

## OLD MUTUAL TROPHY WINE SHOW 2018 | JUDGES' FEEDBACK SESSION

Thursday 3 May, Grande Roche Hotel, Paarl, 11h00 - 12h15.

**MF** Ladies and gentlemen Good Morning – it's still morning – we've run late, but not that late. Thank you all very much for being here.

This session has become something of an annual event, not only because the show itself is an annual event, but because so much comes out of the next hour and a half, both for the producers who take the trouble to attend, but also for media and people involved in the industry who get to hear first-hand the discussions and the debates which I think are a defining feature of the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show.

Charles Chevallier said to me that this is probably the first time he's judged in an environment in which people talk through their impressions of the wine and in that way – it's not about a negotiation over medals and points, it's about clarity on what appeals to one judge, which may not appeal to another judge – and through that to refine and define stylistic imperatives, putting all of those together and try to transmit them at this feedback session is a way of sending a message to the industry about what it is the judges are looking for and what stylistics are certainly important, not only to the Trophy Wine Show judges – those who act and work in the domestic market – but also of course those who have come from overseas.

This is a really important point. The show, as far as I know, has the highest percentage of international judges and it's not because we don't have confidence in the depth of judging talent which is now available in South Africa, it is because we really want the insights and the views of the internationals to become part of the judging aesthetic in South Africa. I've worked as the international judge at a number of important shows overseas and they kind of pass you around from panel to panel, they give you a disproportionate vote, they want to hear what it is that you like and don't like and they think that one judge amongst 20 or 25 can perform the same judge as one in three. The judges here have obviously been much more successful in communicating this, because over the years we've had exactly that kind of result and that kind of response.

As is also now annual and expected, this is the first opportunity the judges have had to thank the stewarding team that works tirelessly and solidly, not just for the three judging days of the show, but from the moment that the wines are delivered here to Grand Roche and onwards through the show itself, where the panellists call for numerous second pours. That's just a kind of rule: if there's a question or there's a doubt, if the wine is tasting even just a little bit flat, the instruction is "call for a second bottle on a whim". If the second bottle is much better than the first – in other words if the first wine was a little dull and you wondered why somebody who'd produced a dull wine went to the trouble of entering it in a show, the point is to order a second bottle, give it a second chance. The producers send in their bottles. They're entitled to have them taken to pieces more than once if necessary.

So the stewards work tirelessly and I would like them to come inside to present them to you. Amongst the team that have been the team leaders, there's Gillian, Mario, Mercia, Wanie and Ashley who I think between them have probably done at least 10 if not more Trophy Wine Shows. Then Sharon, Finlay, Lizette, Simone, Bradley, Isaac, Bulalane, Janique, Tamsin, Desiree and Leroy. Guys, you've been amazing! You'll see when they turn around that the back of their T-shirts is branded Grand Crew. They are a fabulous crew and I'd like to say on behalf of all the judges a very sincere thanks to all of you for the work you've done, or making the show move as smoothly as it has. While I do that, this is my chance to thank Alex Mason-Gordon and Michael Crossley, who, I can tell you categorically, without their involvement, their sense of detail, their obsession with detail and their real sense of propriety – I only saw the gold medal and trophy winners about half an hour after the trophy judging was over. They keep

everything from me because my casting vote in the end can make the difference as in fact I think it did today. So they run this, the tightest ship ever. They've done it so well and done it for so many years it's a treat working with all of them.

So I'd like the judges to give those guys and the team that runs the show, a warm round of applause.

May I ask you to kill your cell phones for the next hour, or put them on silent, put them on record – although of course everything that takes place here is recorded and goes up on the website. We do have roving mics and so once we've done a little bit of a presentation from here, the real point of the feedback session is to answer questions. So I'm going to try and be briefer than I usually am.

One of the things that really characterises this year has been the strength of quality across a wide range of classes. Now we hear that from time to time, but remember that this year we had 2015s and 2017s – highly regarded vintages – on the bench and 2016, which I think suffered from being in the shadow of 2015, many of those 2016s are showing fabulously well. So there really was a triumvirate of great vintages and it's expressed in the final medal tally, which isn't significantly higher in gold – I think we had 40 or 41 last year, 136 silvers, but 455 bronzes. There was a discussion on Sunday night when the judges got together, about making sure that a wine shouldn't just be given a bronze as a consolation prize. Now I must say that in my mind bronze has never been a consolation prize. A bronze medal at this show should be thought of as a bronze medal at the Olympics. If you can get it, "you've done good"!

