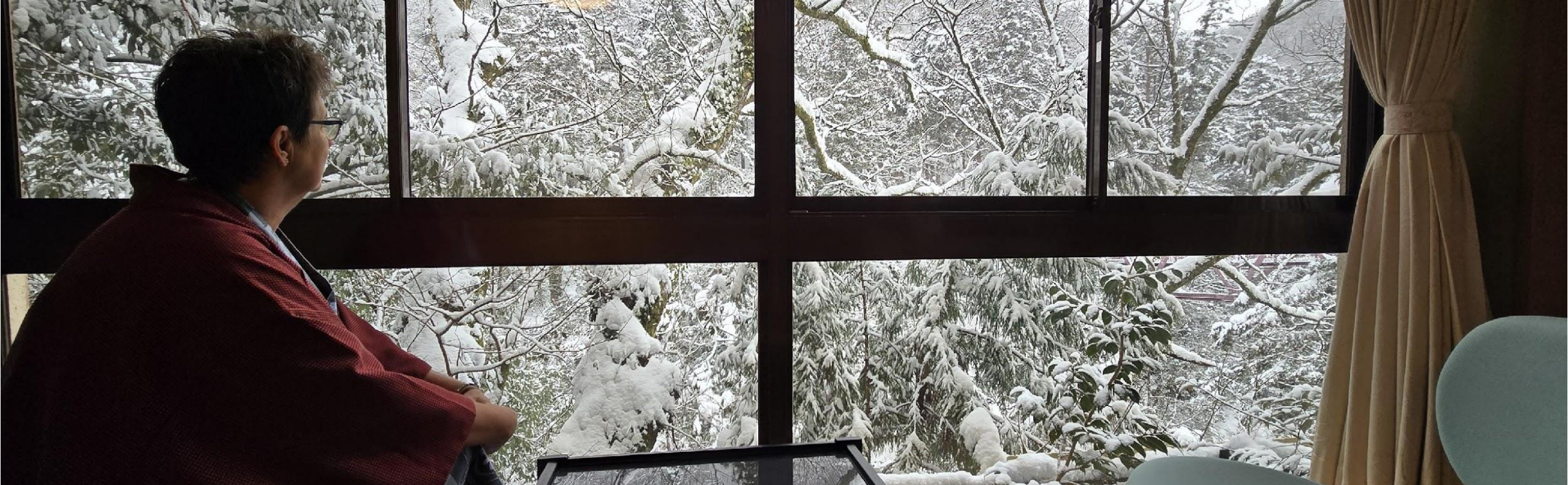




Master's Choice by Cathy van Zyl MW

Hosted by Wines of South Africa Japan – Tokyo, 1 April 2026





Welcome & Introduction

I'm Cathy van Zyl, Master of Wine based in the winelands of South Africa, and I'm thrilled to be here with you this evening, and to share a small selection of my favourite South African wines. It's my 6th visit to Japan, and this time I've been travelling around your amazing country with a group of fellow MWs, learning about and tasting the wines grown and crafted here in Japan by some of your finest producers. It's been an unforgettable experience not only because of the superb quality and character of the wines but also the typically Japanese warmth and hospitality which we experienced wherever we went.



About Cathy's Wine Choices

The wines we will be tasting this evening were chosen by me, firstly because I love their appearance, texture and taste, and, secondly, because they highlight many of the things I love most about the current South African wine scene. These include its energy, enthusiasm and emphasis on freshness and fruit flavour; its accent on origin and enabling the vineyard to tell its story; its passion for traditional grape varieties as well as more recently introduced varieties that show particular promise; its dedication to craftsmanship, authenticity and attention to detail; and its mission to both understand and reflect what makes South African wine unique.

South Africa's Winelands – Between Two Oceans

As its name suggests, South Africa is the southernmost country in Africa, and its wines are grown at the very tip of the continent, between two oceans: on the western side is the Atlantic, with its Benguela Current bringing cold water up from the Antarctic Ocean (the average water temperature is 10-16°C), and, on the eastern side of the country, the Indian Ocean, with its Agulhas Current bringing warmer water down from the tropics (the average water temperature is 20-27°C).





