

STANDARD BANK CHENIN BLANC TOP 10 CHALLENGE – 2021 REPORT

- The Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge 2021 judging and procedures

We followed pretty much the same procedures as last year to accommodate the required strict Covid – 19 protocols. Besides this judging at the Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge 2021 was conducted according to standard tasting protocols detailing both the logistics and tasting procedures as before. This is not only good governance but ensures consistency and is a guarantee that the same procedures will be followed each year. For the first time we included some highly rated non-entrants as blind benchmarks as added calibration, further enhancing the rigour of this competition.

The judging panel comprised of five judges – unfortunately there was no international judge this year due to the Covid 19 travel restrictions – and an associate, whose score was not considered but who was there to learn and to contribute to the discussion. The associate judging position is a crucial part in the guidance and mentorship of up-and-coming young judges to give them the opportunities to gain experience.

Panel members were:

James Pietersen (Chair – CEO Wine Cellar)

Boela Gerber CWM (Senior Judge – Groot Constantia Richard Kershaw Wines)

Higgo Jacobs (Senior Judge – Sommerlier and Strauss Auction Wine Specialist)

Malu Lambert (Wine Writer, malulambert.com)

Penelope Setti (Penny Noire Winebar, Chef's Warehouse)

Amos Sobashe (Oldenburg)

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 of the 138 entered wines was concluded, 26 wines were considered to show merit and went through to a second round where the panel could give them more detailed examination.

After the scores were tallied in the final round of tasting, there were 10 wines that clearly achieved scores to take them into the Top 10.

- Key findings and commentary

What stands out is the incredible quality of SA Chenin Blanc. We are the benchmark for this variety on the global stage and as such we see greater competition, leading to greater innovation with each new release! This is evident in the winemaker's exploration of new regions, the use of skin contact, natural fermentation and a myriad of fermentation and maturation vessels.

There were 138 entries from 81 producers in this year's Challenge, exactly the same amount of producers as last year. This is a par with last year's entries but down quite a bit on the 150 in 2019 and the 159 entries in 2018, and similar to the 136 entries in 2017, but still up on the 124 in 2016 and the 126 for the 2014 Challenge. The uncertainty surrounding Covid 19 playing its part.

Of the 138 entries in the 2021 Challenge, 95 wines were indicated as wooded on the entry form versus 108 for 2020 and 113 for 2019, this is equivalent to 68% (2019 - 75%). Obviously, 43 wines were unwooded (there were 28 in 2020) a significant increase, equivalent to 31%. However, this

distinction between wooded and unwooded is becoming more and more moot as we see the rise in the use of older barrels, eggs, concrete tanks and amphora.

With the added benefit of known benchmarks included blind in the tasting and a rigorous and experienced panel we are once again excited and convinced by the incredible selection of Chenin Blanc on display. It really does seem to be getting better each year. We also see a healthy consistency in the top performing wines, especially considering that the panel rotates.

Judges remarked on the quality of the wines entered in the competition, particularly that oaking was extremely well handled and that the younger fresher styles also came through again this year. We are seeing an even greater style variation with especially skin contact, the use of amphora and 'natural winemaking' coming to the fore.

The wines were mostly from the 2020 vintage, an excellent white wine vintage, evident in the high acidities and low pH's in the wines and alcohols that are generally closer to 13%. The top wines share a sense of detail, refinement, and complexity.

The Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge list for 2021 includes (in alphabetical order):

- Bellingham The Bernard Series Old Vine Chenin Blanc Limited Release 2020
- DeMorgenzon Reserve Chenin Blanc 2020
- Guardian Peak Donkiesbaai Steen 2020
- Ken Forrester Terre Noire Chenin Blanc 2020
- Kleine Zalze Wines Vineyard Selection Chenin Blanc 2020
- Kleine Zalze Wines Family Reserve Chenin Blanc 2020
- Le Belle Rebelle Solitude Chenin Blanc 2020
- Lieland Vineyards Old Vine Chenin Blanc 2020
- Simonsig Wines Avec Chêne Wooded Chenin Blanc 2019
- Stellenrust Old Bushvine Chenin Blanc 2020

It brings the total number of producers to have made an appearance over the seven-year history to 35, as there are three producers debuting in this year's Top 10 (Guardian Peak, Le Belle Rebelle and Lieland). There is also one producer making its eighth appearance (StellenRust), with a top 10 position once again and one their seventh appearance (DeMorgenzon)!

The average price of the top 10 wines in 2021 is R244 (R192.80 – 2020). The lowest priced wine on the Top 10 Challenge list for 2020 is R120 (2020 – R68) and the highest price R430 same as 2020.

