

Cape Mediterranean whites

White blends are still what South Africa does best, says Tim Atkin MW, who explains that although Chenin Blanc is still the driving force, Viognier shows great potential

THE SOUTH AFRICAN wine scene has been through many changes in the past two decades, but few have been as significant as the emergence of Cape white blends. Most commentators would nominate the best Bordeaux-style and 'Mediterranean' cuvées as some of the outstanding successes of the post-apartheid era. What's more surprising is that the category is so recent. You could argue, convincingly, that the phenomenon is less than 15 years old.

Grapes like Chenin Blanc and Semillon have probably been around since the 17th century in South Africa, although they were not identified as such until much later, and may have been used in field blends long before. But combining white grapes in a more formal way, with the aim of producing an outstanding wine, really began in 2001 when André van Rensburg of Vergelegen released what he now calls his GVB White, a barrel-fermented Semillon-Sauvignon Blanc. A year later, Eben Sadie of Sadie Family Wines made a Mediterranean-style white for the first time. Palladius is a brilliant Chenin Blanc-based blend that can include as many as nine other varieties, depending on the year. Like GVB White, it helped to launch a new wave of Cape whites.

Two schools

There are essentially two schools of white blends in South Africa. The Bordeaux-style is simple enough to define. It's invariably a Sauvignon Blanc-dominated wine with varying proportions of Semillon, but rarely anything else. The Mediterranean category is more complicated, largely because it is dominated by Chenin Blanc, which isn't regarded as a warm-climate variety in France and doesn't really belong to a family of grapes that includes Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, Grenache Blanc, Palomino, Clairette, Muscat and Verdelho. More confusingly, Semillon is often blended with Chenin Blanc, as is Chardonnay, another non-Mediterranean variety. No wonder Mediterranean blends are sometimes called 'other' white blends in South Africa.

As you'd expect, the groups tend to be very different in style, as well as origin. The Sauvignon-Semillon wines are essentially coastal, influenced by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans in areas such as Cape Point, Constantia, Durbanville, Elim, Elgin and Walker Bay or, alternatively, grown in the cooler parts of Stellenbosch, Cederberg and Franschhoek, often at altitude. The Mediterranean white blends tend to come from the hotter climates of Wellington, Worcester, Paarl, Stellenbosch, Tulbagh and especially the Swartland. Of course, in such a large country, there are exceptions.

Chenin Blanc apart, which remains the country's most planted white grape with 17,889 hectares out of a national total of 99,680ha, very few of the Mediterranean grapes are used to make varietal wines. (I'm excluding Chardonnay and Semillon here.) This is partly because most of them aren't produced in great quantities – there are 9.53ha of Marsanne, 48ha of Verdelho, 51ha of Roussanne and 65ha of Grenache Blanc – but also because there isn't much demand in a country which remains focused on Sauvignon, Chardonnay and, to a lesser degree, Chenin, which is still regarded by many as a workhorse grape.

If there is one Mediterranean variety that does have a standalone presence it is Viognier, which is now the 15th most planted grape in the Cape. South Africa is still deciding



Cape Med whites: know your vintages

2014 The wettest January in years; a challenging vintage for earlier-ripening whites, especially Sauvignon Blanc. Mixed quality.

2013 A moderately warm vintage, but very dry in the Swartland. Very good-quality wines with freshness and vivacity.

2012 Quite a hot year, especially in January,

producing good quality, if richer, riper wines. Not long-term keepers.

2011 A very hot vintage that was particularly challenging for those making white wine. Buy with care.

2010 A humid, warm vintage created difficult conditions for reds. Earlier-picked whites fared better. Drink up.

where Viognier does best – and, for now, only Lismore in Greyton makes a world-class example – but the grape has potential. For all that, I'd still rather taste it in a blend. Only 14 years on from the launch of GVB White and Palladius, white blends are what South Africa does best.

Tim Atkin MW is an awarded wine writer and photographer, and a leading commentator on South African wine

Cape Med whites: the facts

Area under vine 99,680ha; white grapes are 55.09%

Most planted white grapes Chenin Blanc (17,889ha), Colombar (11,696ha), Sauvignon Blanc (9,320ha), Chardonnay (7,665ha), Muscat (1,983ha), Semillon (1,194ha), Viognier (878ha)

Main growing area for 'Mediterranean' varieites Paarl, Stellenbosch, Tulbagh, Swartland, Wellington

Best producers of 'Mediterranean-style' wines AA Badenhorst, Alheit, Bellingham, BlankBottle, David Sadie, DeMorgenzon, Eagles' Nest, Fable, Fairview, Keermont, KWV, Lismore, Lourensford, Miles Mossop, Mullineux, Rall, Sadie Family, Saronsberg, The Foundry, Thorne & Daughters, Vondeling, Waterkloof ➤

The results

This mixed bag of wines, from varietal Viogniers to blends based on old-vine Chenin, delivered mixed reviews from our experts, though all agreed on the potential of this exciting category. Tina Gellie reports

SIX MONTHS ON from *Decanter's* 'profound' Syrah tasting (*December 2014 issue*), our tasters were confident of a similar – or possibly better – result with these white wines.

'South African white blends are the one category where winemakers can go wild – take their clothes off and run down the valley shaking their jazz hands,' explained Greg Sherwood MW. 'I didn't quite feel that unbridled passion and joy here, but there were still some exciting wines.'

