

Fine Wines of South Africa

by Ormond Smith

Inconceivable as it may sound and of all the wine regions and countries we have “visited” in terms of tastings since our inception in 1977 (and there have been many.....very many!), we had never ventured due south of the Equator into South Africa. Given the quality of wines being produced there, an introduction was therefore not only long overdue but most definitely necessary. To that



end, a tasting of Fine Wines of South Africa was organised for March 7th at the Waterside Hotel, Inverness and was led by a self confessed aficionado of the region, member Malcolm Ogilvie of Wine Importers (Edinburgh) Ltd, old friends of Goustein Scotland. Malcolm yet again displayed his enthusiasm and knowledge of his subject in his usual relaxed, informative style and the members and guests invited to the Tasting were treated to a range of some ten wines, all of which “hit the spot” in terms of quality and style.

The degustation kicked off with a welcoming glass of **L’Ormarins Estate Sparkling Brut NV** from the **Anthonij Rupert Winery** in Franschhoek (due east of Cape Town and just beyond Stellenbosch) on the slopes of the Groot Drakenstein mountains. This wine is made using the Methode Cap Classique (essentially the Champagne Method but not permitted to be called so!) and displayed a delicate peach hue with appealing aromas of candied apple and citrus pith. The palate was assailed with good acidity and ripe fruits and this elegant wine finished long and with a light lemon note – an excellently well made sparkling wine.



Following a short video and informative background talk by Malcolm, the white wines of the evening started with a **2014 Klein Constantia Estate Sauvignon Blanc**. The Constantia vineyards (the oldest in the Cape region, dating back to 1689!) are nowadays in the southern suburbs of Cape Town itself, nestling in a valley on the eastern flank of Table Mountain, the effects of the warm climate and relatively high rainfall being offset by the influence of the “Cape Doctor”, the south-easterly wind blowing in off the ocean. Since their initial vintage in 1986, the Klein Estate is now regarded as one of the leading Sauvignon Blanc producers in the Cape, picking up many local and international wine awards for this wine. Fermented in stainless steel to preserve the fruity aromas and flavours, the



wine displays hints of passion fruit and pineapple on the nose and the palate shows typical Sauvignon “zing”, good acidity and a clean refreshing finish. A fitting introduction to what would be a very enjoyable evening. The second white was a **2012 Protea Chenin Blanc** from

vineyards just south of Wellington in the Paarl area, this versatile grape showing pale lemon in the glass with aromas of pear and honeysuckle. There was a refreshing vibrancy on the palate, with crisp and tangy nectarine and apricot flavours culminating in a pleasant lingering finish. Returning to the Constantia vineyards, we next sampled a **2014 Buitenverwachting Chardonnay**, the vinification process of whole bunch pressing with skin contact for 24 hours in French oak giving a rich and full bodied wine with bold citrus tones and minerality on the nose. Barrel matured for eleven months in French barriques, the palate displayed most appealing butterscotch, toasty notes, leading into oaky flavours and plenty of fruit characters.....a wine to savour! The final white of the evening, a **2014 Delheim Gewurztraminer** came from just east of Cape Town in Stellenbosch, the grapes hand-picked, de-stemmed and only lightly pressed, the juice being permitted to settle overnight before being racked and inoculated with selected yeast strains. After fermentation in concrete tanks at low temperatures, the wine then spent four months on the lees after which it was lightly fined and sterile filtered. The resultant wine displayed good colour in the glass with attractive aromas of orange blossom, lychees and Turkish Delight backed up with some zesty citrus hints, the palate emphasising the features of the aromas with a lingering spicy finish.....more please!

The first red wine came from Constantia, a **2012 Buitenverwachting Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot**, reminiscent of the wines of Bordeaux in France. Following fermentation and post maturation on the skins for 21 days, the wine was then barrel matured for eighteen to twenty four months in French oak barrels. Stylish aromas of cassis, plums and pencil lead assailed the nose, giving way to a complex structured palate, marrying rich, ripe fruit with hints of minerality and finishing clean, well balanced and fragrant.

It has to be said that Pinotage is a wine which, well made, can be excellent but poorly made, can be quite highly tannic and can often give a “burnt tar” taste on the palate so like Marmite, you either like it or.....! The **2011 Cloof Pinotage** from the vineyards around Darling (about an hour north of Cape Town and most definitely influenced by the Atlantic weathers) was without doubt a well made wine but interestingly, still divided opinion on its appeal around the writers table. The Pinotage grape is a distant cousin of Pinot Noir, the PN being introduced into South Africa in the early 1920’s but was found to struggle in the hot climate. Crossed with the Cinsaut grape, this hybrid, named Pinotage, produced deeply coloured grapes with high tannins, in fact the wine looks very like Shiraz, intense dark red. A very productive grape, the resultant wines went through a period in the 80’s and 90’s of low quality commercial production which did little for its international reputation. Fortunately this situation has changed and now wine makers are producing high quality wine with world wide appeal. The Cloof wine was a very dense dark red with rich aromas of plums, tobacco, blackberry and even liquorice. The palate was mouth filling and well rounded, the nasal impressions continuing in the mouth and a lingering savoury finish with deep dark chocolate and plum flavours was most appealing. For the writer this wine “hit the spot” although for others at the table, the “jury was undecided”!



With cognisance of the timing of the chef's culinary presentation, we moved on to the final red wine, a **2011 Optima Shiraz** from the **Antonij Rupert L'Ormarins** vineyards in Stellenbosch. Rich, dark red in the glass (not unlike the Pinotage for denseness), the nose was complex and refined with excellent berry fruits and interesting spicy overtones. This continued onto the palate, mouth filling yet well balanced and rounded with silky tannins and the long finish with loads of fruit and hints of oak was just perfect. Most certainly a wine with longevity. I did come across a tasting note on this wine which reads "as soft and smooth as a ballroom dancer gliding and dipping in a Viennese waltz!".....I'll leave you to conjure up the image of that in a glass!! The closing wine of the Tasting was a simply stunning **2012 Kanu Kia-Ora** dessert wine from Stellenbosch and absolutely nothing to do with a concentrated soft fruit drink of the same name. The name is also a New Zealand Maori greeting (much as we would say "Hi")..... but that's another story! This wine really hit the high notes with the tasters, powerful liquid gold in the glass and a melange of sun kissed apricots, honey and almond infused nougat on the nose. The wine exploded onto the palate, rich and full bodied but never cloyingly sweet, the obvious sweetness from the sugars being checked with a racy acidity and the fruity, honeyed finish just went on and on. A wine that could be laid down for up to ten years.....could you actually refrain from opening a bottle before then?

The evening culminated, after due appreciation to our speaker Malcolm, with a most appetising lamb kebab and this was accompanied by a **2011 Cloof Inkspot** from the Darling vineyards. With its blend of Pinotage (45%); Shiraz (21%); Cabernet Sauvignon (18%) and Cinsaut (16%) the resultant inky concentration accurately befits its name, Inkspot, and the nose displayed generous black berries, vanilla and a fair degree of spiciness from the oak. The palate presented a perfect balance, complex and mouth filling as flavours of ripe plums, juicy cherries and cassis and assailed our taste buds, lingering long and satisfying, a perfect match for the lamb kebab.



Our thanks to Malcolm for broadening our knowledge of wines from South Africa, demonstrating that this country is extremely capable of making not only excellent wines but wines which can hold their own against well established examples from around the wine growing world.