As the bronzes came in in higher numbers, it was quite clear that it wasn't possible to push them out of the medals. For all the bold talk on Sunday night about let's not make bronze medal a consolation prize, a hell of a lot of those bronze medals would have been silver medals two or three years ago and probably would have been gold, or gold candidates, ten years ago. So the bar has been lifted. The industry has absolutely risen to the challenge. On top of that, the really crucial piece of information we have is that in all the things that were problematic in the past – there are people who have been here for ten years – are now very much a minority in what appears on the tasting benches: remember the long debates about *brettanomyces*; we've heard the anguished discussions about the role of cork; and about bacterial spoilage and volatile acidity and massively overdone tannins and clumsy wine-making. Not this year.

Overall the wines are much better, much purer, much cleaner, more linear and now, all of a sudden, the judges have an opportunity when they're looking at their top silvers and their golds to look for real personality, real nuance, real detail. It's not just about a well-made wine that gets there by default. It is that some of the really finest wines have expressed themselves in a way we weren't expecting to find five or ten years ago.

The total medal count is now almost two thirds. 632 wines won medals of which 23 finished up on trophies. So it's a 2% trophy result from the entries. I've been given a figure for those of you who are obsessed statistically with questions of closure, which I was rather hoping in its own way had been dealt with by the changes in the cork industry – the fact that so many people are using much better agglomerates, so that cork is really much less of a problem. 212 out of the 632 medal-winning wines were under screwcap. That's quite an interesting factor. We will take questions around screwcap, because the one question we do debate between ourselves is about the evolution of wine under screwcap.

I'm not going to take your time with trying to do overviews when we have a panel of judges here whose job it is to talk about a couple of classes. I'm going to fast track it straight away by passing the microphone to Charles Chevallier, who is here from Chateau Lafite Domaines Barons de Rothschild and who spent most of his time tasting red wine – both cabernet and Bordeaux blends. I'm going to ask him to talk about the Bordeaux blends, but also about his approach to cabernet and how he saw some as

building blocks for other wines. In other words good in their own right, but incomplete because they were in need of the presence of other varieties and those that were pure in their own right. Charles.

**CC** Thank you. In your question I want to say what is and what was my main job in Bordeaux is the wine-making process and so on, but to blend the wine, to taste the different varieties and to find the quality of each which is going to be blended to have the best balance possible.

Yesterday I had the opportunity to taste all the cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc totally separately, to have some wines purely by themselves. That is something quite different from what I am used to, but very interesting to understand what is the style of the wine, the purity of the variety by itself and the wine-making process which makes the wine self-balanced. This is something different for me, but very interesting to understand.

I saw some very good quality wine. Yesterday I wanted to take one with another to make a blend to find something, but that's not the objective so I understand this. It's a very interesting competition and tastings. Thank you for inviting me. A great job for all the wine-makers. I am very happy to understand more about South African wine.

**MF** Merci Charles. I am going to now pass the microphone to Nkulu. This is your third show as a senior judge. Maybe just talk about the two classes that made the greatest impression on you and why.

**NM** Good morning everyone. It's a great pleasure to be back at the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. The two categories that made an impression on me were Sauvignon Blanc. Firstly, as we all know in this room, Sauvignon Blanc is a big category and in South Africa the average wine drinker really loves Sauvignon Blanc.

I was really impressed with the quality of the wines. I thought we've moved away from those green, pyrazine-loaded style of Sauvignon Blanc. There's more fruit purity that I picked up. What I also liked was how aromatic and floral the examples were. Secondly, the few examples that were barrel-fermented I thought were really wonderful and I think there's a bigger market. We should encourage the industry to make more wooded Sauvignon Blanc. I thought there was a lot more complexity. There was a lot more interest, purity, freshness and the wines really showed very well.

The other category I was impressed with was the Bordeaux-style blends which I judged with James and Charles. It's also a big category and I see a lot of wineries produce Bordeaux-style as a flagship wine. What really impressed me there once again was that the great examples really stood out. There was beautiful integration, the wines were really classic and they really showed well all round. Just on the negative side, a few of them were blockbusters gone wrong, where there was too much sweetness, the wines were very ripe and the oaking was rather clumsy.

So those were the two categories that really showed well for me, but generally very positive.

**MF** Thanks Nkulu, as you pass the microphone to Christian who's up next to talk about Shiraz. One of the features that's really interesting is that every year, I have, as the Chairman, a full set of cribbies which, if there are questions about the components of a blend, or the final analysis of the wine, we can access it if we need to. Over the years what I've noticed is, there was a point three or four years ago, where we had a huge number of red wines at 15% alc or more. They're down. They're not all of them dramatically down, but certainly we've got far more in the 14% bracket and hovering around the mid 14's and those would have been wines that three to five years ago would have been 15 and 15 plus. More importantly we've got more and more red wines that are under 14%; not vastly under, but we certainly had on the trophy table today a couple of red wines that were 13.2 up to 13.8 or 13.9. This is a really positive and really important trend.

