

Stability is a defining feature of Old World wine-producing countries: the established order of a long-established region (like Bordeaux) is unlikely to change dramatically. The New World, on the other hand, thrives on flux. Wine drinkers are more fashion-oriented, which means that they are always ready to abandon last year's favourites for next season's "must-haves." For wine distributors seeking to assemble an edgy but viable selection, life is a balancing act. You need producers who enjoy a level of recognition but are still not seen as part of the vinous establishment. You also require a few "wild cards" to offer an alternative aesthetic reality.

David Clarke is an Australian sommelier now living in South Africa. Together with his wife Jeannette he now runs a distribution business called Ex Animo wines with just such a line-up of generally avante-garde producers. Very few of the wineries he represents were even in business when he arrived at the Cape. Most don't own the vineyards from which they source their grapes. Some aim for a purer style of quite conventional wines; others are constantly experimenting with fermentation and maturation strategies to coax unlikely flavours and textures from the fruit. Most eschew the use of new oak, almost all of them prefer freshness to opulence.

At a recent tasting I managed to work my way through many of the wines in his portfolio. En route I came across so many that were finely made, pure, linear and fresh that it became almost impossible to list them without producing a document that read like a catalogue. Despite that risk, I've decided to highlight one or two wines from most of the producers - if only to provide a short-hand guide of what to seek out.

There were several very good sparkling wines: Jane Ferreira-Eedes's Dainty Bess, a rosé MCC made entirely from Pinot Noir, was showing lovely bready notes, while Melissa Nelsen's Genevieve Zero Dosage 2012 Chardonnay was fresh, spare rather than austere and perfectly elegant. Both of Jocelyn Wilson's Hogan wines were equally striking: the 2016 Chenin delivering great concentration while the Divergent blend of cabernet, cinsaut and carignan offers bright red berry notes with finely nuanced fruit on the finish.

Chris Williams (whose day job is cellar master at Meerlust) makes several very good wines under The Foundry label. My favourites were the Grenache Blanc and the Roussanne. The Myburghs at Joostenberg have quite an extensive range: Die Agteros Chenin (36 year old organically farmed vineyard), the Fairhead blend of roussanne, viognier and chenin and the 2017 Cinsaut were my standout wines. I also liked Mike and Jeanine Craven's Clairette Blanche 2017 and their Chenin Blanc from the Karibib vineyard in Stellenbosch.

Johan Meyer's JH Meyer range is a source of several single site pinots and chardonnays. The best of these come from the "Kleinrivier" vineyard (Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge) and Palmiet in Elgin. On the subject of chardonnay, Julien Schaal's 2016 "Evidence" from Elgin was one of the best I tasted. Luddite's Niels Verberg has been making some interesting wines under his "Saboteur" label. The white blend - closed under a crown cap (which is a great idea) - is mainly chenin, with some viognier for spice and some fume blanc for freshness. It's very easy drinking. John Seccombe's Thorne & Daughters brand is a source of great whites, while his Wanderer's Heart is a beautifully assembled red blend.

Craig Hawkins's Testalonga brand needs no introduction to wine buffs. The Baby Bandito chenin 2017 is one of his best to date. Koen Roose's Spioenkop is also not really a newcomer to the wine scene. I doubt there's a better dry riesling in the market at present than his 2016 vintage.

Finally every wine made by Trizanne Barnard can justify its place in a wine collection: all are thoughtfully crafted, beautifully poised, pure and harmonious. That said, her barbera, her sauvignon, her semillon, and her semillon-sauvignon blend are worth whatever effort it takes to track them down.

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