

Tasting my way through only a small selection of the 800 mainly current release wines at WineX in Sandton last month, I was treated to something of a bird's-eye view of the country's indisputably dynamic wine industry. Allowing that only about 250 of the country's producers are big enough to justify attending a consumer wine show, the presence of 60% of them means that the line-up really reflected an important overview of the country's production. There was very little of the high volume industrial wine (a fair amount of which is either exported in bulk, or sold locally mainly in the vicinity of the winelands.) There was also only a very small representation from the ultra-boutique and garagiste end of the spectrum. The 1 - 5 barrel batches produced by the more adventurous winemakers contribute excitement to the debate (and provide fodder for the bloggers). The finest examples are pre-sold on allocation or within weeks of release.

National pride rather than statistical analysis drives the generally held South African belief that the Springboks face the All Blacks on almost equal terms. Anyone who actually counts the number of times the men in green-and-gold have beaten the Kiwis will recognise that the default winners are not from the African continent. The wine industry has its own sustaining myth - the idea that our red wines are better than our whites, and are worth more money (and more emotional energy). Most critics and wine writers do not agree. Where there are competitive judging environments (the Six Nations Challenge comes to mind) there is more objective evidence to support the strangely unfashionable view that the whites are significantly better than the reds.

That was certainly my impression from my WineX tastings. The 2014 vintage of the Vondeling Babiana is probably the best ever produced by the cellar, and while the 2012 Erica Shiraz bagged a Platter 5 star, I'd rather be drinking the beautifully textured, delicately aromatic white blend. (I'd also happily destroy a platter of oysters with the cellar's 2015 Sauvignon Blanc - crisp, zesty and with distinct passion-fruit aromas giving the bouquet a perfect lift.)

The 2014 Viognier from Lynx was another standout wine. Fresh (13.5%) and fragrant, but with lovely savoury textures on the palate, it was completely different from the oily, rich examples which have turned wine drinkers off the cultivar. The Oak Valley Mountain Reserve 2010 was a splendid Sauvignon-semillon blend - the kind of wine of which a producers in the Graves region of Bordeaux might easily be proud. The Oak Valley Chardonnay - which has a Veritas Double Gold to its name - was showing rather too much oak at present, but should be fabulous in a few years time.

Reyneke's extraordinarily well priced (R55) sauvignon-semillon 2015 blend was simply delicious, though the more expensive R85) wooded Sauvignon offered more complexity. For those seeking something more adventurous, the Leeuwenkuil Marsanne 2014 (the first varietal bottling of this Rhone cultivar) is delicious, quite refined, with almost tangy mid-palate textures. The vines are still young, so it's not a wine for long cellaring but it makes a brilliant summer food-friendly white.

A new range of hand-crafted wines produced by BLANKBottle for Woolworths - exotic cultivars, exotic blends and off-the-wall names - includes one called "Nothing to Declare." It too contains some Marsanne, together with Roussanne, Grenache blanc, Viognier and Clairette blanche. Unshowy, but with real weight and texture in the mouth, it's worth the effort of tracking down.

There were also several chardonnays which impressed: the first was the 2013 Richard Kershaw, fabulous fruit weight and lovely intensity, with the oak perfectly in balance.

The second was the Meerlust. Chris Williams - who has been cellar master since 2004 - aims for a less oaky, less oxidative style than his predecessor. The 2014 is lighter, more citrus-like, less chunky. Finally, the 2014 Paul Cluver is beautifully expressive and has all the attributes of the 2009, which collected bags full of medals from around the world.

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