

The 10 finest homegrown red wines

18 October 2004 by Marius Labuschagne

Six different wine regions in the Cape winelands this year produced a winning wine at the prestigious Absa Top 10 Pinotage Competition, while L'Avenir Estate, with winemaker Francois Naudé, entered its fifth consecutive winner and seventh winner out of the eight competitions since 1997. L'Avenir now holds the record for the most winning entries.

Raka winery made regional history by producing the first award winning wine from the new Kleinrivier ward near Stanford. The Kleinrivier ward for certified wines of origin was proclaimed at the end of August this year and the Raka Pinotage 2003 is the first certified wine of this origin to receive an accolade.

Women winemakers also feature among the 2004 Top 10 Pinotage winners for the first time since 2000, namely Teresa Fourie of Raka and Adele Dunbar of Coppoolse Finlayson-Sentinel (Sentinel Pinotage 2003).

The wines selected for the 2004 Absa Top 10 Pinotage Competition can be regarded as proudly South African examples of our unique homegrown wine variety. The Top 10 Pinotages were announced at a gala luncheon in the Mount Nelson Hotel in Cape Town.

They are (in alphabetical order):

Bay View Pinotage 2003 (Longridge/Winecorp - Stellenbosch)
La Cave Pinotage 2003 (Wamakersvallei Wine Cellar - Wellington)
Laibach Pinotage 2003 (Laibach Vineyards - Stellenbosch)
L'Avenir Pinotage 2003 (L'Avenir Estate - Stellenbosch)
Môreson Pinotage 2003 (Môreson - Franschhoek)
Raka Pinotage 2003 (Raka - Stanford)
Rijk's Private Cellar Pinotage 2001 (Rijk's Private Cellar - Tulbagh)
Sentinel Pinotage 2003 (Coppoolse Finlayson-Sentinel Winery - Stellenbosch)
Spice Route Pinotage 2003 (Spice Route Wine Company - Swartland)
Spier Private Collection 2002 (Spier/Winecorp - Stellenbosch).

Two other wineries have with this year's results proved their supremacy with Pinotage, namely Wamakersvallei (La Cave Pinotage 2003) in Wellington with winemaker Bennie Wannenburg, who entered a winning wine for the third year consecutively, and Rijk's Private Cellar in Tulbagh with winemaker Pierre Wahl, who entered a winning wine for the second year consecutively and the third in four years.

Laibach (winemaker Francois van Zyl) and Môreson (winemaker Jacques Wentzel) also repeated winning performances at the Absa Top 10 Pinotage Competition, by entering two winning wines during the past three years and two winning wines during the past four years respectively.

There is also an international flavour in South Africa's homegrown Pinotage red wine. Five out of the Top 10 Pinotages were produced by wineries which were bought by foreigners and quality Pinotage wines seems to be a high priority for them.

The Bay View Pinotage 2003 and Spier Private Collection Pinotage 2002 are both products of Winecorp, a company of which the major shareholder is the Enthoven family, originally from Holland. The owners of Laibach, husband and wife Dr Rudolf Kuehner and Dr Petra Laibach-Kuehner, are from Heidelberg in Germany, while L'Avenir was bought by Marc Wiehe from France in 1992 and he now

permanently lives on this estate. Rob Coppoolse from the Netherlands established Coppoolse & Finlayson in 1991 as a wine producer and wine exporter and it led to among others the Sentinel range of wines.

The Absa Top 10 Pinotage Competition is the only wine competition in South Africa in which the top ten wines of a particular variety is selected. This Top 10 competition has played a major role in the increasing number of top quality Pinotage wines that are produced in the Cape every year. Pinotage is also a unique selling point on the international wine scene, due to its South African origin.

"Similar to Absa, the new achievements of the Pinotage society stand on the shoulders of the previous year's successes. There seems to be a trend that on the international scene Pinotage is slowly but surely becoming the preferred South African red wine," says Dr Steve Booyesen, Group chief executive of Absa.

"Absa is very proud to be a sponsor of this competition and to be part of the Pinotage Association's objective to always improve continuous quality and volume. We agree with the author Elbert Hubbard who said art is the beautiful way of doing things, science is the effective way of doing things and business is the economic way of doing, and when you combine it - as is the case with fine Pinotage wines - the final product is higher in every facet. To me it is the essence of what is achieved every year."

The panel of experts who judged the 2004 entries were Duimpie Bayly (convener), Peter May (wine writer from England and honorary member of the Pinotage Association), Neil Pendock (wine writer), Charl Theron (wine consultant and previously head of production at KWV), Mike Louw (wine consultant), Jenny Ratcliff (Cape Wine Master) and Dave Hughes (international wine judge from South Africa).

The runners up out of the twenty finalists of this year's competition were 2003 Hill & Dale Pinotage, 2003 Beyerskloof Select Winemakers Pinotage, 2001 Morgenhof Estate Pinotage, 2001 Jacobsdal Pinotage, 2003 Diemersfontein Pinotage, 2002 Stellenzicht Golden Triangle Pinotage, 2001 Altydgedacht Pinotage, 2003 Beyerskloof Pinotage Reserve Collection, 2002 Beaumont Pinotage and 2002 Tecoma Pinotage.