One last point to make because Nkulu touched on it and Charles has already spoken, at the Cabernet class yesterday there was an intense debate about a wine where Charles thought the oaking alone required the judges to send it back as defective. It was a really interesting discussion, because normally when you fault a wine, you're faulting it for Brettanomyces; you're faulting it for VA; you're faulting it for quantifiables. His point was – and it was a really interesting point – the oak was fabulous, it had been very well managed. The only thing was there was no fruit and there certainly was something behind the oak and we kept looking to see whether it would emerge and it never did. His view was that it's wrong to give that wine a high nothing or a low bronze. The point is that, on its own, if you got that wine blind you wouldn't know what the variety was, you wouldn't be able to tell anything about it at all. It was an expression of the cooper's art, not the wine-makers art. In fact that wine in the end was treated as a fault, in the hope that the producer – who will be shattered to discover that his wine, with such an investment in wood was sent back with a 59 – and hopefully that will encourage him to engage with us. We take all questions from all producers so that we can discuss this question of making sure that the wine isn't travelling on wood alone. That now does bring us to Christian, who has done this show more times than he would care to remember and who has done the Shiraz panel more times that he'd like to remember. I think with the highest number of gold medals in any class – and probably still the largest class of the show – I think there was a real turnaround in the fortunes of Shiraz and you probably want to talk about that.

**CE** Thank you Michael. As Michael has said I've been a senior judge on this competition since 2007 and on Sunday night myself and James and a few of the other old hands spent some time discussing what we could call ourselves. There's a new wave and then there are us old farts, but we settled on veteran. I'm a veteran judge here and I've done Shiraz quite a few times.

I really had a sense of the category coming of age this year. It was just a very, very impressive category. We ended up with six golds, I think more than any other white or red. What's so impressive about it is that there seems to be a real understanding almost across the board of fruit purity and freshness and tannin management. The oaking is much more sensitive. Very often all you're seeing is fruit tannins rather than barrel-derived tannins, lovely aromatics. Typically the debate around Shiraz has always been framed in terms of whether it's more Rhone or whether it's more Barossa. I think we're finally starting to get a very South African expression of the variety, which sits somewhere between the two. There's perhaps more fruit density than you might get on northern Rhone, but equally the caricature of Barossa into being hugely muscular and rich and tannic, our wines tend to have more delicacy and finesse. Well done to the Shiraz producers.

**MF** The microphone is there. Could you pass it to Isa. Isa Bal is a master sommelier. He's worked for eight years at the Fat Duck, but is now an international sommelier consultant. He has a palate that constantly reminds us that wine is made to be served with food. I think probably the question that I'm going to ask you to address is around the debate we had in the red blend class, but it's not about that class alone. Which are the characteristics that you think are important in food-friendly wines and to what extent you were able to discern that in the line-up of wines you saw over the three days and anything else you want to add?

**IB** I think in terms of wine, when I taste the wine the first thing I think about it is how good this is going to be with food. I think wine and food are inseparable and they complete one another.

The key for me is actually balance. I don't have a problem with wine having high alcohol or wine having reached quite full tense body, as long as it's all in balance with that fruit, alcohol, tannin, everything. Given enough time it will become something quite food-friendly. Maybe not initially in its early life. There are more delicate styles that are immediately appealing to go with food.

I have seen quite a few wines that actually deliver that quality in wine, and also I think in Pinotage in particular. I was very happy to taste the Pinotage flight and I think it's time for Pinotage to be re-introduced to traditional markets, especially the UK, where rightly or wrongly it had built up a reputation and people kind of went off it a bit. What we tasted over the last few days showed real quality and real food-friendly styles, as well as ones that you just want to take a glass and drink on its own. So I think I was really pleased to see those doing well.

**MF** You may just want to take that Pinotage point further, because you also tasted in the Pinotage blend class. What was your impression of that?

**IB** That was a little bit less smooth riding, because I felt the Pinotage single varietal bottles had really high quality fruit and I had the feeling in some of the blends the same quality was not used to make that blend. So I ask the question what's happening here? Maybe not the same attention is paid to do the blends.

**MF** You made the point that the best wines are going forward into the pure varietals and the blending wines become a bit of a tidy up operation?

**IB** Sort of a second thought – almost that feeling. Not all of them though, some of them.

**MF** Thank you sir. The microphone is on this side of the table. Narina, a few quick words particularly on the Bordeaux blend class, because you chaired it. You had, I think, a very interesting day.