The focus of this tasting was Mediterranean varieties – both blends and single varietals (South Africa's winemakers, and many critics such as Tim Atkin MW, group Chenin Blanc- and Rhône varietal-based blends under the 'Mediterranean' umbrella). Including the hundreds of 100% Chenin Blancs produced in the country would have meant a week of tasting, but as old-vine Chenin is the cornerstone for many key Cape white blends, we allowed up to a maximum of 75% of this grape. White Rhône grapes, particularly Viognier, are becoming increasingly important.

Given that arguably most of the best white blends in South Africa were included in the tasting, Atkin was nevertheless disappointed. 'The best wines were amazing but overall there were not enough exciting wines.' Adrian Garforth MW felt this was down to individual preference. 'This tasting showed one of the challenges for South Africa:

'Readers can be confident in buying these' Greg Sherwood MW

diversity. Of styles, tastes and winemaking philosophies. Some wines will polarise people; we saw that even among ourselves. That doesn't mean producers aren't making good wines; it just means consumers might be a bit shocked by what they get.'

The judges felt Swartland and Stellenbosch performed well, though Garforth had a caution. 'I'm nervous of people jumping on the Swartland bandwagon,' he said. 'There are some great winemakers and fantastic old vines that, when handled sensitively in an unconstrained fashion, can give really exciting things. But there's rubbish in Swartland too. Don't forget about the guys in Paarl, Constantia and Stellenbosch, who are far more widely travelled.'

He continued: 'Formulaic winemaking was the norm in South Africa until about 10 years ago. Now winemakers are being bold and taking chances. Sometimes they misfire by a mile, but even so they're still pushing boundaries. That's what they have to focus on.'

Viognier stood out as a variety to watch for Sherwood. 'There were three or four that were punchy and world-class.

The scores

65 wines tasted

2

Outstanding

11

Highly recommended

49

Recommended

3

Fair

0

Poor

0

Faulty

The tasters' verdicts

Tim Atkin MW



Atkin is an award-winning wine writer, photographer, broadcaster and taster, who became a Master of Wine in 2001. He has won numerous awards for his website, www.timatkin.com, which includes an in-depth annual report on the South African wine scene. Atkin has been visiting and writing about the Cape since 1991 and is regarded as one of the leading commentators on its wines.

Atkin's verdict

'This was a strong tasting, proving that

South Africa's range of climates is well suited to grapes like Viognier, Roussanne, Muscat, Grenache Blanc and Verdelho, as well as Chenin Blanc – a variety that is always included in the 'Mediterranean' camp in the Cape, if not in France.

'There was a good mix of cooler- and warmer-climate styles among my favourites from Constantia to the Swartland, but the latter, inevitably, were more numerous. Mediterranean grapes work well across the Cape, but are better suited to hotter areas.

'I expected the white blends to show well and, as a group, they did; my two favourite wines among them. But the grape that surprised me most was Viognier, which is gaining in quality and diversity in South Africa. Special mentions should also go to three rarer grapes (at least in the Cape): Roussanne, Verdelho and Grenache Blanc – all three of which starred in at least one of the top 13 wines of the tasting.'

Adrian Garforth MW



Garforth runs an export agency focusing on New Zealand and South African wines, and also consults internationally as director of Blackrock Wines. He became a Master of Wine in 1993, and later moved to South Africa for a while, where he was involved in the creation of the Spier wine business.

Garforth's verdict

'It is always a delight to see just how far South Africa's wine industry has evolved since those early days of mass export to an

eager and interested global audience. If the quality then could only have approached what we see and taste today, then the image of this wonderful winemaking country would not be tarnished by consumer perceptions of a beautiful land that is primarily a source of cheap and cheerful quaffing wine.

'South Africa's diverse terroir gives it the potential to produce high-quality wine, and the new wave of winemakers are working with fantastic old-vine raw material to produce some particularly spectacular whites. The source of the most interesting fruit is often old Chenin Blanc vineyards that thankfully have survived the massive replanting program initiated in the early 1990s. In a wonderfully ironic twist, it is those farmers who were probably too poor to replant who are now reaping the rewards.

'While a couple of wines we tasted were truly Outstanding, it is worth noting that the general quality is on an upward trajectory; the future looks very bright indeed. My personal favourites were invariably blends built upon the solid foundations of low-yielding, old-vine Chenin often sourced from the decomposed granite soils of the Voor-Paardeberg. All were at least two years old and showed even greater ageing potential.'

The other Rhône grape less so.' Garforth agreed: 'Marsanne and Roussanne don't stand alone; they're not something South Africa should hang its hat on. But built around a solid core – that is old-vine Chenin, then a dollop of Viognier with some Roussanne and Marsanne can produce something world class.' He said that while Rhône varieties and Chardonnay add complexity and excitement to a blend, it is the 'building block' of old-vine Chenin that is the Cape's calling card. 'In the right hands it shows a sense of place, minerality, concentration and depth.'

Atkin felt alcohol levels were 'more reasonable than I'd have thought, with quite a few wines at 13.5%, – I thought it might be higher'. He did comment on 'a few unbalanced wines' and a number that were 'sweet, alcoholic, and overly developed', but added that while he didn't like them, his fellow judges did. 'Each to their own!'

