

The annual public tasting of the top wines from the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show is a great opportunity to sample a selection of the Cape's best current releases. As the show chairman I taste most of these wines, but unsighted, so without a clear picture of how each property has actually performed. At the judging I also have no idea about how they are priced.

Even the most dedicated enthusiast can't get through 170 wines in a four hour session. I tried my best, but public tastings are also social events, with producers wanting to chat about their wines, and wine enthusiasts sharing discoveries with each other. Accordingly, this is not a complete list of the show's best value wines, nor can it be a list of the best value current releases, given the size of the market relative to the total entries in the show.

It did provide me with an opportunity of renewing my acquaintance with Louisvale, once one of the most fashionable sources of South African Chardonnay. At the time the Devon Valley cellar offered an unoaked, a lightly oaked and an intensely oaked version of its hallmark wine. The silver medal winner at the competition was the Chavant, made with older barrels and therefore not too overtly wooded. At R80 it was one of the very obvious bargains in the room: lovely creamy mid-palate notes, but still fresh and subtle.

There were several delicious Chenins, including the Asara 2017, Croydon Vineyards' 2017 and the Grande Provence 2017. All were priced under R100 per bottle, all had a lovely concentration of flavour, well-balanced fruit and remarkably persistent finish. I know it's impossible to benchmark consumer opportunities in different countries because of the difficulty in applying cost-of-living indices which also take account of differences in taxation. However, I cannot think of anywhere in the world where wines like this are available for less than \$8 a bottle.

On the subject of wine value - there were three silver medal wines from the Flagstone Two Roads series at the tasting - all priced at R79 per bottle: an equally delicious Chenin Blanc, a beautifully managed Viognier (slightly nose shy, but with lovely flavour intensity on the palate) and a wonderfully fresh Chardonnay.

Value when it comes to red wines is less easily determined: they generally cost more (I'm not entirely sure why, input costs are similar, but I guess that's an indication of what the market will bear). Still, however you look at it, the Compagniesdrift Cabernet Merlot at R79 is a wine well worth chasing down, as is the Zandvliet Shiraz, an old classic now looking less attenuated as a result of new owners willing to invest in one of Robertson's best known wine properties. The 2015 has beautifully managed tannins, a savoury lightness-of-touch on the palate, and real elegance on the finish.

For around R100 the Gabrielskloof The Blend 2016 (a previous vintage was a trophy winner at the show) is worth seeking out, likewise the 2015 Le Riche Richesse (R120). The former is a fairly standard Bordeaux blend, the latter has mostly the same varieties, but with the addition of Cinsaut, once South Africa's go-to blending red. If you buy at Woolworths (supposedly the retailer at which the least price-sensitive South Africans do their shopping) you will be amazed and delighted by the Delaire-Graff Redstone Bordeaux blend (R129). As for a well-priced pinot noir (something almost as mythical as the unicorn) the delicious 2015 Broad Valley was there with the silver medallists, at R189 per bottle.

Finally, for me the best value wine on the show: the Marras Chenin Blanc 2017. Produced from two vineyards - average age almost forty years - cold-fermented and then barrel-aged in older wood, it is a truly brilliant achievement. Fresh but not overly fruity, restrained but not slight, nuanced and exquisitely balanced, it's the bargain of the year at R60 per bottle. Even dedicated red wine enthusiasts cannot fail to succumb to its charms.