**NC** Yes, thank you Michael. We did have a very interesting day. Morning ladies and gentlemen. The Bordeaux blends for me were positive in this sense that there's balance coming into the wines. The point that Charles made was the blends are well constructed. So the blending of the three, four or five wines was done correctly. For me, taking from that, we are understanding as winemakers, as an industry, the different cultivars.

From that point of view, the other thing that was quite distinct in the class was that there were lots of wines almost in the higher standard and in the lower class. There's a bit of a middle. You don't get the classic pyramid style of non-score bronze, silver, gold. There was a bit of a gap in quality in between. So there's a middle class, but I think as we get to it, people are finding their feet with Bordeaux blends. That's the message from me. So people are going from over-oaking it, making block busters – as Nkulu said "Blockbusters gone wrong" – there are still some unfortunately, but we're getting to the quality. It's really getting there and it's getting really stylish and world class wine. It was a lovely day. Our palates could feel it, but it was a really lovely fun day in the end.

**MF** Pass the microphone to James. James' palate is used to being sand-papered with a cheese grater from early in the day. He had a really interesting Day 1 through a number of white, white blends and so on. Maybe you want to talk about that.

**JP** So my first day started with 122 wines in front of me and we went from other niche varieties to Sauvignon Blanc Semillon, to Semillon into other niche reds, so it was quite an interesting journey. It's an area where we saw winemakers experimenting, having a bit of fun. We were super-impressed with the Sauv/Sem blends, They are a very strong category in South Africa, quite neglected and we saw two really good examples come to the fore.

I think relating to Isa's point, Sauv/Sem blends are something we do extremely well, but we need to find where to use them. They are super on the table and they are wines that need food for people to really understand.

If we move to other niche varieties, these included Grenache, Grenache Blanc, Marsanne, Roussanne, Verdelho and Theron. Who knows what Theron is? I didn't either. This was a lot of fun and you can see the winemakers are having fun in this area, but a cautionary part of the experience is that the wine should not be forced. I think we need some vineyard age when it comes to Marsanne/Roussanne. I think with Grenache Blanc, there were probably eight or nine of them, and I find it a bit of an anomaly where it looks like a variety that should rather be in blends.

To follow that up, we had the other white varieties blends tasting as well. These were wines that weren't Sauv/Sem and we found some really interesting wines there and that will be a very interesting route going forward. I think once we understand what we're doing in terms of making wines that are more like the southern Mediterranean style, I think there's a great future.

A quick note on other red varieties. There was quite a bit of Cinsaut in there. In the 2002 Platter Guide there were four Cinsaut wines listed. In the 2012 Guide there were still only four Cinsaut wines listed and in the 2018 Guide there are fifty Cinsaut wines. A note of caution is that it is fun, it's great. I think it's the kind of wine we could see as our daily drinking quaffing wine, but there's so much sweetness in there. I'd like to see wines that are fresh – a freshness, a little bit lighter in style, wines that are made to be drunk chilled. When we move over to Grenache Noir maybe these wines should be started as rosés, moved up into light reds, before we try and make serious reds from them. Lots of fun!

My final day was chairing the Cabernet panel and I just want to comment that I think Cabernet is at a cusp, a dawning. I think the 2015 vintage is very important. Cabernet is grown in probably one of our most expensive and unsustainable vineyard regions called Stellenbosch. The wines need to be the very best. They need to be made extremely well and they need to be world class. I think the time to take this forward is now. So Cabernet Sauvignon I feel is right there. They're exceptionally well made, but it needs to continue this trajectory of being world class quality wines. Thanks.

**MF** Thank you very much James, who managed to include a birthday in his judging celebrations. He's looking pretty good considering the combined effect of a birthday and three days of judging. Can we pass the microphone to Debra who's going to talk about the joys of Sauvignon Blanc.

**DM** Speaking of birthdays, I judged this show in 2011 and I was reflecting as you all trailed into the room, either I'm significantly older or you've all gotten significantly younger and I was curious. Who in the room is under age 40? [Large show of hands] And who wishes they were under age 40? I think this is an amazing testament as to where the industry is growing. As many of you know, I'm based in Asia and Asia is really feeling the excitement of the youthfulness of this region and you certainly saw it in the wines.

I tasted, along with James and Christian, a few of the classes already mentioned. I particularly enjoyed the white blends. I thought they were aromatic, fascinating and some very adept use of unusual grape varieties – in fact a few times I had a bit of trouble guessing what I was tasting.

The Pinot Noirs, there were some that showed a lot of promise, but I felt the winemakers hadn't quite found their footing as to what Pinot Noir should be in that class. So they ranged from bright, fruity, simple wines to clearly an effort to make something more comple.