In terms of vintages, Sherwood thought the 2014s elegant and fresh with great tension and capacity to age. 'The 2013s lack the density and balance of the 2012s, but they have an lovely opulence, a freshness and a fruit-forwardness that. If you had both vintages in your cellar, you'd perhaps drink the 2013s before the 2012s.'

He spoke for all the tasters when saying the overall quality was very high, offering 'great value' to consumers. 'If a wine is tasted blind by *Decanter's* experts and is recommended, then it will be good. Readers can be confident in buying these.'

Entry criteria:
producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release white Mediterranean varieties and blends. Wines could contain no more than 75% Chenin Blanc and no more than 25% Chardonnay and/or Sauvignon Blanc. Permitted varietal wines or other components of blends included: Roussanne, Marsanne, Clairette, Grenache Blanc, Grenache Gris, Palomino, Viognier.

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Grande Provence, Franschoek 2013

Decanter average score: 18.5/20pts (95/100pts)

Individual judges' scores: Tim Atkin MW 18.5 Adrian Garforth MW 18.5 Greg Sherwood MW 18.5

£22.50 Good Wine Online

Bull's eye! This was the first vintage of this wine and only Karl Lambour's second year in charge at Grande Provence. Lambour has brought the winemaking skills he displayed at Constantia Glen in Constantia to Franschoek – arguably a much harder gig, given that this is made entirely with fruit from the valley (a rarity in a place where most farms buy grapes from elsewhere). It's a dry-farmed blend of Chenin and Viognier, taken from sandstone and granite slopes opposite the winery, and makes the most of the oldest Chenin plantings in Franschoek. Quite a début.

Tim Atkin MW Tight, stony, mineral nose. Sappy and fresh, complex, mineral and textured with subtle oak and good ageing potential. A blend that is more than the sum of its parts. Leesy, mealy and long. Smart wine.

Adrian Garforth MW Crushed granite, white pepper and crunchy white peaches make for a mineral taut nose. Cool, green apple with a hint of sweet and sour palate with weight. Zesty, spritz finish.

Greg Sherwood MW Interesting oak and gunflint aromas. Ripe, rich and textured, a touch strong on the oak, but will integrate. Limey, complex, long.

Drink 2015–2018 Alcohol 14%

Greg Sherwood MW



Sherwood is senior fine wine buyer at Handford Wines in London. He earned his Master of Wine qualification in 2004 and while proud to be only the fourth South African to do so, he is encouraging more of his fellow countrymen through the rigours of the MW exam process.

Sherwood's verdict

'South Africa's white blend category is very important for a number of key reasons: the wines often utilise old-vine

varieties focused primarily around Chenin Blanc; the blends represent a unique expression of Cape wine quality that is near impossible for international competitors to imitate; the Mediterranean and Rhône varieties used in blends translate into wine styles that produce a perfect alternative to white Burgundy and Chardonnay – rich, broad, full bodied, vibrant, nuanced wines that accompany a broad spectrum of cuisine.

'With the ageworthy nature of these blends, we were not surprised to see several fine 2011s and 2012s in the tasting line-up – both excellent vintages for whites – together with a majority of 2013s with their pure, opulent, fruit-forward vintage expression.

'Where Chenin Blanc played a leading role, the Swartland and Voor-Paardeberg wines showed strongly, but Stellenbosch was always in the mix with the best contenders. For me, the Rhône varieties remained the unknown joker in the pack. From the best terroirs, not many white wine styles can rival barrel-fermented Viognier for its overt exoticism, complexity and drinkability.'



Rall, Coastal Region 2013 18.5 (95) TA 18.5 AG 18.5 GS 18.5

£23 Bottle Apostle, Fine & Rare, Handford, Harvey Nichols, Hedonism, Planet of the Grapes, Roberson, Swig, Vin Cognito, Woodwinters

Donovan Rall's white blend of mostly Chenin Blanc with 24% Verdelho, 18% Chardonnay and 9% Viognier (the percentages change from year to year) is such an established star of the Cape white blend scene that it's easy to forget its maiden release was only 2008. This is a blend of regions as well as grape varieties, combining grapes from specific parcels in Stellenbosch and the Swartland. (Geek fact: the Chenin Blanc is sourced from Christa von la Chevallerie's famous vineyard in the Swartland that also supplies grapes for Chris Alheit's celebrated Cartology blend).

TA Complex, densely fruited nose with herbs and baking spices. Mealy, spicy palate, showing notes of vanilla, toast, honey and citrus fruit freshness. Long and stylish.

AG Creamy exotic lemon and pineapple nuances with custard and curd, a lick of oak and caramelised figs. Rich, broad and textured, there's bags of yellow fruit complexity with hints of honeycomb and yellow pastille fruit.

GS Strongly oaked, honeycomb and leesy. Big, fat buttery palate, complex fennel and white peach, too much alcohol, but a textured, confident, fruity finish with good length.