South Africa's Winelands – Scenic Ribbon of Land

Most vines are grown in a temperate strip of land between ocean and mountain along the east and west coasts, roughly 800 km long and seldom more than 50 km wide, noted for beautiful and sometimes dramatic scenery. Here rainfall measures up to 1,000 mm per year. Inland, semi-arid conditions prevail and rainfall is significantly lower, making wine producers dependent on irrigation.

The area under vine has been declining for some years, and today stands at roughly 86,000 hectares. The most widely planted white-wine varieties are Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Colombard, Chardonnay and Muscat d'Alexandrie; the most widely planted red-wine varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah/Shiraz, Pinotage, Merlot and Ruby Cabernet.

The Wine of Origin scheme divides the wine-producing zones into the following categories or types (from largest to smallest): Geographical Units, Regions, Districts and Wards. Currently there are 7 Geographical Units, 6 Regions, 31 Districts and 102 Wards.

Western Cape – Diverse Kingdom Of Flowers & Vines

Around 90% of vineyards are found in the Western Cape, which is both a province of the Republic of South Africa and a demarcated Geographical Unit in the Wine of Origin certification system.

It is home to the Cape Floral Region, the world's smallest yet most diverse floral kingdom, with more than 9,000 plant species, around 70% of which are endemic.

The main type of vegetation found in this unique area is known as fynbos, an Afrikaans word literally meaning “fine bush”. The often-aromatic shrub-like plants within this domain include the world-famous and colourful protea species, such as the pincushion, sugarbush and spectacular king protea.

It's interesting to note that local winetasters sometimes use the word “fynbos” to describe red wines with a floral or fragrant character, such as Cabernet Franc or Syrah.





Western Cape – Multitude Of Grape Varieties & Wine Styles

Diversity of plant life in the Western Cape is mirrored in the unusually wide variety of soil types, topographies and mesoclimates, coupled with positive factors like regular coastal fog, cooling sea breezes and a moderate Mediterranean climate. These give rise to a rich diversity of grape varieties and wine styles, as well as wines of unique character and complexity.

A (Very Short) History

- South Africa is unusual – possibly unique – in being able to date the birth date of its wine industry very precisely – to 2 February 1659
- Vines had been imported from France, Germany and Spain, and established in today's Cape Town, around 1655.

Important recent developments include:

- Return of SA to the international community from 1994, after isolation of apartheid era;
- Development and deployment of advanced technologies and science-based approaches;
- The “Swartland Revolution” in early 2000s, emphasising simple, empathetic and authentic winemaking.

To-day, praise be to God, wine was made for the first time from Cape grapes¹, namely from the new must fresh from the vat. The grapes were mostly Muscadel and other white, round grapes, very fragrant and tasty. The Spanish grapes² are still quite green, though they hang reasonably thickly on several vines and give promise of a first-class crop. These grapes, from three young vines planted 2 years ago, have yielded about 12 quarts of must, and we shall soon discover how it will be

SA Wine's Birthplace: An Ancient Ocean

While the tradition of crafting wine in South Africa is comparatively young, the geology that underlies it most certainly is not. The story begins 1,000-million years ago, in an ocean basin, when shales and schists were deposited at what today is an altitude of 20 - 200 m. These deposits were folded, uplifted and eroded into rolling hills.

Then, around 600-500 million years ago, domes of granite known as plutons pushed up into the landscape, followed around 400-300 million years ago by extensive and deep deposits (up to 10 km) of mostly sandstone, quartz and shale.

Finally, a period of uplifting and folding followed, resulting in the Cape's characteristic folded mountain ranges and valleys. Subsequent erosion of the deposits created magnificent solitary sandstone mountains like Table Mountain and Simonsberg (1,000-1,300 m altitude), smaller outcrops like Paarl Mountain and Perdeberg (500-700 m altitude), as well as ranges of hills like Bottelary, Malmesbury and Darling (200-400 m altitude), often resting on granitic bases which merge into shale foothills.



