

There's a low survival rate among producers who focus all their attention on an obscure variety. By the same token, very few wineries enjoy a reputation for more than one or two cultivars or blends. Neville Dorrington, who owns Rijk's in Tulbagh, recently lamented how difficult it has been to persuade the market to look beyond his chenins (which are often extraordinary) and his pinotages (which have collected a cabinet full of awards). He was simply observing how hard it is to get a third line (in his case, Shiraz) front-of-mind.

Blaauwklippen, on the other hand, has enjoyed a reputation for its Zinfandel for at least 35 years - and is pretty much unknown for everything else. The fact that the property has yielded some fine Cabernets, good Ports and now makes an excellent estate brandy has changed nothing: mention the name Blaauwklippen to any wine literate South African and the response will be "zinfandel." It's hardly surprising that Rolf Zeitvogel, the estate's cellarmaster and CEO, recently hosted a tasting unashamedly setting out to celebrate the property's flagship variety. Best known in California, but present also in Italy (where it is called Primitivo), Blaauwklippen's cultivar of choice remains steadfastly obscure in South Africa.

There are less than 30 hectares of Zinfandel in South Africa - and almost half of the total plantings are to be found at Blaauwklippen. The oldest blocks still producing fruit date to 1978, though there were some even older vines which were replaced a few years ago. Walter Finlayson, who was the estate's first modern era winemaker, helped the Boonzaiers set up the cellar and the vineyards after his family farm (known variously as Hartenberg and Montagne) was acquired by Gilbeys in 1976. No doubt Finlayson's knowledge of the variety came from his days at Hartenberg and in 1981, he won his second Diners Club award (the first, for a cabernet, had been the year before) for a Blaauwklippen Zinfandel.

Another important block of Zinfandel was established at Kleine Zalze (then also a Gilbeys property) at about the same time. In the mid-1980s the Kleine Zalze winemaker, Marinus Bredell, won the trophy for the best red at the Young Wine Show with a wine made from this vineyard. Thirty years ago you could have been forgiven for thinking that Zinfandel was destined to be the next big thing in Cape wine.

With all the eggs in one basket, Blaauwklippen's Zeitvogel seems to be applying Andrew Carnegie's adage - which is to look after the basket. His tasting began with a Cap Classique made from zinfandel (regular white fizz colour, dense and quite viscous on the palate) continued through a blanc de noir which had the typical "blush" hue (but which balanced savoury and off-dry notes very successfully) and reached its apogee with the Reserve 2009.

I wasn't sure how much I was really looking forward to the red - Zinfandel is capable of delivering intensity, opulence and a massive whack of alcohol - but I found myself completely taken by the wine. It was full and concentrated - no question - but still offered a savoury freshness on the palate to counter-balance the weight and structure. Compared to some Californian examples (which reach alcohols of 16% and more), it was a mere slip of a wine: but it vindicated Blaauwklippen's fidelity to the variety. It's a pity the 2009 came from the estate's library stocks: I'd have happily included it in the Six Nations Challenge line-up in August.

Rolf Zeitvogel wrapped up the event with a little gin tasting ("zin and gin" as he put it) in order to show what the Triple Three Distillery - which operates alongside the property

but with different shareholders - has been doing in the hand-crafted gin market. The boom in artisanal gin is a worldwide phenomenon, with a couple of South African distillers producing fabulous products. Triple Three is among the elite: its *100% Juniper Berry* and its *African Botanicals* are my favourites in the range.