

RECOMMENDED NEW RELEASES

Including Some Little-known Gems from the Viticultural Boondocks

by Pierre-Antoine Rovani

*** of the 30 South African wines featured in this report, 15 are from the Vinnovative Imports portfolio ***

BRADGATE 2003 CHENIN BLANC / SAUV. BLANC STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 88 PTS.

Bradgate's 2003 Chenin Blanc 70% - Sauvignon Blanc 30%, from a cool vintage, contains more Chenin Blanc in the blend than it has in the past. The finest example to date of this consistently **excellent value**, it reveals fresh citrus and gooseberry aromas. Loads of flavorful pears and apples are intermingled with minerals and hints of lemons in its rich, lush, light to medium-bodied character. Drink it over the next year.

PAUL CLUVER 2003 CHARDONNAY ELGIN, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 87 PTS.

PAUL CLUVER 2003 WEISSER RIESLING NOBLE LATE ELGIN, SOUTH AFRICA SWEET WHITE 89 PTS.

Armed with a spicy berry-filled nose, the 2003 **Chardonnay** sports a broad, medium-bodied personality. Its flavor profile, filled with thick layers of spiced creamy peanuts, is distinctive and satin-textured. Drink it over the next 1-2 years. Powerful aromas of jammy apricots and smoky spices are found in the nose of the 2003 **Weisser Riesling Noble Late Harvest**. Sweet, but well-balanced by its buttressing acidity, this is a focused, medium-bodied wine with outstanding concentration and length. Candied apricots and spices make up its fruit-forward personality. Anticipated maturity: now - 2015.

DORNIER 2003 DONATUS WHITE STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 88 PTS.

A blend of Chenin Blanc, Semillon, and Sauvignon Blanc, the 2003 Donatus White displays aromas reminiscent of almond cream and toasty French oak. Rich, lush, silky-textured, and spicy, this is an appealing sweet nut-flavored wine with excellent mouth-feel and length. A **value**, it should be consumed over the next 1-2 years.

FAIRVALLEY 2004 SAUVIGNON BLANC COASTAL REGION, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 86 PTS.

A result of South Africa's efforts to desegregate its wine industry, this producer is owned and operated by the workers at Fairview, a winery owned by Charles Back. The South African government and Back each invested capital to launch this venture in 1997. A **fine value**, the 2004 Sauvignon Blanc displays ripe apple aromas and a light to medium-bodied, simple yet fun personality. Lively, smile-inducing and fresh, it offers flavors reminiscent of crisp apples and citrus fruits. Drink it over the next year.

JARDIN 2004 CHAMELEON STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 89 PTS.

JARDIN 2003 CHARDONNAY NINE YARDS STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 89 PTS.

JARDIN 2003 MELLIFERA NOBLE LATE HARVEST STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA SWEET WHITE 86 PTS.

JARDIN 2003 MERLOT STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA RED 86 PTS.

JARDIN 2004 SAUVIGNON BLANC STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 87 PTS.

JARDIN 2001 SOPHIA (Cape Winemakers Guild) STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA RED 91+ PTS.

Note: This estate is known as Jordan Winery throughout the world with the exception of the United States because of the California winery of the same name. The 2004 **Sauvignon Blanc** has demure aromas (perhaps because it had been bottled immediately prior to being tasted) of smoky pears. Light to medium-bodied, pure, fresh, and satin-textured, it reveals appealing flavors of pears and champagne currants in its expressive personality. Drink this **fine value** over the next 12-18 months. A blend of 55% Sauvignon Blanc and 45% Chardonnay, the 2004 **Chameleon** is an unwooded white of considerable richness. A **wonderful value**, it displays well-ripened pears and apples on the nose. This broad, medium-bodied, silky-textured wine boasts a plush personality packed with white fruits, spices, and gooseberries that linger in its impressive finish. Drink it over the next 2 years. Massive quantities of spices are found in the ripe aromatics of the 2003 **Chardonnay Nine Yards**. Produced from 15 year-old vines, this offering was aged on its lees for a year and instead of *bâtonnage*, a process in which a stirring tool is inserted into each cask, this wine's barrels were regularly rolled around the cellar to maximize lees contact. The result is a medium to full-bodied effort with loads of richness and breadth. Sweet pears and candied apples are intermingled with creamy spices in its ample, concentrated, and seamless character. **One of the finest South African Chardonnays I've tasted to date**, it is a candidate for drinking over the next 3-4 years.