Complex Tapestry Of Soils

The soils are noted for their great age and diversity over short distances, particularly in the coastal zone.

Important soil types include:

- Reddish and yellowish brown soils, usually associated with granitic hills and granitic foot slopes of the sandstone mountains. These soils, at altitudes of 150-400 m, often on steep slopes, are highly weathered and acid, stable and well drained, with a good water-holding capacity.
- Other granite soils occur on gently undulating hills between the mountains and the sea at 20-150 m altitude. These are generally duplex in character, consisting of coarse bleached sand and often also yellow-brown gravel or ferricrete (“koffieklip” in Afrikaans), on wet (gleyed) clay. These soils are moderately vigorous and, in combination with prevailing cool sea breezes, produce consistently good-quality wines.
- Shales usually surround the granite plutons and are adjacent to sandstone on granite mountain ranges. Soil types typically vary from stony, weathered rock on hill crests, to strongly structured soils on mid- and foot-slopes, combined with weathered shale which can be exploited by vine roots.
- Inland, shales and river deposits predominate.





Topology & Aspect

Cape vineyards are planted in a wide variety of locations - valley floors, hillsides, mountain slopes and plateaux – at anything from around 50m to well over 1,000 m above sea level. This creates many different pockets in which to grow diverse grape varieties.

Being located in the southern hemisphere, cooler southern and eastern slopes are preferred, especially for varieties like Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir.

A (Mostly) Temperate Mediterranean Climate

Viticulture originated and still mainly takes place at a latitude of 27-34° south, in an area with a Mediterranean climate and beneficial coastal conditions, notably cool sea breezes. Summers are warm to hot, and winters cool to very cold on the Northern Cape plateau, where, unlike the Western Cape, frost can be a problem.

Rain falls mainly between May and August, and, because of the cold Benguela Current, it diminishes (a) in a northerly and northwesterly direction along the west coast, and (b) inland from the mountain ranges which follow the coastline, making irrigation essential in these areas.

Average temperatures follow an inverse pattern to rainfall, i.e. they increase in a northerly direction and with distance from the sea.





Trend - passion for traditional grape varieties

A little earlier I mentioned a winegrowing revolution which had its roots in the Swartland region in the early 2000s, spread throughout the winelands, and continues to exert a powerful influence to this day. One of the most exciting facets of this revolution was a re-evaluation of traditional grape varieties that had fallen out of favour, due to growers' emphasis on so called "international grapes" like Chardonnay, Merlot and Pinot Noir.

Varieties that had become unfashionable and therefore uneconomic often saw their vineyards become neglected, forgotten and even uprooted. But the Swartland revolutionaries and their counterparts in other areas saw potential in the heirloom vines, sought them out and carefully nursed them back to health, for vinification using modern approaches and techniques to emphasise flavour and site expression.

The example I've chosen for us to taste tonight is Palomino, a white-wine variety also known as Malvasia Rei, White French and Fransdruif (which means "French Grape" in Afrikaans).

Previously important for the distilling industry, Palomino now occupies just 0.1% of South Africa's total hectares and thus is limited to very few bottlings. However, the best of them, like brand owner-winemaker Francois Haasbroek's old-vine expression, are delicious and well worth seeking out.



Wine 1 - **Blackwater Wine** Pleasure Garden Palomino 2021

- Wine of Origin Robertson
- Residual sugar: <2 g/L
- Total acid: 5.2 g/L
- pH: 3.65
- Alcohol: 12.3%
- Vineyard planted in 1927 on shale-based soils with lime and chalk substructure, single wire support.

Winemaking

- Destemmed and settled 24 hours, racked to concrete 'egg' and 300L barrels. 20% fermented 5 days on skins, no additions. Components blended after primary fermentation, aged on gross lees 14 months. Racked off lees and bottled.