I had great pleasure tasting the Chardonnay class. I thought there were some gorgeous Chardonnays coming through. Having tasted those a number of years back – I'm sure some of you know I've been coming here since 1994, so I've seen an incredible evolution of style – and I would say these are the most refined Chardonnays I've seen. They were beautifully made, far less oak dominance, which I had seen somewhat in the past. If there's a caveat, a beware, there were a few that of course were incredibly seductive with that struck match character, that slight hint of sulphur that adds complexity. Secretly I

love them, but be very, very cautious. They're increasingly seen as a faulty technique to add complexity to a Chardonnay. I think the world fell in love with it because Puligny often had that same aromatic character. I'm seeing them being rejected. I select wines for Cathay Pacific and I can tell you my team mate that selects with me, refuses to allow anything on board with struck match and the general feeling is that this style does not last. That would be my caveat.

I thought the wines on the whole were very clean. The Sauvignon Blanc class was fascinating and great to taste. I've seen an incredible transition of style in the past six years. I think they've become very sophisticated, but the challenge I think even for the panel was what is Sauvignon Blanc at the moment, because we recognise extreme green is out of fashion. So the search is to find either the peaty ones – almost like Riesling – or beautiful ripe tropical fruit with a hint of herbal accent I think were the most successful.

Then let's talk about the wooded Sauvignon Blanc. That is where I saw enormous success, but again, in this area I can see people are still experimenting with the oak. So I'll just say from my international biased view of global market, be careful with the oak on those wines. It should not be noticeable, just a sort of barrel-fermented character, makes a beautiful Pessac-style wooded Sauvignon Blanc. I think there's a huge future with those Sauvignon Blancs.

**MF** Thank you Debra. Now if you'd grab the microphone Alex. Two things I'd like you to talk about. One is obviously the transition from associate to full judge. Is it a different experience and, if it is, why it is. What is the change? Then the second question, probably the one the audience wants to hear is the question of Chardonnay. As you heard from Debra, it's a strong class, it produced several medals and stylistically we've seen a change. Maybe identify what that change is.

**AM** Thanks Michael. This is my first judging experience as a senior judge. For the last three years prior to this I was invited back as an associate. Sitting as an associate in the naughty corner, we feel confident to flag wines we think are potential golds, because we know we can stick our neck out, but if you're making a mistake because you're in a learning environment, you're not going to be shot down, or stake your entire reputation on putting that on the line. The transition was rather intimidating when I first stepped into the room and looked around. I thought there's an amazing international palate; and I'm sitting across from one of the most experienced and amazing palates; and I'm sitting among them right now. Wow I must be part of them! In terms of weight on your shoulders, I think there's quite a lot more, but the learning experience and the people sitting around here are incredible mentors and Michael is the one who sticks out in my mind. They instil a confidence in you that you need to fight for the wines you believe in and there's a reason why you're fighting for them. There's a winemaker out there who's made an incredible wine. Everyone's palate is different, something might get lost, but you've got to stick up for something you believe is really well made and that real thought has gone into that wine.

With regards to Chardonnay, I also judged the Chenin Blanc panel. I must say these were two of the panels that stood out for me. I don't make a Chardonnay as a winemaker myself and I really enjoy well-made Chardonnays. I think this was an incredibly impressive class with four golds in total. The representing golds were amazing spectrums from the really ripe style that had very, very clever oak, very well integrated oak, all the way through to that flinty style. I have to say I did have to fight for that flinty style to get a gold. I think all of these styles have a very important place in our market and on our tables and in restaurants. We can't really just be looking at driving a particular style.

From a winemaker's perspective, what really impressed me with some of these Chardonnays was that this wasn't just fruit that was allowed to hang to what you might think was having big fruit and just whack a whole lot of oak in there and hope that they tie together. These were really detailed well-made wines, where there was a lot of thought that went into the final blends. So well done to the winemakers who have got golds. You've made some really stellar wines.

**MF** Heidi knows I keep the fizz for last. She is the fizz specialist. It's the first panel on the first day and there's no one else who's going to be talking about fizz except Heidi. I'd like you to talk about it as a category, as a class you saw and what you've seen over the last couple of years.

**HD** They say you should begin as you mean to end and it was my pleasure always to start with the Cap Classiques. There were 41 of them. It was a small snapshot and I think what distinguishes this competition from others where we judge Cap Classique, is that the line-up is fairly random. There's no classification of category. You judge as it comes. I'd like to thank the support team, because bubbly really requires careful management when it comes to the pouring and the pacing and the temperature at which we judge. So Michael, Alex, thank you so much for the attention you paid to that.