Drink 2015–2022 Alc 14% ➤

Highly Recommended 17-18.25pts (90-94pts)



Lismore, Viognier, Greyton 2012
18.25 (94) TA 17.5 AG 18.5 GS 18.5

£19.49 Handford, Selfridges, Swig
Super-complex nose of creamy melon and green apple purée, wet slate and majestic marzipan depth. Mid-weight palate with fresh acidity, good balance and some orange peel lift. Clearly evolved but not overly so and will age further. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 14.5%



Muratie, Laurens Campher Blended White, Stellenbosch 2013 17.5 (91)
TA 18 AG 17.5 GS 17

£12.50 Genesis Wines
Restrained but beguiling aromas of smoke, stones and yellow pastille fruits. Rich, textured palate of depth and breadth, citrus and stone fruit notes, and subtle lees. Spicy and pithy with a tapering finish. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 14%



The Foundry, Roussanne, Stellenbosch 2013 17.5 (91)
TA 17 AG 18 GS 17.5

£14 Handford, St Andrews Wine Co, Woodwinters
Taut green apple with mineral nuances and spicy complexity. High in acidity, saline and fresh with good fruit concentration and the distinct Cape fynbos [native bush] character. Superb balance and a very long finish. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 13.5%



The Sadie Family, Palladius, Coastal Region 2012 17.5 (91)
TA 16 AG 18.25 GS 18.25

£38.46-£41.79 Fortnum & Mason, Handford, Hedonism, Lay & Wheeler, SA Wines Online, Selfridges, Swig, Vincisive, Uncorked, Woodwinters
Enticing, exotic nose of white peach and pineapple. Lovely balance, combining clean fresh Chenin fruit, but with complex notes of fennel, rosemary, classic stone fruits and nutty elements. **Drink** 2015-2022 **Alc** 14%

'Formulaic winemaking was the norm in South Africa until about 10 years ago. Now winemakers are being bold and taking chances'

Adrian Garforth MW



Anthonij Rupert, Cape of Good Hope, Swartland 2014 17.25 (90+)
TA 17 AG 18 GS 17

£15.99-£17 (2013) AG Wines, Woodwinters
Taut green apples and green melon lift with a leesy touch. Great concentration of fresh peach and nutmeg. Very well made with some old oak depth, but has a restrained power and is sure to evolve very nicely. **Drink** 2015-2019 **Alc** 14%



Eagles' Nest, Viognier, Constantia 2014 17.25 (90+) TA 17 AG 16.75 GS 18

£22-£25 Handford, St Andrews Wine Co, Vagabond Wines, Woodwinters
Delicate note of marzipan – quite aromatic. Well balanced and stylish palate with a pedigree similar to the northern Rhône. Apricot notes with appealing acidity and a lightness of touch. Classy winemaking. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



KWV, The Mentors Grenache Blanc, Western Cape 2011 17.25 (90+)
TA 17 AG 17.5 GS 17.5

£17 Bottle Green, Edgmond Wines
Floral, almost Riesling-like nose that is evolving with petrol complexity. Sensational depth, vibrant pithy acidity and real energy. Tangy and extremely long; will develop further in bottle. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



KWV, The Mentors Verdelho, Stellenbosch 2013 17.25 (90+)
TA 17 AG 17.5 GS 17

£17 Bottle Green, Edgmond Wines
Peppery, spicy, capsicum and gunpowder nose. Medium- to full-bodied palate that is fresh with good complexity of clove and greenage; interesting texture. Understated concentration; a slow burner. **Drink** 2015-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Vondeling, Babiana, Voor-Paardeberg 2012 17.25 (90+)
TA 16.5 AG 18.25 GS 16.75

£13-£14 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Red Squirrel Wine, Swig, Woodwinters
Lovely ripe tropical notes with clear oak influence and peppery aromatics. Palate is tangy, textured and slightly reductive with edge and tension. Well balanced with long finish – the taste of Voor Paardeberg. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 13.5%



Waterkloof, Circumstance Viognier, Stellenbosch 2012 17.25 (90+) TA 17 AG 17.75 GS 17

£17.99 Boutinot, Handford, Hawkshead Wines, Slurp, Woodwinters
Caramelised bananas and mangoes fill the nose on this opulent, forward toffee-laden white. Palate is rich, toasty and complex with good fruit concentration and fresh acidity. Very interesting, sexy wine. **Drink** 2015-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Thelema, Sutherland Viognier-Roussanne, Elgin 2011 17 (90)
TA 17.5 AG 16 GS 17.5

£13-£14 Great Western Wine, Hawkshead Wines, Slurp
Beautifully perfume of yellow stone fruit, cassis leaf and sea breeze; real complexity. Crystalline purity with good weight, and taut, juicy, mouthwatering drinkability. Smoky and complex; a bold effort. **Drink** 2015-2018 **Alc** 14%

