

It is a constant and not unjustified lament of the country's winemakers that they sell their wines too cheaply. Sometimes winery owners highlight the point by illustrating that the wine steward in a restaurant earns more from the 10% tip on the wine list price of a bottle than their own business banks on the same sale. There's no easy solution to the problem: some hoped that the drought would lead to a shortage of bulk wine, and an increase in grape prices - which in turn would ratchet up ex-cellar prices of everyday drinking wines.

If this is what they were expecting, I saw no evidence of it at last month's wine show in Pretoria. The 2018 Porcupine Ridge Sauvignon Blanc (consistently one of the best entry level examples in the industry) was still selling for less than R50 per bottle. Landskroon's 2017 sauvignon was no more expensive. The Hill & Dale 2016 Cabernet Shiraz, which is delicious and accessible, is on shelf for R60 - as is both the merlot and the pinotage from the same cellar. The Fleur du Cap Chardonnay 2017 - which has seen a dollop of decent oak and is quite nutty and caramel-like as a result - sells for a mere R70. The same investment will buy you a delicious (and quite classical) Durbanville Hills Cabernet.

There is an argument which holds that since all wines have the same basic dry goods costs (bottles, closures, labels, boxes) and that transport charges from the Cape to Gauteng are much the same for all producers, it's worth spending a little more and getting better juice in the bottle. Marras (Martin Lamprecht) - probably the most exciting of the new generation Swartland producers (because he's making delicious wines at unbelievably affordable prices) has several fine wines under R100. For R70 you can buy his Los Tros Chenin, which was a gold medal winner at this year's Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. His Chenin made entirely from Piekenierskloof fruit (it's a little more fragrant - whiffs of pear and white peach) sells for R10 more. The Marras reds include a 2017 Shiraz Cinsaut (R75) which is approachable now - succulent without being simple - and his Piekenierskloof Grenache 2017: light, spicy and harmonious, all that for R90.

At under R100 you should be able to find Rijk's Touch of Oak Chenin 2016: profoundly good fruit, still capable of ageing, the 20% barrel component adding complexity, rather than stripping away the freshness. The same price point brings you Cederberg's standard release chenin blanc, fine, pure and precise. If sauvignon blanc is your preferred tipple there's Paul Wallace's Little Flirt 2017: crisp, slightly citrusy, with intense greenpepper notes and light gooseberry whiffs.

Kanonkop's Kadette takes you into R100 territory, if only just - though the Pinotage Rose, grippy and fragrant and therefore more of a very light red, comes in at R70. The Cape blend (mainly pinotage and cabernet) sells for R110, and it is finely balanced and elegant. The Kadette Pinotage 2016 delivers restrained cherry fruit and well managed tannins for R120. This is a fraction of the price of the cellar's still very oaky current release Pinotage in the Kanonkop not Kadette range. In fact, if you are going to make the kind of investment associated with Kanonkop's estate wines, buy the 2013 Cabernet Sauvignon, which is fabulous, but needs years of patient cellaring.

Overgaauw's Merlot 2016 brings us back to the just over R100 price point: at R130 it is fine, with plush red fruit, savoury but not simple. The same money will buy you the La Bri Chardonnay 2017, made from grapes harvested from 26 year vines, barrel fermented, the oak and fruit in perfect balance. Idiom's Italian range (Rosso and Bianco di Stellenbosch) also sells for R120. The former is 90% sangiovese 10% barbera - perfect for pizza-pasta - that latter 100% pinot grigio, fine, precise and simply delicious. There are worse ways of sitting out a recession.