

## LIQUID INVESTMENTS

# Spoilt for choice in Stellenbosch as fine wines abound

**T**he least controversial observation that could be made about South African wine is that the overall quality has improved over the past 15 years.

It's only after you dig into the detail that points of dispute emerge. Is the Swartland the Cape's saving grace? Are the prestige districts of the so-called coastal region our viticultural heartland? Does it make sense to have created the Wine of Origin Cape Town appellation? Do we value our wines and vineyards at their true worth or does patriotism blind us to their shortcomings?

The list is endless – even before the debates acquire territorial or political overtones.

I recently hosted a presentation of wines from four Stellenbosch estates. It was easy enough to assemble a line-up comprising two wines from each property. Each sample was world class and none of the wines a duplicate of any other on the table.

During a break I suggested to Luke O'Cuinneagain – the wine maker at Glenelly – that although Stellenbosch is rightly regarded as the source of the Cape's best (and best known) cabernets, its most striking claim to fame is the breadth of options across the quality wine spectrum. He replied that Glenelly's owner, May-Eliane de Lencquesaing, had recently said to him that she could think of no other appellation in the world where so many varieties performed so well.

De Lencquesaing is one of the few wine people to whom the term "legendary" might rightly be applied. She is the former proprietor of Chateau Pichon Lalande – her family once owned eight Cru Classe Bordeaux estates.

As a teenager during the Second World War she played a key role in smuggling French Jews and others on the run from the Nazis through the Medoc. The details of her heroics in Bordeaux are recorded in the Kladstrups' book *Wine & War*.

A key figure in the wine world for more than 40 years, she is unlikely to make observations of this kind frivolously, especially given her investment in Stellenbosch.

Unsurprisingly, her efforts at Glenelly have a Medoc feel about them: there are several bordeaux-style wines in the



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range. But given Stellenbosch's versatility there are wooded and unwooded chardonnays and an increasingly impressive cabernet shiraz blend.

Shiraz was planted in the Medoc until at least the 1820s and it was certainly illicitly added to blends well into the 20th century.

Glenelly is situated in Idas Valley, more or less next door to Rustenberg, whose traditional strengths have been cabernet and chardonnay.

There's something of a coherence in what performs well in this mainstream (but slightly off the beaten track) corner of the appellation.

DeMorgenzon contributed a bubbly made with chenin and then two fabulous reserve wines, the 2016 chenin and the 2015 syrah.

Jordan, DeMorgenzon's neighbour, does well with both these varieties and enjoys a stellar reputation for its chardonnay and its red bordeaux blend.

The Stark-Conde wines from the Jonkershoek side of the appellation were classical bordeaux cultivars: the trophy-winning lightly wooded Round Mountain Sauvignon Blanc and the equally highly feted Three Pines Cabernet.

Jonkershoek has always been cabernet country: in the past – before urban creep took out some of the best sites – it was the source of some of the Cape's most famous reds.

Morgenster's contribution to the event was its white bordeaux blend as well as its sangiovese-dominated Tosca: with Giulio Bertrand's decision to add a sauvignon-semillon blend to his Vergelegen range could not have been difficult.

As for the Tosca, the success in Tuscany of cabernet and merlot alongside the traditional sangiovese made the idea of a Stellenbosch super-Tuscan an obvious gamble – one that has clearly paid off.

This line-up alone proves that Stellenbosch's extraordinary versatility is one of the great certainties about Cape wine.