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Special Report: The Exciting Sparkling Wines of South Africa



Constantia Valley Vineyards in Cape Town

With over 150 producers, the sparkling wine scene in South Africa keeps getting more interesting. New producers from several growing regions are making very respectable MCC's [méthode cap-classique—i.e., méthode champenoise]. Of special interest are the small, newer producers like Ambeloui, Colmant, Charles Fox, Genevieve, and Silverthorn dedicated to only making sparkling wines and only using Champagne varieties and practices. In this special report, we review the new releases of South African sparkling wine from these and other top producers. Not all the wines reviewed here are imported to the US, but given their overall high quality level and reasonable prices, they will be soon.

In addition to the newer, small wineries, established producers like Bon Courage, Klein Constantia, Pongracz and Villiera are upping their game, sourcing fruit from diverse terroirs, fermenting partly in oak barriques, and blending in reserve wines to yield refined sparkling wines with fresh, complex, Champagne-like flavors. In addition to these producers, we've found several other very good producers that we've tasted for the first time—Allée Bleue, Constantia Uitsig, De Wetshof, Domaine de Dieux, Hout

Bay Vineyards, Saltare, and Uitkyk. In the tasting notes at the end of this report, we review the best MCC's of South Africa, an update of our last review done two years ago. As discussed below, two sparklers stand out to us as the top cuvées of the Western Cape—the Boschendal 2007 Prestige Cuvée Jean Le Long and the Colmant NV Brut Chardonnay. This report updates our Report # 30 *The Wines of South Africa*, our 2010 article on Graham Beck, our 2009 article on *Surprising South African Sparklers*, and our 2012 article *South African Sparkling Wine: A Hidden Treasure*. Readers interested in sparkling wines and Champagne more generally should read our recently published Report # 34 *Champagne Revisited* and Report # 40 *Consumer's Guide to Rosé Champagne and Sparkling Wine*.

A Brief History

In 1971 Frans Malan made South Africa's first méthode champenoise wine at Simonsig using Chenin Blanc grapes and called the wine Kaapse Vonkel. [Beginning in 1987, Johan Malan converted to a Chardonnay and Pinot Noir blend.] It took a while, but by the late 1980's Simonsig was joined in making quality sparkling wines by the partnership of Jean Louis Denois and the Grier siblings at Villiera, Archim von Anim's venture at Haute Cabriere, Graham Beck's Robertson investment (with the help of Pieter Ferreira), and Nicky Kroner's release of its Krone Borealis Brut at Twee Jonge Gezellen. Finally, in 1992, the Cap Classique Association was founded and the term Méthode Cap Classique (MCC) came into being.

In the 43 years since Frans Malan created the first South African Champagne-style sparkling wine, the number of producers has grown to over 150 today, 84 of which are members of the Cap Classique Association.

Chefs de Cave

To make excellent sparkling wine requires something additional to good fruit and extended aging on the lees. It requires the special blending talents of a chef de cave to

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Issue 11	2005 Bordeaux Crus Bourgeois
Issue 12	California Petite Sirah - Syrah Update
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Issue 28	The Wines of Priorat
Issue 29	The Wines of Monterey County
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Issue 32	The New Wines of Israel
Issue 33T	he Wines of Paso Robles
Issue 34	Champagne Revisited
Issue 35	The Wines of Soave
Special Report	South African Chenin Blanc
Issue 36	The Wines of Santa Barbara
Issue 37	The Wines of Sicily
Issue 38	The Wines of Washington State
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