Recommended 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	TA	AG	GS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
AA Badenhorst, White Blend, Coastal Region 2012	16.75 (89)	17	17	16	Very interesting aromas of ripe grapefruit and spice. The palate is honeyed with notes of waxy pear, lees and baking spices, and a long, peppery finish.	13.5%	2015-2019	£24.95	AC Gallie, Handford, Hedonism, Lay & Wheeler, Love Wine, Robersons, SA Wines Online, Stone Wine & Sun, Swig, Wine Tasting Shop
Avondale, Cyclus, Paarl 2012	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.75	Savoury aroma of oak, honey and pastry notes. An oily character to the palate, but it has a good acid core, and a pleasing Semillon-loaded finish.	13.5%	2015-2018	£15-£18	House of Townend, Ministry of Drinks
Bosman Family Vineyards, Fides, Wellington 2013	16.75 (89)	16	17	17.5	Developed colour. Aroma of bruised apple. Cognac-brûléed oranges and honey. Has character and good length and is genuinely funky and interesting.	13.5%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.bosmanwines.com
Lemberg, Lady, Tulbagh 2013	16.75 (89)	17	16	17	Opulent, vibrant nose of lemon, lees, peach pith and wood spice. Good acidity and bags of flavour and length. Should make for a lovely food wine.	14%	2015-2018	£14.50	www.lemborg.co.za
Saronsberg, Viognier, Tulbagh 2013	16.75 (89)	16	16.25	18	Rich, intense and super-sexy in the glass. The opulent, barrel-ferment hint and attention to detail makes for a fresh and inviting wine.	13.5%	2015-2022	£11.50	Adnams
Simonsig, Roussanne, Stellenbosch 2013	16.75 (89)	17	16.5	17	Hints of crème brûlée, apple crumble and quince with a touch of marzipan. Rich, with subtle reduction and good, savoury length; well made.	14%	2015-2020	£14.49	SA Wines Online
Vuurberg, White, Coastal Region 2013	16.75 (89)	16.5	17.5	16.5	Lifted nose of wood spice, gunflint, grapefruit and gooseberry. Restrained but complex palate, showing complex herbal notes, flint and a tight finish.	14%	2015-2018	£42	Boutinot, Handford, Hawkshead, Slurp, Swig
Alvi's Drift, CVC, Worcester 2011	16.5 (88)	16	17.5	16	Obvious oak aromas with ripe Chenin lurking beneath. Concentrated sweet-and-sour quince and fig confit palate. Long, powerful, and in your face.	13.5%	2015-2018	£14	www.alvisdrift.co.za
Bellingham, The Bernard Series Grenache Blanc-Viognier, Paarl 2013	16.5 (88)	17	16	16.5	Aromatic yellow fruits, savoury hints and a white pepper overlay. Lime, greengage and smoke – certainly well-proportioned and buxom.	14%	2015-2018	14.99	SA Wines Online
Miles Mossop Wines, Saskia, Coastal Region 2011	16.5 (88)	16.5	16	17	Sweet yellow fruits, caramelised figs, custard tart and oak spice. Bold and flavoursome, with enough acidity to support this individual wine.	14.5%	2015-2020	£11.99	Bottle Apostle, Corks Out, Handford, Harrogate Fine Wine, St Andrews Wine Co, Woodwinters, Wright Wine Co
Thorne & Daughters, Rocking Horse, Western Cape 2013	16.5 (88)	15.5	17	17	Sweet coconut oak, caramelised peach and fig lead to a matching palate that throws the kitchen sink at you. Well balanced with a peppery finish.	13.5%	2015-2016	£5.99-£6.50	Bottle Apostle, Corks Out, Handford, Harrogate Fine Wine, Lay & Wheeler, St Andrews Wine Co, Woodwinters, Wright Wine Co
David Sadie, Aristargos, Swartland 2013	16.25 (87)	16	16	17	Taut, textural, zesty wine with lifted green apple fruit, fig confit and freshly sliced quince. Palate is just a little too ripe but it's an easy drinker.	13%	2015-2019	£12.89	Edgmond Wines, Handford, SA Wines Online, Vincisive, Vin Cognito
DeMorgenzon, Maestro White, Stellenbosch 2014	16.25 (87)	15.5	17.5	16	Green apple, cider and a yeasty beer nose. Clean and fresh palate of white pepper, savoury yellow lemony fruits and peachy hints.	14%	2015-2016	POA	Gerard Seel, Majestic
Fijndraai, Van Coller Family Reserve, Stellenbosch 2012	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.25	16.75	Rich, precise, mineral and cassis leaf nose, with a Pouilly-Fumé expression on the palate. Well-made but not overly complex with a medium finish.	13%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.fijndraai.com
JH Meyer Wines, Ivory White, Coastal Region 2014	16.25 (87)	15.5	16	17	Earthy, savoury yellow fruits, cassis leaf and plum skin. Textured and weighty with hints of ripe tropical fruit and fresh acidity. Atypical but interesting.	13%	2015-2020	£11-£12 (2013)	Bottle Apostle, Forest Wines, Handford, Park & Bridge, Vinoteca
Leeuwenkuil, Family Reserve, Coastal Region 2013	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.5	17	Stylish, youthful nose with hints of struck match and beeswax. Savoury touch follows on the palate with pineapple pastilles and pepper. Fresh finish.	13.5%	2015-2019	£8.99	New Generation Wines
Painted Wolf Wines, Penny Viognier, Swartland 2014	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16.5	Delicate yellow blossom and honeyed richness on the nose. Palate opens up to show good balance and fresh acidity with a typical Viognier character.	15%	2015-2018	£8.99	Newton Wines
