

Michael Fridjhon in Business Day – 5 September 2014

On Saturday 4th October the Cape Winemakers Guild (CWG) will hold its thirtieth auction. The organisation (and its wines) has come a great distance in three decades, with the progress over the past five years comfortably outstripping the achievement of the previous 25 years. While the rest of the industry has also done remarkably well, there's no doubt that the Guild is beating the average.

Its relative stagnation up to 2009 was largely the result of a membership policy which protected those on the inside at the expense of new admissions, creating a climate of complacent smugness. Now we are seeing the benefits of generational change. People like Andrea Mullineux, Bartho Eksteen, Miles Mossop, Coenie Snyman, Gottfried Mocke, Rianie Strydom, Andries Burger - to name but a few - are adding their skills and experience to the pool. There is an aggregating effect as they strengthen a vanguard which includes Marc Kent, Duncan Savage and Adi Badenhorst. Before this influx, the younger members did not have the critical mass. Now, working together they have been able to lift the intensity, the passion, the focus and the concentration.

But the achievements have not been solely the work of the most recent arrivals to the Guild's ranks. The CWG leadership has managed to harness the dynamic potential of the revitalised Cape wine industry, particularly through a regular workshop programme in which the members share their research and expertise. There are in-house seminars to broaden their understanding of the technical issues around winemaking. Focused tastings also add an international dimension, providing a better sense of what to expect from the more esoteric varieties. When you look at the content of the courses which were on offer when even the youngest members were students, there is a discernible gap between what winemakers are taught, and what they still need to learn.

The line-up of wines for this year's sale reflects much of this progress. For the first time there were no overtly faulty wines, in other words, no wines showing defective or unclean handling of the fruit. Five years ago *brettanomyces* would have been evident in several of the reds. Sure, there are still wines which won't appeal to everyone, but this is now largely confined to subjective criteria - like the extent to which new wood is evident in (generally very young) wines and what kind of ripeness levels are sought. Even here, the reds showed more restraint than a few years back and the Sauvignons less overt greenness.

I've tasted 42 of the 60 wines on the sale. It is clear that the white wines still substantially out-perform the reds. The fruit has been handled more sensitively, the wines are more nuanced, and their age-worthiness is less in doubt. Scores of 85 or more went to 11 out of 14 whites but only 12 out of 28 reds. (These are very high ratings on my 100 point scale, even if this seems less impressive to producers and punters attached to the American 100 point system where anything under 90 does not count. For detailed notes go to <http://www.winewizard.co.za/article/cape-winemakers-guild-tasting-2014/>)

White wines scoring 90 or more included the Mullineux Sauvignon Gris 2013, the Cape Point Vineyards 2013 white blend, the Kleine Zalze Granite Selection Chenin Blanc, the Chamonix Chardonnay 2013, the Paul Cluver Wagon Trail Chardonnay 2013 and the Jordan Auction Reserve Chardonnay 2013. The reds scoring 86 or more included the Neil Ellis Reserve 2011, the Vriesenhof Cabernet 2007, the Tokara Tribute 2010, the Boekenhoutskloof Syrah Auction Reserve 2012, the Cederberg Teen die Hoog Shiraz 2012

and the Beyerskloof Traldust Pinotage 2012.

While there's no doubt about the quality of most of what is on offer, pricing is likely to provide a sobering reminder that when too much testosterone chases too little stock, it's not a bad idea to have a bank as the Guild's headline sponsor. I assume Nedbank will be happy to offer second mortgages to over-enthusiastic buyers.