Cap Classique is really an exciting category for me in that it's got its own personality now. It's definitely moved away from trying to be champagne lookalike. What worries me though is that there's a lot of incidence of Prosecco lookalike, where there isn't the depth, the dimension, the complexity that you'd expect to find in a bottle of Glera. This is the first year and panel where the conversation and the debate has turned away from whether it's the rich autolytic style and the fresh fermented Francais style to more around variety – what the different varieties do for a blend or for a sparkling wine and whether the traditional varieties should be used in order to best express bottle fermentation – because there was definitely use of other varieties, which expressed themselves as pure and pretty, but perhaps not with the same sort of complexity that you'd expect to find on a bottle of fermented bubbly.

I'm encouraged as well by next year's ruling that there's going to be a minimum requirement of twelve months on the lees. I think it's desperately needed in order to guide our quality and to elevate it. With Prosecco we know that it's an international phenomenon that is so popular, but it's only recently that it's banging on our door and with the export charges it's going to go head to head with Cap Classique. So it's critical for the Cap Classique producers to establish themselves now as a cut above in quality, in expression, in style, in what it has to offer and also positioning in price point as a protective mechanism against losing ground. It's still a category that's growing in double digits, which is also really exciting, but we're going to really lose ourselves if we start going backwards and making pretty stuff to release to a demand in the market and a thirst for bubbly that isn't complex and doesn't have a real direction in what we're doing.

**MF** Heidi thank you very much indeed. That's the full on review from the panel. I'm going to hand over to the floor, with a brief comment on fortifieds.

We had some quite nice Muscats, one of which finally came out as gold. It's a category that you've heard me say many times is something we do extraordinarily well in this country. It does need the support of the wine-writing profession and of the retail profession, because the guys who make it are making it for an ever-diminishing audience and it's a great sadness. Those wines are very fine and they have great versatility. They can be served over ice as an aperitif. They can be served with cheese and in many cases they are an alternative to port-style wines.

On the subject of ports, I have to say we had a very disappointing class. It's progressively more disappointing. If I were paranoid, I might think that the port producers are sending us a message, but when your vintage reserve ports are 2015, they are in fact insulting themselves and the panel by sending wines that haven't even begun the process of elevage. A vintage-style port does its real growth and its maturation in bottle and if it's just gone to bottle, it doesn't really have much to show of what it's going to become. It's very hard to judge and also unfair to judge.

We had one or two reasonable tawnys, a ruby that looked to me like a vintage port masquerading as a ruby, but given that the category clearly does have some support in the market, otherwise we would



have seen older examples, I assume that we need to be careful about taking consumers for granted. Consumers need to know that they're buying a wine when it's started to make its way comfortably onto the plateau of maturity. If that means a six month Sauvignon Blanc, it might mean a six year old port-style wine if people are going to be able to make a judgment call. We didn't see that and for me the fortified class was the single disappointment of the show.

The microphones are roving and available for questions from the floor, which you can address to me and I will find a panellist to answer, or you may go straight to the panellist with your question.

**Q** Thanks Michael. You made an observation about the lowering of alcohols in the red wines. A question around that. In your view, what has caused that to happen? Is that, on the one hand, perhaps a change in viticultural management and winemaking technique, or is it the impacts and shifts in climate, or is it a combination of the two?

**MF** The answer to that is always going to be not clear cut. I think that we've seen in the last few vintages that the grapes have reached phenolic ripeness at lower sugars, so that's an explanation in its own right. I think the second question is an aesthetic one. People were chasing super ripeness and find that they get criticised for sending wines like that in to panels such as the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. So I think that we haven't seen those wines. I'm sure they're out there and that's also played its role and I think that they are certainly managing to keep alcohols down – there's a lot of pressure in terms of consumer judging panels, journalists, everyone saying this wine is too high in alcohol, so they're applying viticultural techniques, whether it's canopy management, pruning dates which are quite important to try and get your final ripening season out of the heat spikes. All of those factors I think have contributed, but the driving factor has to be the aesthetic of the producer. In other words, if they're not concerned about it, they're not going to apply the techniques that will in the end give them lower alcohols.

**DM** I just wanted to add a comment to that. In my market, Asia, it's not so much a matter of whether or not it's high alcohol, it's the extreme richness that we avoid that often comes with the high alcohol.

**JP** Michael can I make a point about Sauvignon which is such a commercially important category? We had 75-odd unwooded entries and I think just about every single wine, bar three or four, got a medal of some sort - unfortunately mainly bronze. The category seems incredibly safe, technically correct, but not very exciting. Just before this session started, Isa and I were having a conversation. I think what's missing from Sauvignon is ... we need more terroir-specific wines and I use the term advisedly. What is terroir? That's a point of philosophical debate. What constitutes a good Sauvignon? Nowadays we see managed pyrazine levels, but they tend to be very workmanlike and I think the next step for Sauvignon is going to be vineyard-specific wines. Just a thought to leave you with.