Simonsig, CWG, Red Ox Roussanne-Chenin Blanc, Stellenbosch 2013	16.25 (87)	15	17.25	16.75	Sweet marzipan, custard tart and apple crumble aroma. Interesting, evolving, musty spice on the palate. Very good length and a certain amount of energy.	13.5%	2015-2016	£28.95	Bottle Apostle, Corks Out, Handford, Harrogate Fine Wine, St Andrews Wine Co, Woodwinters, Wright Wine Co
Solms Delta, Amalie, Western Cape 2013	16.25 (87)	15.5	17.5	16	Dusty, waxy hints of soapstone and mineral-laden green melon complexity. Lovely, rich fleshy finish too – good minerality and length.	13.5%	2015-2017	£14	Bottle Apostle, Corks Out, Handford, Harrogate Fine Wine, St Andrews Wine Co, Woodwinters, Wright Wine Co
The Foundry, Grenache Blanc, Voor Paardeberg 2014	16.25 (87)	17	16	16	Aromatic, perfumed waxy green apples. Salty palate with some green herbs, pithy acidity and stylish length. A sleek effort.	13%	2015-2018	£17.52	Handford, Woodwinters
Zevenwacht, Zeven Bouquet Blanc, Stellenbosch 2014	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	Intense floral notes with some nutty complexity. Rosewater, lychee and herbs on the medium- to full-bodied palate. Balanced and has great length.	13.5%	2015-2016	£14.99	Marks & Spencer
Boutinot, Cape Heights Viognier, Western Cape 2013	16 (86)	15	17	15.75	Peach and apricot balanced by fresh acidity – a mid-weight Viognier. Plush, soft and easy drinking with good complexity. Mass appeal.	13.5%	2015-2017	£10	Boutinot, Handford, Hawkshead, Slurp, St Andrews Wine Co
Creation Wines, Viognier, Walker Bay 2014	16 (86)	15.5	16.25	16	Bright, lifted nose of boiled sweets, apple purée and apple cordial. Broad and creamy with good richness and depth of flavour.	14%	2015-2017	£13	SA Wines Online
Excelsior, Viognier, Robertson 2014	16 (86)	15	16.75	16	Lime and lemon rind, with creamy grapefruit and melon notes. Quite rich and fruit-forward on the palate and with complexity too.	14.5%	2015-2016	£7.20	Liberty Wines
Leeuwenkuil, Marsanne, Voor-Paardeberg 2014	16 (86)	16	16	16	Warm baked apple tart, cinnamon, apple purée and toasted bread crumbs. Smoky, taut palate with good acidity and textural length.	13%	2015-2019	£11.95	www.leeuwenkuilv.co.za
Spice Route, Viognier, Swartland 2014	16 (86)	15	16	17	Peanut brittle notes. Earthy, leesy richness and opulent depth. Easy-drinking wine with green herbal notes and the grape's typical floral character.	13.5%	2015-2018	£9.99	Gerard Seel, Lea & Sandeman, The Drink Shop
Alvi's Drift, Viognier, Worcester 2014	15.75 (85+)	14	16.5	17	Lime pith with an imposing white pepper and citrus note. Clean and fresh, complex and persistent with a slight confected character.	13.5%	2015-2017	£18-£21.29	Slurp, South Down Cellars, Vinotopia
Boekenhoutskloof, Wolftrap, Western Cape 2014	15.75 (85+)	14.5	16.5	16	Cream soda, green apples, coconut oil and fig confit. Lovely character with some spicy elements and fresh acidity to support.	13.5%	2015-2018	£10.99	AC Gallie, Dorset Wine Co, Noble Green Wines, Love Wine, North & South, Oxford Wine Co, The Solent Cellar, Wined Up Here
Eben Sadie, Skerpioen, Swartland 2013	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15.25	Subtle, well-made wine with notes of apple, pear and nutmeg, and well-integrated oak. Sleek and aromatic – has mass appeal.	14%	2015-2018	£18.99	Handford
Kleinood, Tamboerskloof Viognier, Stellenbosch 2014	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15	15.5	Smoky, slightly reductive nose with chalky green fruits. The complex, saline palate is fresh and sappy with understated floral fruit; a fine example.	13%	2015-2017	POA	Bob Wines, Prohibition Wines, SA Wines Online, The Good Wine Shop, Vincisive Wines, Vivat Bacchus
Lourensford, Winemaker's Selection Viognier, Stellenbosch 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16.5	15.5	Evolving oily aromatics, good tangerine fruit weight, oak and minerals. Pleasing acid balance on this well-judged, mid-weight wine with good length.	14.5%	2015-2017	£12.95 (2013)	Eagle Wines, Liquorbins, The Shenfield Wine Co, Thomas Peatling
The Foundry, Viognier, Stellenbosch 2014	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16	15.75	Blend of lemongrass, grapefruit and citrus pith. Some leesy characters on the palate add to the white pepper and citrus fruits. A bit warm on the finish.	13.5%	2015-2016	N/A UK	Handford, Lay & Wheeler
Bellingham, The Bernard Series Whole-Bunch Roussanne, Paarl 2014	15.5 (85)	15.5	15.5	15.75	Subtle floral and beeswax notes with minerality, zip and freshness. Flavours of quince and yellow apples, boiled sweets and a smoky reduction.	14%	2015-2017	£9.99	Sainsbury's
Painted Wolf Wines, Roussanne, Paarl 2012	15.5 (85)	16.5	15	15.25	High-toned, honey and spice characters with savoury undertones. Salty sea breeze lift and real definition, though finish loses focus a touch.	12.5%	2015-2016	£9.99	Adnams, Addison's, Bowland Forest Wines, Newton Wines, Red Squirrel Wines, Roberts & Speight
Robertson Wines, Wide River Viognier, Robertson 2014	15.5 (85)	14.5	15.5	16.5	Lime peel and crisp, mineral and peachy aromatics. Massive mouthfeel – an opulent palate of Rhône-style weight. Has good length but a lean finish.	12.5%	2015-2017	£13.95	Tanners