Looking for Importer

Trend - accent on origin

Innumerable recent studies and surveys highlight the premium placed by consumers on the origin and authenticity of the products they consume. Wine is no exception, and South African producers are both mindful of this trend and committed to allowing the wine to reflect its origin as vividly and truthfully as possible.

The example I have for you tonight is crafted by a self-taught winemaker in Stellenbosch, Virginia Povall. Ginny is a former New Yorker with a corporate background, who fell in love with the Cape and moved there in 2008 to begin a journey into wine.

Her internationally awarded Mary Delany Chenin Blanc is sourced from ±70-year-old vines on a legendary farm owned by the Laing family in the Wine of Origin district of Citrusdal Mountain. The area is noted for its rugged terrain (its Afrikaans nickname, “Skurfberg”, translates as “Rough Mountain”). Grapes from this site are world-renowned thanks to Ginny and other top producers such as Eben Sadie of Sadie Family Wines.

To showcase the unique character and superlative quality of the site, Ginny’s winemaking style has been minimalistic since her debut vintage in 2009, with only roughly half the wine fermented and aged in oak barrels (the remainder in steel tank and, lately, concrete ‘egg’), and a notably brief maturation period of 6 months, to preserve the delicate fruit.



Wine 2 - **Botanica Wines** The Mary Delany Chenin Blanc 2024

- Wine of Origin Citrusdal Mountain
- Residual sugar: 4.5 g/L
- Total acid: 6.0 g/L
- pH: 3.13
- Alcohol: 13.89%
- Dry-farmed bushvines planted in 1960 at 500 m altitude in red sandy soils (decomposed sandstone over a layer of clay), approximately 30 km from the sea.

Winemaking

- Grapes hand sorted, crushed and destemmed. Juice immediately pressed and cold settled for 2 days at 10°C. 1,750L fermented in concrete 'egg', 1,237L fermented in 4th-fill 400L French oak barrels. After fermentation, left on the fine lees in 'egg' and barrel for 6 months before blending and bottling.



Imported by ANPAN



Trend - dedication to craftsmanship, authenticity and attention to detail

Our next wine speaks of the emphasis on craftsmanship, authenticity and attention to detail which is characteristic of current generation of top wine producers.

The wine is grown on a farm named Anysbos in the Wine of Origin ward of Bot River, a few kilometres from the ocean. Anysbos is the local name for the indigenous fynbos species *agathosma cerefolium*, known for its aniseed- or liquorice-like fragrance.

The vines are farmed by Johan Heyns, formerly a lawyer and later filmmaker, and his wife Sue. The wine is made in a small onsite cellar by Marelise Niemann, one of the established stars of the South African wine scene, and one of the growing number of women winemakers.

Marelise also crafts her own range of wines, named Momento, in the Anysbos cellar, and is one of a small but fast-expanding number of female wine-brand owners.

The wine we are tasting is called DisDit (meaning “this is it”), and is a blend of Chenin Blanc and three Mediterranean varieties. You’ll notice how expertly crafted the wine is, and how its components blend perfectly to create a unique flavour profile (perhaps there is even a hint of liquorice). Yet the wine has a light, unforced quality to it, reflecting Marelise’s soft, gentle handling of the grapes, and her commitment to make wine as naturally and simply as possible.



Wine 3 - **Anysbos** DisDit 2024

- Wine of Origin Bot River
- Residual sugar: 2.28 g/L
- Total acid: 5.58 g/L
- pH: 3.26
- Alcohol: 13.5%
 - Chenin Blanc 57%
 - Roussanne 20%
 - Marsanne 13%
 - Grenache Blanc 10%
- Mostly dryland bushvines planted on Bokkeveld shale. All grapes from Anysbos.

Winemaking

- Grapes wholebunch pressed, settled without enzymes or sulphur and naturally fermented in 225, 300 and 400L Burgundy barrels, none new. Parcels matured separately in barrels 10 months before blending and bottling. No fining.