**Q** My question's for Debra. What kind of South African wines would appeal to the Asian market? Maybe you could just elaborate on why.

**DM** I was interested that I judged Sauvignon Blanc white blends and Chardonnay when in fact I live in the red wine capitals of the world, so my market is decidedly red-focussed. I do quite a bit of market research, I haven't checked in the last two years, but we were 68% red consistently for years. Sauvignon Blanc is always an entry wine and is very popular as a reception drink, so we always know what kind of party we're getting, whether you're handed Dom Perignon or Sauvignon Blanc. So it's seen as the affordable alternative wine.

Barrel-fermented Sauvignon Blanc is the connoisseur's wine. Because our wine collectors are so focussed on Bordeaux, we're very familiar with high quality white Bordeaux, so that's why I mentioned don't let the oak show, but let the oak polish and round out the Sauvignon Blanc flavours.

Your big competition in our markets is by far New Zealand. It's actually not France for Sauvignon Blanc, it's New Zealand. For Chardonnay I think you have a really good fighting chance. We do not like heavily oaked Chardonnays. Your competition in that case is white Burgundy. It's not even Australia, which would be your second competition. With white wines you have to fight a bit in the Asian market and a lot of the white wines are drunk as the entrée, because we bring our own bottles into the restaurants and they're usually Charles' Lafites that we bring in. In order to persuade someone like Isa to waive the corkage, we have to order white wine off the list. Sometimes that sends out confusing signals, like the white wine market is surging, but it's actually by default.

Lastly, if you're marketing white wine, often with Sauvignon Blanc people talk about it being a summer wine, outdoors, summer. Keep in mind that for Chinese – which is the bulk of the market – they don't really think about wine as a seasonal category and they in general don't like to eat outside. They still associate outdoor eating with peasant, being poor and are now rich enough to eat indoors with air-conditioning. I would definitely emphasise the seafood, because I can't think of anyone in China who doesn't treasure seafood, at least in the wealthy cities, so I would focus on the seafood tie. Then just be aware that for Asians it's very unusual to have a cold drink at the table. Even our beers would be room temperature. I've been there 30 years and my girlfriends and I all order a cup of hot water to drink with our meal. So ice cold service is alien. If you're making your Sauvignon Blanc for that market, make sure it's palatable at a slightly warmer temperature. The key is the seafood match.

**MF** Thank you Debra. Questions now.

**Q** Debra what would you say is more popular in Asia – white wines versus red wines versus bubbles?

**DM** Definitely red. For bubbles in Hong Kong. Bubbles are very, very popular, where the Champagne market was dominated by LVMH and then Prosecco came blasting into the market with an affordable alternative. For the first time ever I'm giving a presentation at an Expo in three weeks on Prosecco. I think Heidi was right to flag Prosecco. It's a challenger to the market. I think Cap Classique has a tiny little cult following. It would be good to see more. The problem with bubbles is LVMH has locked in many of the top outlets, so it's hard for non-LVMH portfolio – Krug, Moët – to even get in the door. My thought for the Cap Classiques, stake out your territory while you can. Try to get into the independent outlets.

**MF** There was a question lurking at the back there. Thank you.

**Q** I just wanted to know how many Merlots were entered and your feedback.

**MF** Who chaired the Merlot panel? Merlot was on the same day as Chenin and there was a gold.

**CE** Having been a bit despondent about the state of Merlot, I'm happy to say the category showed quite a lot of progress. We had 45-odd entries, we got a gold and I think it's symptomatic again of the focus on excellence that seems to pervade the industry. I must congratulate producers because you do seem to be engaging with the feedback. Far less weedy, thin, green examples and similarly ... There has in the past been an overreaction to thin and weedy and the wines that are overdone. Much better balance, much better fruit purity. Still a way to go, but not nearly as much of a train smash as maybe five years ago.

**MF** Norman you had a question you wanted to add and then other questions just so I can see where they are.

**Q** It's a two stage question. I think back to the 2008 Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show, the discovery of show was the Ashton Kelder unwooded Chardonnay if I recall correctly. I bought four cases by telephone and it came in as what it came in as. At the time I asked the question and looking at the style of the wine:

What is the likelihood that this is going to become a fairly significant category in the South African wine industry and the response was: No, of course not! We just don't do Chardonnay like that in this country. If you take a look at where we are at the moment and the number of unwooded Chardonnays that are actually made, it's quite significant.