Recommended (continued) 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	TA	AG	GS	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Rustenberg, Roussanne, Simonsberg-Stellenbosch 2014	15.5 (85)	15	16.5	15	Lifted aromas of peach skin, green apple and an exotic soapy touch. Pleasing, rich style – very young with lots of ripe pear and interesting minerality.	14%	2015-2017	£24.95	Frontier Fine Wines, The Drink Shop, Christopher Piper, Great Grog, Majestic
Boekenhoutskloof, Porcupine Ridge Viognier-Grenache, W Cape 2014	15.25 (84)	15	16	15	Apricot and white peach notes. Palate is softly textured with yellow fruits, peach purée and a hint of minerality. Pretty, but not quite a 'wow' wine.	14%	2015-2016	£14	Majestic
Eben Sadie, Sequillo, Swartland 2013	15.25 (84)	15	14.5	16.5	Wonderful exotic mix of melon pastilles, fresh pineapple and green apple bonbons. Rich, honeyed and showing some age for a 2013.	14%	2015-2018	£19.49	Amps, Fortnum & Mason, Hallsam, Handford, Hangingditch, Hedonism, Huntsworth, The Sampler, Swig, Wine Utopia, Wine Trust
Fairview, Goats do Roam, Coastal Region 2014	15.25 (84)	14.5	16.5	14.5	Delicate, floral nose with wet slate and quince fruit. Soft, grassy expression with excellent acid balance and a long (if light) fennel-flavoured finish.	13.5%	2015-2017	£10.99	Hawkshead, Liberty Wines, SA Wines Online, Slurp, The Old Bridge, The Wine Reserve
Fairview, Nuok, Paarl 2013	15.25 (84)	14.5	15.5	15.5	Surprisingly full on the palate, with good concentration of mango, passion fruit and subtle white pepper. Lots of fresh acidity and a flinty finish.	13.5%	2015-2016	£18.99	Liberty Wines, SA Wines Online
Fairview, Roussanne, Paarl 2014	15.25 (84)	15.5	15.5	15	Gentle, complex, subtle wine with beeswax, green apple and citrus notes. Pure, clean and fresh with a good finish; will develop.	13.5%	2015-2018	POA	Liberty Wines
Grande Provence, Chenin Blanc-Viognier, Franschhoek 2014	15.25 (84)	16	16	14	Very fresh, ripe Chenin Blanc comes through. Palate showing a little too much toasty oak, but this is a well-made wine with good freshness and focus.	14%	2015-2018	£12.95 (2013)	Good Wine Online
Grande Provence, Viognier, Franschhoek 2013	15.25 (84)	15	14.75	15.75	Vibrant lemongrass, Asian spice, lime peel and zesty freshness overwhelm the palate. Sleek mineral precision and vibrant fruit concentration.	14%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.grandeprovence.co.za
Painted Wolf Wines, Peloton Blanc, Coastal Region 2013	15.25 (84)	14.5	15	16	Forward, waxy, aromatic nose. Strawberry bonbons give a sweet lift to the creamy, textured palate. Rather angular acidity.	13.5%	2015-2020	£9.99	Newton Wines
Rickety Bridge Winery, The Foundation Stone, Coastal Region 2014	15.25 (84)	15	15.5	15.5	Lifted, exotic nose of yellow peaches and white pepper. Mid-weight, flinty palate with a touch of bell pepper and crisp acidity.	13.5%	2015-2018	£9.99	AC Gallie, Hard to Find Wines, Love Wine, Olivers, Oxford Drinks
Yardstick Wines, Marvelous, Western Cape 2013	15.25 (84)	15.5	14.5	15.5	Perfumed and lifted aroma of lychee and rose petal. The high acidity of the Chenin gives freshness to the palate and the fruit is vibrant.	13%	2015-2016	£13.95	Dreyfus Ashby, Handford
Fable Mountain Vineyards, Jackal Bird, Western Cape 2012	15 (83)	15	14.5	15.5	Chalky, savoury apple and white peach notes with reductive vinyl complexity. Honeyed, soft, fleshy texture with a yellow peach and mineral finish.	13%	2015-2016	£24.95	Dreyfus Ashby, Handford, Woodwinters
Fairview, Viognier, Paarl 2014	15 (83)	14	15.5	15.5	Mid-weight, well-balanced wine with some floral notes, stone fruit and a pleasant enough finish, though it lacks a bit of varietal character.	13.5%	2015-2016	£13-£14	Ake & Humphris, Eton Vintners, Hawkshead, Highbury Vintners, Leamington Wine Co, SA Wines Online, Slurp, Taylor's, The Drink Shop
The Three Foxes, Clairette Blanche, Coastal Region 2013	15 (83)	14	14.5	16.5	Soapstone, wet slate and honeyed, aromatic yellow peach fruit aromas. The palate shows a tart, fleshy bite or red apple and a zippy finish.	11.5%	2015-2018	£19.49	Exel Wines