Looking for Importer

Trend – Blends with Chenin Blanc

The previously mentioned emphasis on Chenin Blanc has resulted in an accent on blends of Chenin Blanc with various other varieties. Such wines are sometimes called Cape White Blends, and there are some leading winegrowers, like Andrea Mullineux of Mullineux Wines, who strongly believe Cape White Blends have the potential to become South Africa's flagship white wine.

This is because of the already superb quality of the top examples, notably those boosted by the use of old-vine grapes, and because South Africa has more hectares under Chenin Blanc than any wine-producing nation, and thus enjoys a significant point of difference.

Andrea's Chenin Blanc blend is acknowledged as one of the finest, perhaps *the* finest, in its class. Its distinctiveness is enhanced by the inclusion of a small splash of Andrea's beloved Semillon Gris, a rare mutation of Semillon, which she also bottles separately for the Cape Winemakers Guild auction wine named The Gris Old Vines Semillon.



Wine 4 - **Mullineux** Old Vines White 2024

- Wine of Origin Swartland
- Residual sugar: 2.0 g/L
- Total acid: 5.5 g/L
- pH: 3.29
- Alcohol: 14%
 - Chenin Blanc 68%
 - Clairette Blanche 14%
 - Grenache Blanc 6%
 - Viognier 6%
 - Semillon Gris 6%
- The flagship white wine since first vintage in 2008, based on Chenin Blanc, up to 72 years old, grown in granite, schist, quartz and iron soils. Other varieties in the blend have traditionally done well in vineyards dating back to 1960. Combination of owned and leased vineyards. Chris and Andrea Mullineux have complete control of how leased vineyards are managed, or farm the leased vineyards themselves.

Winemaking

- All grapes wholebunch pressed, with oxidative handling of juice. Racked to 225 and 500L barrels and 2,000 and 5,000L foudres, all French, 20% new, for natural primary and secondary fermentation. On lees, unstirred, until racking out of barrel to prepare for bottling after 11 months. Barrels kept full as long as possible. Unfiltered.



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Trend - energy, enthusiasm & emphasis on freshness & flavour

One of the most important legacies of the “Swartland Revolution” is its emphasis on freshness and fruit flavour, through improved vineyard and cellar management, earlier picking and other means.

Accent on freshness was a reaction to the traditional style, notably in the premium red-wine area, which tended towards heavy extraction. This style, known in Afrikaans as “dikvoet” (literally “thick foot”) reached its zenith in the “Parkerisation” era, with its obsession with lengthy hang-time and ultra-ripe fruit.

The younger generation which rebelled against this ethos brought not only a lighter, brighter style of wine, but also fresh energy and enthusiasm, qualities which shine brightly in the creator of our next wine, Jessica Saurwein. Another in the growing cohort of women winemakers and wine-brand owners, Jessica works from a small cellar on the family farm near the south coast town of Stanford, specialising in top-quality Pinot Noir and Riesling which she sources from premium cool-climate sites.



Wine 5 - **Saurwein Wines** Om Pinot Noir 2023

- Wine of Origin Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge
- Residual sugar: 2 g/L
- Total acid: 5.4 g/L
- pH: 3.54
- Alcohol: 13.38%
- Late vintage, with excellent ripening conditions and very healthy fruit. Grapes picked in two batches from two vineyards just 100m apart. Resultant wine is energetic and concentrated, with beautiful fresh acidity and ageing potential.

Winemaking

- Grapes picked and sorted by hand, cold soaked and spontaneously fermented. 12% whole bunch clusters. Post-fermentation maceration about 2 months. 10 months in 228L French oak barrels, 25% new.



Imported by Masuda



Trend - Sustainability in a time of climate change

City on a Hill, the boutique brand owned and vinified by André Bruys, may be described as “a child of the Revolution” in that it’s based in Swartland, where the Revolution began, and its wines reflect the revolutionary style in many ways: the vibrancy and freshness (though perhaps on the gutsier side of “light”), the natural winemaking and minimal intervention in the cellar, the emphasis on Chenin Blanc and on site expression, the use of no new oak etc.

