

The Cape Winemakers Guild (CWG) annual auction has brought special selections of its members' wines to the wine-drinking public since the mid-1980s. At the time I was the wine consultant to Sotheby's, under whose auspices the sale was conducted, and the head of their London wine department, David Molyneux Berry, traveled to Johannesburg to wield the gavel. The average hammer price then of a bottle was about R15 - an amount which would also have bought a fairly decent classed growth Bordeaux.

Over the years the constant refrain (more from wine writers than from the punters) was that the auction cuvées tended to be more visibly oaked, more showy, but not necessarily better, or worth the premium. This criticism had little impact on the prices, which have escalated well ahead of inflation and which now represent the real top-end of the local luxury wine market. At the 2014 sale the average bottle price was R700 with several wines selling for twice that amount: no matter how cavalier you are about the cost of your tipple, that's an attention-grabbing price-point. Lately, the more astute producers have toned down their dependence on wood. Evidence of the forests of central France is still there, but it's generally better integrated and vinosity (rather than hard furnishing) is now the hallmark feature of the best wines.

The Gauteng pre-auction tasting of the wines is usually conducted by the members themselves in a slightly festive atmosphere at the head office of the Guild's sponsor, Nedbank. It's a "must-attend" event on the wine geek calendar, but it does come at a price: the enthusiasm is infectious and by the time the audience has reached the 50<sup>th</sup> wine in the line-up, everything tastes as if it had been pressed by the Archangel Gabriel and aged in casks hewn from oaks grown in Eden.

A few years back the Cape Town-based hacks arranged to taste the line-up blind and I was able to join them. This year I had a chance to sample the full range unsighted, in the company of a few colleagues and in the privacy of my tasting-room: no interference, no sales pitch, just the wines themselves singing for their supper. Nearly all of them were pretty smart: they are a significant step up on where they were five years ago and my notes reflect this achievement. There is an argument which says that when you know you are sampling super-premium wines your scores (even blind) will err on the side of generosity. There's some truth to this though it applies equally to a blind or sighted tasting. If I compare my own ratings this year to those of the public tastings of the past few years, the spread is pretty much the same. Any wine obtaining an 85/100 or higher occupies a slot in the top 2% of the South African pantheon.

The very best scores (all over 90) were garnered by Marc Kent's Boekenhoutkloof's Syrah Reserve 2013, Andries Burger's Paul Cluver Wagon Trail Chardonnay 2014, Adi Badenhorst's Granietberg 2013, Frans Smit's Auction Selection 2011 and Etienne Le Riche's Cabernet 2013. In close contention were Nicky Versveld's Lanner Hill Double Barrel white 2014, Pieter Ferreira's Graham Beck Non Plus Ultra MCC 2008, John Loubser's Silverthorn Big Dog MCC 2010, Peter Finlayson's Auction Reserve Pinot Noir 2012, Carl Schultz's Hartenberg Merlot 2013, Rianie Strydom's Paradigm 2012, Coenie Snyman's Rust en Vrede Estate blend 2012, Carel Nel's Boplaas Daniel's Legacy blend 2013 (together with the Boplaas Ouma Cloete Straw Wine 2014) and Bartho Eksteen's Vloekskoot 2014 blend.

You might also want to consider Johan Malan's Simonsig Heirloom 2013, Dewaldt Heyns's Die Erf Shiraz 2013, Dawid Nieuwoudt's Cederberg Shiraz 2013, Boland Coetzee's Vriesenhof Pinot 2013, Andries Burger's Paul Cluver Pinot 2013, Pierre Wahl's Rijk's Pinotage 2012, Beyer's Truter's Traildust Pinotage 2013, Miles Mossop's Tokara Tribute

2011, Gary Jordan's Sophia 2012, Neil Ellis's Insignium 2012 and Louis Strydom's Ernie Els 2013.

The Nedbank CWG Auction takes place on 3<sup>rd</sup> October in Stellenbosch. Visit [www.capewinemakersguild.com](http://www.capewinemakersguild.com). My full scores and notes are available on <http://www.winewizard.co.za/article/cape-winemakers-guild-2015-blind-tasting/>