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)
 ■ La Petite Ferme, Viognier, Franschhoek 2014 14.75 (82) ■ Lammershoek, LAM White, Swartland 2013 14.75 (82) ■ Bosman Family Vineyards, Adama, Western Cape 2013 14.5 (81)

For full UK stockist details, see p103

Next month's panel tastings
 Red Graves 2012, Côte-Rôtie and Argentinian Malbec blends

Expert summary: Tim Atkin MW

A solid and encouraging performance from this diverse line-up of wines, which highlighted the wealth of South Africa's key winemaking regions and producers



Tim Atkin MW is an awarded wine writer and photographer, and is regarded as a leading commentator on South African wine

THIS TASTING FOCUSED on Mediterranean grapes in general, not just blends. This meant that there were almost as many varietal wines, from the likes of Verdelho, Grenache Blanc, Roussanne and especially Viognier, as there were combinations of grapes. It was an extremely diverse line-up.

To keep sample numbers manageable, we set the bar at 75% for the maximum percentage of Chenin Blanc-based wines. This meant that there was no room, alas, for Alheit's Cartology (92% Chenin), widely considered one of the best blends in the Cape. Under our 75% Chenin maximum but sadly not sending samples were Mullineux's 2012 white blend and Keermont's Terrasse 2013. Apart from these three absentees, the tasting featured the cream of South Africa's Mediterranean producers (see *Cape Med Whites: the facts, p99*) – a representative line-up of an important category.

The blends were mostly Chenin-based, but here too, the diversity was evident. There were also cuvées dominated by Roussanne, Marsanne, Grenache Blanc and Viognier, making this a tasting that required an unusual level of concentration,

'The tasting featured the cream of South Africa's Mediterranean producers – an important category'

given its broad stylistic parameters. The results highlighted the best producers, with fine showings by most of the key names. I would have expected a few more Outstanding wines perhaps, especially from Eben Sadie, but the overall quality was good to very good. Less-famous wineries (at least in my view) that did well included Grande Provence, Muratie and Anthonij Rupert.

There was a good spread of regions among the winning wines, covering all of the warmer climate areas, as well as the broader Coastal Region (which, bizarrely, includes some inland areas, too) and Western Cape appellations. It was also good to see some of the cooler Cape wards feature on the winners' rostrum, most notably Elgin, Walker Bay and Greyton, proving that these areas have potential with this wide pool of grapes, too.

One of the more interesting aspects of the tasting was the chance to taste a line-up of Cape Viogniers. This is not a variety commonly associated with South Africa, despite relatively large plantings and its exponential growth. In 1996, there was less than 0.5ha under vine, compared with 878ha today. Three varietal examples and one Viognier-dominated blend were among our top 13 wines. Eagles' Nest, Lismore and Waterkloof are the three best Viognier producers in the Cape, so it was good to see them emerge from the surrounding mêlée here. **D**

My top three
 Tim Atkin MW

■ **Rall, Coastal Region 2013** Donovan Rall's wine is based on Swartland Chenin Blanc, but includes grapes from other areas (mostly Verdelho with lesser amounts of Chardonnay and Viognier). It's consistently one of the best in the Cape: subtle, refined, gently oaked and sustained by acidity. **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2015-2022

■ **Lismore, Viognier, Greyton 2012** Samantha O'Keefe's picturesque property is a special site. The vines are still young, but Greyton is emerging as a great sub-region. I love the elegance and poise of her Viognier: understated, refreshing and floral, with none of the oiliness the grape sometimes gives in the Cape. **17.5 (91)** Drink 2015-2022

■ **The Foundry, Roussanne, Stellenbosch 2013** Chris Williams is winemaker at Meerlust, but he also makes some excellent Rhône-style whites under his own brand. I love the tautness and minerality of this wine, which has lovely leesy complexity and a touch of oak. **17 (90)** Drink 2015-2018

My top three
 Adrian Garforth MW

■ **Rall, Coastal Region 2013** A fascinating blend sourced from the Paardeberg and Stellenbosch. This is minimal-interventionist winemaking at its best, and the expert marriage of the blend has resulted in a wine with great weight, complexity, poise and balance. **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2015-2022

■ **The Sadie Family, Palladius, Coastal Region 2012** It is hard to downplay the impact that Eben Sadie has had in raising awareness of South Africa as a quality wine producing country. Palladius has always made a statement and though not always to my taste, 2012 is back on form: fine texture, harmony and an extremely persistent mineral finish. **18.25 (94)** Drink 2015-2022

■ **Vondeling, Babiana, Voor-Paardeberg, 2012** Another successful Chenin-based, wild-ferment wine from 30-year-old vines. A touch reductive to start, but it soon opens up to show lovely tropical aromas, great mid-palate fruit concentration and a long, spicy finish. **18.25 (94)** Drink 2015-2018

My top three
 Greg Sherwood MW

■ **Rall, Coastal Region 2013*** Donovan Rall's talents are awe-inspiring. The consistency of the style and quality of his winemaking wins him a cult following. This shows immaculate oak judgement, mesmerising blending and vibrant energy and freshness. **18.5/20 (95/100)** Drink 2015-2022

■ **Lismore, Viognier, Greyton 2012*** Samantha O'Keefe is a pioneer in Greyton. Her whites always deliver seductive, exotic richness combined with minerality and freshness. This Viognier has Condrieu-like depth, finesse and pedigree. I can't imagine any white Rhône lover not falling in love with it. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2015-2022

■ **Saronsburg, Viognier, Tulbagh 2013** Dewalt Heynes has proven himself one of the Cape's most insightful winemakers, delivering opulent, vibrant, modern wines with pristine fruit purity, alluring oak and seamless balance. Seek this and his other wines out. **18 (93)** Drink 2015-2022

**Disclaimer: Sherwood is senior wine buyer for Handford, a specialist South African merchant that stocks many of the wines in our tasting*

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

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