City on a Hill is also an example of growing wine in a warming world, with André choosing to work with varieties that have demonstrated their resilience in this historically warm area, like Tinta Barroca and Cinsault, as well as more recent yet resilient varieties like Grenache Noir and Carignan. He also works with well-established and proven sites.

Wine 6 - **City on a Hill Wine Company** Cinsault 2024

- Wine of Origin Swartland
- Residual sugar: 1.4 g/L
- Total acid: 5.4 g/L
- pH: 3.62
- Alcohol: 13.65%
- Vines planted in granite and iron soils between 1998 and 1995, dry-farmed as bushvines.

Winemaking

- Grapes harvested in morning, transported to cellar and rested overnight in cold room. Different batches fermented separately with natural yeasts. Roughly 50% whole bunches. On skins \pm 20 days before basket pressing. After malolactic fermentation, transferred to foudre and old 500L barrels. Bottled after 10 months.



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Trend - single variety, multiple sites

Marelise Niemann, who we mentioned earlier, is the owner-winemaker at Momento Wines. She fell in love with Grenache while in Spain's Priorat region, and she's specialised in the variety since her first vintage as a soloist in the early 2010s.

Marelise not only bottles multiple variants of the grape - Noir, Gris and Blanc - but, in line with a fairly recent trend, also produces expressions of multiple and diverse sites, from high-altitude Piekenierskloof on the west coast to Bot River on the southern seaboard.

The version we're tasting tonight is from the original site, on Swartland's famous Paardeberg.



Wine 7 - **Momento Wines** Paardeberg Grenache Noir 2022

- Wine of Origin Swartland
- Residual sugar: 1.4 g/L
- Total acid: 6.1 g/L
- pH: 3.26
- Alcohol: 12.52%
- Made from same vineyard since 2014, low-yielding bushvines planted in the early 2000s on granitic soils on slopes of Paardeberg.

Winemaking

- Gentle and minimum intervention with 'hands-off' approach to show the delicate and elegant side of this grape.
- After hand picking in early morning, bunches destemmed into small fermenting tanks with 30% whole clusters.
- Four days cold soak on skins before natural fermentation. Punch downs by hand, twice a day. After slow and steady fermentation, additional maceration of 10 days. After total 4 weeks on skins, grapes gently pressed with old basket press into old foudre for malolactic fermentation and maturation. Total time in foudre: 12 months. No fining.



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Trend - more recent varieties showing particular promise

While old-time varieties like Cinsault and Palomino are being revived and given a second day in the sun, more recent arrivals are regaining fashionability, too.

These include the Bordeaux black grapes which, during the Swartland Revolution, were largely outshone by Syrah and other Rhône/Mediterranean varieties.

In particular, Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec are now rising in the popularity charts, but even they are being eclipsed by one of their cousins, Cabernet Franc.

For context: ten years ago there were only around 60 bottlings of this spicy and aromatic grape; now there are twice as many, spanning the length and breadth of the winelands, and a multitude of taste profiles, from fruity to herbaceous.

Jocelyn Hogan Wilson of Hogan Wines - yet another woman winemaker and wine-brand owner in our line-up tonight - produces one of the best examples. Jocelyn named the wine for a Red Hot Chili Peppers song lyric, and I'm sure you'll agree it's smokin' hot!

Wine 8 - **Hogan Wines** Mirror For The Sun Cabernet Franc 2021

- Wine of Origin Stellenbosch
- Residual sugar: 1.7 g/L
- Total acid: 5.4 g/L
- pH: 3.5
- Alcohol: 14%
- Grapes from 12-year-old trellised vines in granitic soils on lower Helderberg Mountain, 2 km from the coast. Maritime effect is most favourable, especially in hot January-February months in. Leaf removal in the bunch zone during November/December an important practice to let enough sun in to prevent vegetal flavours.

Winemaking

- Grapes sorted and crushed (no whole bunches). Spontaneous fermentation in open fermenters with very soft handling during fermentation, only two punch downs-per day. 10 months in 225L French oak barrels, 20% new. Rough filtration before bottling in December 2021.



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