

The final wave of the Cape wine industry's 2015 results are now out. In early October the Veritas awards (now in their 25<sup>th</sup> year) were announced to much fanfare. Shortly after that, the Prescient Chardonnay report was published. Finally, at the launch of the Guide's 2016 edition, details of the Platter Five Star award winners were released.

Not many wine buffs seriously expect a perfect results overlap across all competitions. They recognise that not all judges are equally skilled, working environments differ, the composition and size of the panels plays a part, as do the contents of the bottles themselves. Wine is performance art: not every bottle from the same batch tastes the same and some wines taste better on some days than on others. (Bio-dynamicists believe that there are fruit days, leaf days, flower days and root days, influenced by cosmic factors, and affecting the performance of the product - and presumably the perception of it by the taster.)

However, you also wouldn't expect a complete disconnect either. From a total entry of over 1700 wines, the Veritas judges found a mere three Chardonnays worthy of a double gold. None of the them featured among the Platter Five Star laureates, nor did any of them make it to the Top 10 of the Chardonnay Report. There's a slightly stronger correlation between Platter and the Prescient report: Sumaridge 2013 and Paul Cluver Seven Flags 2014 are both in the top ten and Newton Johnson and the Oak Valley are just outside the bracket. (But Platter's White Wine of the Year, the Warwick White Lady Chardonnay 2014, is absent from both other lists.) Chardonnay is widely acknowledged to be one of the Cape's strongest categories. Surely it's not too much to hope for a broader consensus across all three tastings?

The closer you look at things, the harder it is to believe that these lists share so little in common with each other (and in the case of the Veritas double golds, with any other competition. The notable exceptions were the Rustenberg Five Soldiers Chardonnay 2012 and the Peter Barlow 2009, both Trophy Winners at the Old Mutual.) At least insofar as the Platter line-up is concerned, it's fair to observe that since the wines being judged are due for sale in the trade over the next 12 months, there may have been vintage differences between what the Platter judges had on their tasting benches, and the wines up for consideration on the competition circuit. This offers a partial explanation. Earlier vintages of the Five Star wines have done well elsewhere: the Delaire-Graff Botmaskop and the Laurence Graff Reserve, the De Krans Cape Vintage Reserve (Port), and the Rijk's Reserve Pinotage all come to mind.

Then there's the fact that many of strongest performers in the Platter line-up don't enter competitions: you won't find the Mullineux wines (an extraordinary 5 x Five Star winners) in any show. However, if you apply this logic, you also have to ask about the wines which used to adorn the Platter list before the new Five Star tasting arrangements were implemented. Sadie Family Vineyards (last year's winery of the year) down to only one Five Star winner, and none for Chris and Suzaan Alheit - it hardly seems conceivable.

You can use these discrepancies to rubbish the various tastings and the awards upon which the industry depends to bring some order to the 7000+ wines on offer in any one year. On the other hand, you could as easily argue that most of the top wines are so good that those which missed the cut could just as easily replace those which made it this year without any dilution of standard. That's certainly my take: make a list of the top 150 wines (red and white) using any credible selection process and you'll find a surprising consensus: it's when you try to separate the so-called superstars from the other celestial novae that the outcome acquires a slightly arbitrary feel.

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