James, you spoke about Cinsaut. In 2012 I think you said there were 10 that were listed. There are 50 in 2018. I wrote a fairly significant piece in 2013 about Cinsaut, which unfortunately was never published, because the publication I wrote it for went to the wall. In the course of writing the piece I interviewed somebody who had done her Cape Wine Masters Certificate dissertation on Cinsaut and I asked the question: What do you think is going to happen to Cinsaut as a wine varietal in South Africa going forward? The response was: It'll never amount to anything, but what will probably happen is that it will be a blending component to some extent. So the question I'm asking in both of those contexts is: Is that the industry following the market, or is it the industry driving the market, in that context?

**JP** I chaired the Chardonnay panel. In terms of unwooded Chardonnay, considering that we have the Sauvignon Blanc debate happening – and it's a very important varietal for everyday drinking wine and then we have these fantastic Chenin Blancs and other white varieties coming on line, unwooded Chardonnay seems to me a bit of an anomaly and I almost want to say an unnecessary category, but it is successful.

In the panel I think we found the wines to be lovely, nice, well made, peachy, fresh juicy wines, but I can't see them amounting to much more. So I think they are successful commercial wines and we'll continue to see more of them. There were maybe one or two that are maybe trying to elevate themselves to a Chablis type of style, but the Chablis style would be wines that are more focussed and linear and they won't necessarily be unwooded. There might even be a wood component to give the wine a bit more structure. That's my take on the unwoodeds.

In terms of Cinsaut, I think it's a very good point. We go back to our Sunday evening tastings, where we had delightful wines from the 60's, 70's and earlier vintages and Cinsaut played a massive role in anything that had even Cabernet on the label. So Cinsaut is certainly super important when it comes to blending. It's got an important tannin structure that adds to longevity and the fineness of a wine. So when you have Cabernet, or even Pinotage, where you have more muscular or harder tannins, the Cinsaut bring a kind of a fineness to it. The danger with the young single bottlings is that the wines are too fruity and too simple and I think they should be toned down in style to offer a great everyday drinking alternative, because what do you drink at the braai? We drink buxom red wines. We should be drinking light, quaffable, fresh red wines but the fruitiness should be toned down and handled. So that's where I think Cinsaut should play its game, and blending is important.

**MF** I would like to pick up on that and make two points.

The first is if you look at the way the Chardonnays are succeeding now, more and more of them do not have evident wood. If we talk about Cinsaut category we don't want the purity of the fruit to be contaminated with oak. Happily, the price of oak goes up and up and more and more winemakers are coming to realise that they can't use it as a crutch to carry their wines.

Back to your question firstly of the Chardonnay, the reason you don't get those super concentrated, linear unwoodeds is if your Chardonnay is that good, the odds are you're going to give it a bit of wood. Likewise with Cinsaut, two or three years ago it was the trophy winner in the niche red category. It was a beautifully managed wine. Both of them require poise and part of the poise demanded of the winemaker is the ability to step back and say it doesn't need wood. In the case of Chardonnay what it may need is no new wood. So is it going to be an unwooded, or is it going to be a Chardonnay without evident wood? We're seeing that that was certainly the successful part of the wooded Sauvignon Blanc

class, those where the wood wasn't evident, but a sense of better texture is certainly where they were going.

More questions from the floor.

**Q** Any comments about our Chenin Blancs? We know how important the variety is for us and how are our Chenin Blancs looking?

**CE** It won't come as a surprise that the category is looking fantastic. It is a national treasure. I think you see the value of old vines coming through in just about every instance. It's a very tricky category to judge because there's such a wide variety of legitimate styles. When you're looking at Shiraz for instance, you've got a lighter, fresher, whole bunch aromatic style and those are pretty much it. When it comes to Chenin you can make a completely off-dry Chenin with lots of lees contact and quite a bit of oak and it's delicious and it has its place and you want to reward it. Similarly you can make a lean, fresh reductive style and it's also delicious and you've got to reward it. As ever Chenin's greatest strength is also its greatest drawback in terms of the consumer, because I don't think the consumer ever knows what they're buying, but for wine geeks, Chenin is just looking fantastic. We really should treasure and take it to the world with confidence, because we do fantastic Chenin.

**MF** Christian thank you. I'm not going to try and squeeze any more questions out of the room. I have to say that I think that the panel in taking the earlier review part covered a huge range of subjects, which probably explains why there's not as much questioning from the floor as we would have expected.

As you know we repair outside for what is called a finger lunch and that's an opportunity for everyone here to engage with the judges if they want to.

In wrapping up and thanking everyone – and I do hope there's someone here from Grand Roche, the hotel which has been the venue of this judging since the Show's inception in 2002 – has been a wonderful place to judge, not only because the scenery is distracting in itself, but because the team from the hotel have really done their best to make sure that the judging proceeds smoothly.

Thank you all very much indeed for joining us. Thank you to all the panellists, who have worked very hard for the last three and a half days and who now need a well-deserved rest and possibly a glass of wine.