Grapes for six of the 2021 Top 10 Challenge wines come from Stellenbosch while others have been sourced from Worcester, Pienekierskloof, Swartland and Paarl. There was a great spread of styles, it is clear however that older established vineyards do play a significant role in producing quality Chenin Blanc. Most of the wines this year were off 30 year and older vineyards, with a 14, 20 and 30 year old being the three youngest and the oldest vineyards close to 50 years of age. (Please see the individual winners' write ups for details.)

All of the 2020 Top 10 wines included portions either fermented or matured in wood, the largest new oak percentage was 50% and the use of larger oak vessels like the 400l foudre, clay pots, amphora and concrete eggs all contribute to the sophistication of the oak/maturation regimes.

Residual sugars seem are more or less around the 3,6g/l and the lowest was 2,4 g/l residual on the DeMorgenzon and the highest 6.1g/l residual sugar was on the Kleine Zalze Vineyard Selection. There were only two wines with an RS over 3.9 g/l.

- [Analysis of the Top 10 Challenge list over the six-year history](#)

The only wine to feature in the Top 10 seven years in a row:

DeMorgenzon Reserve Chenin Blanc (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

Eight appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:

Stellenrust (2014, 2015, 2 x 2017, 2018, 2019, 2 x 2020, 2021)

Seven appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:

DeMorgenzon (2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

Spier (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020)

Kleine Zalze (2014, 2 x 2016, 2 x 2019, 2 x 2021)

Six appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:

Four appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:

Perdeberg (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017)

Three appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:

Cederberg Private Cellar (2017, 2018, 2019)

Leopard's Leap (2015, 2016, 2018)

Rijk's (2014, 2016, 2019)

Bellingham (2014, 2016, 2021)

Simonsig (2014, 2015, 2021)

Two appearances in the Top 10 Challenge:

KWV (2014, 2015)

Slanghoek Wynkelder (2018, 2019)

Durbanville Hills (2019, 2020)

Mulderbosch (2018, 2019)

Ken Forrester (2019, 2021)

One appearance in the Top 10 Challenge:

Aetermitas (2015)

Allee Blue (2016)

Boschendal (2016)

Boutinot (2015)

Flagstone Winery (2019)

Fleur du Cap (2017)

Jean Daneel Wines (2018)

L'Avenir (2015)

Nederburg (2017)

Remhoogte (2014)

Spice Route (2017)

Villiera (2014)

Wellington Wines La Cave Chenin Blanc 2016 (2018)

Wildekrans Barrel Select Chenin Blanc Reserve 2017 (2018)

Windmeul (2017)

- Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge 2019 at a glance

Producer	Wine	Vintage	Alcohol	RS	TA	pH	Oak	Vine age	Price
Bellingham	The Bernard Series Old Vine Chenin Blanc Limited Release	2020	13.45	3.81g/l	6.27g/l	3.45	32% new, 30% 2 nd fill French, 30% Foudre and 8% terracotta amphora	37 – 49 years	R189
DeMorgenzon	Reserve Chenin Blanc	2020	13.91%	2.4g/l	5.8g/l	3.56	Fermentation in French oak, 20% new. Barrel matured for 10months.	49 years	R430
Guardian Peak	Donkiesbaai Steen	2020	14.34%	3.8g/l	5.7g/l	3.24	50% in new and second fill French plus concrete egg and clay amphora	20 and 38 years	R275
Ken Forrester	Terre Noire Chenin Blanc	2020	13.09	2.9g/l	6g/l	3.34	400l French oak barrels, 30% new, rest 2 nd and older.	35 and 37 years	R295
Kleine Zalze Wines	Vineyard Selection Chenin Blanc	2020	13.44%	6.1g/l	6.8g/l	3.22	No new oak only older French barrels plus for the first time a portion in amphora	30 years	R120
Kleine Zalze Wines	Family Reserve Chenin Blanc	2020	13.65%	4.8g/l	6.4g/l	3.36	400l 2 nd , 3 rd , and 4 th French Oak and 1 x 500l amphora	40 years	R240
Le Belle Rebelle	Solitude Chenin Blanc	2020	13.11%	3.9g/l	6.5g/l	3.32	100% 2 nd fill French Oak	14 years	R240
Lievland Vineyards	Old Vine Chenin Blanc	2020	13%	2.5g/l	6.3g/l	3.39	50% Neutral oak.	45 and 38 years	R160
Simonsig Wines	Avec Chêne Wooded Chenin Blanc	2019	13.2%	3.1g/l	6.8g/l	3.15	11 months in 2 nd fill French 225l and 400l barrels.	35 years	R195
Stellenrust	Old Bushvine Chenin Blanc	2020	13.9%	3.6g/l	7.4g/l	3.14	7 month in old French 225 barrels, 4 th to 5 th fill.	42 years	R300