

July 3 2010 wine

Many will have returned from South Africa with disappointing memories of their trip. But for those with a broader vision could not have failed to enjoy the wonderful wine of the country. Viticulture has been practised here since the seventeenth century so as a new world producer it certainly is an oldie.

Their wine industry has not been without its problems. Trade restrictions stopped the importation of vines when the main French varieties were travelling the world. The vines throughout the main regions were subject to a leaf virus that inhibited the ripening of the grapes and the crop always had a distinctive green tang.

In the last twenty years things have developed amazingly. New wine making technology and the introduction of popular grape varieties resistant to the leaf virus has increased the size and breadth of the industry. The great vineyards of Constantia, Stellenbosch, Walker Bay, Paarl etc have numerous eminent producers making a range of wines that are the envy of many in the new world.

In the past the main red grape was the pinotage, something that developed over the centuries and would produce anything from light fruity to dark inky reds. The white was the chenin, or steen as it became known that, as in the Loire Valley in France can produce fresh dry to luscious sweet wines. Riesling was always popular making Germanic styles.

Sauvignon blanc, chardonnay, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and syrah are now the mainstays for most companies, and all perform remarkably well in the near perfect Mediterranean climate. A few names to look out for are Boschdendel, Mulderbosch, Thelema, Arinston Bay, Dewall, Klein Constantia, Kleine Zalze, Buitenverwachting, Bellingham, Spier to name a few.

Prices are remarkably competitive for the quality. I would hold up Klein Constantia Sauvignon Blanc against the greatest of this varietal from other countries. Even a simple Chenin or Sauvignon from the Robertson Winery is eminently drinkable. Seriously tasty Chardonnay comes from Rustenberg and Thelema. And all these are remarkably good for summer drinking and to forget the football.

Robertson Winery Chenin Blanc, also Sauvignon Blanc £5.49

Spier sauvignon Blanc, Western cape £6.99

Danie de Wet Sauvignon Blanc Robertson £7.99

Buitenverwachting Sauvignon Blanc Constantia £9.99

Klein Constantia sauvignon Blanc £11.99

Rustenberg Chardonnay Stellenbosch £12.99