

There are two things I don't like about Chapter 2, with its description of the different wine regions. First, as mentioned, the authors refer to sub-district demarcations as geographical 'pockets' (so, for example, the Stellenbosch region consists of the 'Polkadraai pocket' the 'Stellenbosch Kloof pocket' and 10 more. As a quick look at Google will attest, this is not a term that has caught on in South Africa, nor is it used anywhere else in the world. Second, in each 'pocket' the 'top producers' and their 'flagship wines' are identified and named. However, the reader is not told on what basis this selection is made.

Nevertheless, this chapter has many strengths, not least of which is the magnificent photographs (not confined only to this chapter – they are a feature of the whole book). Then there is the advice to travellers (along with GPS coordinates) and the very knowledgeable descriptions of each area and its wines. This description makes up the bulk of the book, and the chapter is rounded off with a description of *garagiste* wine making in South Africa, of brandy production, and of sparkling wine.

Chapter 3 has a section on wine tasting and understanding of wine styles, and a short description of the prevalent styles for the different wine cultivars. Chapter 4 is a bit more of a potpourri of issues with some tips on wine collecting – but nothing on wine selling, probably because the writer assumes all wines that are collected are primarily for own consumption rather than as an investment. This despite the title of the chapter: Profit and Pleasure. The obligatory 'food and wine pairing' section follows. Chapter 5 contains some useful tips for travellers.

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PHILIP VAN ZYL (ed.): *Platter's South African Wine Guide 2013*. John Platter Ltd: Hermanus, South Africa, 2012, 600 pp., ISBN 978-0987004611. Not available in the U.S.; Kalahari.com (South Africa), R 169.00; SA Wines Online (United Kingdom), £ 14.99; Namibiana Buchdepot (Germany), €19.95.

Of course any book that covers wines and wineries in South Africa has to compete with the Platter Guide, an annual offering that scores and provides tasting notes on every wine that is commercially available in the country and provides useful information on each of the wine farms, where to stay and where to eat in the winelands. First published in 1980 by John Platter under the title *John Platter's Book of South African Wines*, the first edition provided tasting notes on "over 1000 wines", and came in at 156 pages. Now, 30 years later, the book is over 600 pages and covers literally thousands of different wines. The Platter Guide is not without controversy, as tasting is not blind until award winners are selected. During this process, the members of the tasting team identify what they regard as the best wines,

which are then shortlisted and re-tasted by a panel, which then identifies what they regard as the best wines in a South African context, and these are awarded five stars. These days, the industry waits for the end-of-year announcement of the five-star wines with as much anticipation as the Oscars. The number of pages of the Platter Guide is probably as good a predictor of quantity in the South African industry: and the number of five star wines the most reliable predictor of quality.

Discerning readers will know that they have to benchmark their taste against the Guide, whose main virtue is consistency of opinion from year to year. Prefer a 3½ star Chardonnay to a more expensive 4½ star offering? The Guide allows you to identify every other 3½ star Chardonnay on the market, and tells you where to find them. Want to indulge in a 5-star offering? Just make sure you get there early! Another handy feature of the Guide is the “Wines of the Year” section, where the 5 star wines are identified along with a “Superquaffer of the year” award, an “Exceptionally drinkable and well priced” selection and a “Buy now drink later” selection. There is even a section on other wine awards, including the “Top 100 SA Wines”!

Each entry in the Guide contains a plethora of information in the case of wine farms: location of the winery (together with GPS coordinates these days), when the winery was established, date of first bottling, trading hours, size of the farm and area under vineyards, other amenities (tourist attractions, restaurants, accessibility for the physically challenged), name of owners, name of winemaker and viticulturist where appropriate, length of their service and so forth. This is followed by a narrative section providing background to the farm, the current vintage, winemaking specifics, awards won, etc. Then the serious business of tasting, rating and annotating is recorded, with all wines at 4 stars and higher typeset in red to enable easier identification. Those with the patience to trawl through back copies of the Guide will end up knowing as much about a specific winery as it is possible to know: imagine 30 years of annotations about your favorite winery, be it Kanonkop or Meerlust (both awarded five stars for their Cabernet in the 1982 edition) or Simonsig, whose highest rating for a dry wine in the 1982 edition was three stars (but four stars for their “slightly sweet” Gewürztraminer) but now receive 4 and 4½ stars for almost their entire offering.

The current print run is 40,000 per annum, and total sales are in excess of 1.4 million, an enormous number in the context of South Africa’s population and given that the Platter’s Guide is not available in the U.S. It is safe to say that the Guide has guided South African wine drinking habits for decades now, and it is hard to imagine the industry without it.

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