Loads of spice-laden black cherries and cinnamon can be found in the aromatics of the **2003 Merlot**. A plush, plummy, medium-bodied wine, it bursts on the palate with seductive black fruit and spice flavors then quickly dissipates. Drink it over the next 2 years.

The Cape Winemakers Guild is a by-invitation-only association of South African winemakers. Prior to an annual auction, guild members do rigorous blind tastings of the membership's finest lots and select those they deem worthy of the Guild's label. Proceeds from the auction go to the education of South Africa's farm-workers and their families. There were only 75 cases of the **2001 Sophia** (Cape Winemakers Guild) produced and 28 of those are coming to the United States. Herb-laced red fruits can be found in this expressive aromatics. A blend of 66% Cabernet Sauvignon, 18% Cabernet Franc, and 16% Merlot from Jordan's finest hillside vineyards, it is medium-bodied, satin-textured and complex. Its concentrated, seamless personality unleashes intense layers of red as well as black fruits on the taster's palate. Deep, powerful, and elegant, this outstanding effort also reveals a long, fruit-filled finish. Anticipated maturity: 2006-2015.

While short in the finish and uninspiring, the **2003 Mellifera Noble Late Harvest** (100% Riesling) reveals a lovely nose of jammy apricots and white peaches. Spicy, medium-bodied, silky-textured, and displaying orange blossom-laden apricots, this is a sweet, abrupt-finishing wine for drinking over the next 4-5 years.

NEW WORLD 2004 SAUVIGNON BLANC WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA WHITE 85 PTS.

Aromatically demure (perhaps because it had been bottled immediately prior to being tasted), New World's 2004 Sauvignon Blanc offers an easygoing, light to medium-bodied character filled with sappy white fruit flavors. This **value** should be drunk over the next 18 months.

RADFORD DALE 2003 GRAVITY STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA RED 88+ PTS.

A blend of Merlot (47%), Shiraz (28%), and Cabernet Sauvignon (25%), the 2003 Gravity reveals a nose of spicy red fruits and lead pencil shavings. Youthfully tight and foursquare, this wine has outstanding potential. Medium-bodied and focused, it displays considerable quantities of well-ripened red as well as black fruits that are, at present, ensconced in the midst of copious tannin. Projected maturity: 2009-2017.

VEENWOUDE 2001 MERLOT PAARL, SOUTH AFRICA RED 87+ PTS.

An exceptionally dark wine, the 2001 Merlot contains 5% Cabernet Sauvignon. Jammy plums, mocha, and roasting spices can be discerned in its aromatics. Big, medium to full-bodied, and dense, it offers a broad panoply of powerfully flavored baked black fruits whose effect on the palate is cut short by monstrous quantities of tannin. Readers who enjoy tempting fate should age this offering because it will be considerably more enjoyable if its tannin melts with age; others should drink it over the next 5-6 years alongside a well-marbled grilled sirloin (meat fat tames the effects of tannin).

VINUM 2003 CABERNET SAUVIGNON STELLENBOSCH, SOUTH AFRICA RED 87+ PTS.

If the finish on the black cherry and blackberry-scented 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon fleshes out in the next few months, this wine could merit two to three points more. Big, dense, and ample, it is a medium-bodied, satin-textured effort crammed with sweet, spicy black fruits. Fresh, expressive and enormously appealing, it is slightly marred by a compressed, tightly wound finish. Drink this **fine value** over the next 5 years.