

Pinotage King declares 2005 vintage 'best ever'

09 June 2005 by Jeanine Wardman

close

*The Pinotage Association hosted members/producers and the media at its annual New Vintage Tasting in Stellenbosch yesterday. **Jeanine Wardman** offers a few observations.*

The Pinotage Association, and the varietal it so passionately promotes, are from time to time beleaguered from factions within the local and international wine world. Judging by the attendance of this year's New Vintage Tasting, the *afskeepkind* of the South African wine industry as Professor Joël van Wyk calls it, undoubtedly has a significant following - at least among producers.

The Association is often criticised for its adeptness at internal marketing, read: its proficiency at singing the praises of wines thought by some to be stylistically dubious, or more specifically over-extracted, alcoholic wines made from overripe grapes - the quintessential *dikvoete*. The Association perhaps does this with clear intent and purpose, coached in the principles of public relations.

An animated Beyers Truter confirmed yesterday that the body officially strives for what he calls, 'classic elegance' - a concept coined a few years ago after considering Pinotage's classic parents, especially the delicate Pinot Noir-half of the family tree.

Many would agree that 'classic elegance' is not a concept associated with wines of close on 16% alcohol, of which there were two in the flight of 14. Tasting convenor Charles Hopkins introduced the issue of alcohol reduction and expressed his support of an effort to make this technique available to local winemakers, citing its widespread use in California and Australia.

Duimpie Baily, deputy chairman of the Association, confirmed that the technique had been 'approved by the industry', but that the implementation is being 'held up in Pretoria'. Baily insisted that alcohol reductions will be legal 'in the current calendar year'.

A foreigner's opinion, especially if he's known to be an outspoken agnostic, can make a hall full of like-minded punters very uncomfortable. Hats off to convenor Charles Hopkins for inviting Chris Kelly to summarise the morning's line-up qualitatively.

Kelly admitted to arriving with 'mixed feelings' and was sure to leave with the same, though conceded to have found a promising common denominator in the form of 'wonderful base fruit'.

He has, not surprisingly, 'stylistic issues'. In this regard Kelly distinguishes between wines that 'assault' and those that 'seduce' - big and over-extracted wines belonging in the former category do not have a rightful place in the line-up in question.

'This is not the Barossa and you are not making Shiraz,' he appealed to producers.

Kelly is fresh off the Trophy Wine Show judging panel and shared fellow-judge Andrew Jefford's insistence on awarding 'wines of distinction' as opposed to 'great drinks' with the audience. Kelly concluded the morning's line-up to have contained many great drinks, but few wines of real distinction.

Truter declared the 2005 vintage 'the best ever' for Pinotage, citing small berries and intense colour concentration as indicators of 'fantastic' wines. He commended the industry's new generation of young winemakers for their 'aggressive experimentation' with winemaking techniques such as cold soaking and fermentation in wood.