanc 2016**  
**R120, Erik van Wyk, Francois van Niekerk**

Alc 13.5%  
RS 2.8g/l  
TA 5.9g/l  
pH 3.56  
Oak Barrel fermented, aged 12 months – 100% new  
Vines 27 years old  
WO Wellington

Pure fruit expression with key lime pie, peach and apple, with ripe papaya and other tropical fruits on the palate, well-integrated and smooth, very long and genteel sweet impression on the finish.

**Wildeckrans Barrel Select Reserve Chenin Blanc 2017**  
**R265, Braam Gericke**

Alc 13.0%  
RS 4.2g/l  
TA 8.8  
pH 3.26  
Oak Barrel Fermented, aged 12 months – 30% new oak  
Vines 36 years old  
WO Botriver/Walker Bay

Subtle spice with white peach, salty orange and florals, wet clay lift, bright and balancing acidity, long and fulsome yet with a sense of lightness of being.