



South African wine styles

Cuvée is the French term for the blending of a wine, which is a way of producing more harmonious wines by adding complexity, emphasising the best attributes of each individual variety and also maintaining consistency from vintage to vintage.

In South Africa, legislation dictates that blends may list varieties only if they were vinified separately before being blended. Percentages need not to be indicated but the varieties must appear in descending order according to volume. Within the red blend category, the **Bordeaux-style** niche is South Africa's most prominent. Typically Shiraz-led **Rhône-style** blends given added complexity by varieties like Grenache, Mourvèdre and Viognier have come to the forefront in recent years. South African producers established a '**Cape blend**' style (no legislation), which requires from 30% to 70% of Pinotage as a component to qualify as such, just over a decade ago. Some of the finest examples these days, however, contain up to 10% less than the minimum. This term is also used occasionally for Chenin-driven white blends.

The **white blend** category in South Africa currently offers some of the most exciting wines to be found in the country. The category includes two main styles – **Bordeaux-style blends** (Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon) and Chenin Blanc-led **Mediterranean-style** blends that are complex and rich – as well as various other less conventional styles.

Pink Wines

Blanc de Noir, which means white (blanc) from black (noir), is made only from red-wine varieties. The grapes are crushed and the juice is kept in contact with the skins for just long enough to extract sufficient pigment to obtain a pale pink tinge. Blanc de Noir is then made as though it were a white wine. **Rosé** wines, sometimes referred to as 'blush' wines, represent a spectrum of colours from the palest salmon to the deepest pink. They are made in one of two ways: from a blend of red- and white-wine grape varieties; or from red-wine grapes only, which are allowed brief skin contact (for six to 24 hours) to attain the desired level of colour. In South Africa, rose wines are also made from Pinotage, a local cross between Pinot Noir and Hermitage (Cinsaut). The product shall have the colour that is distinctive of a Rosé-wine.

Natural Wines

Late Harvest wines are made from grapes harvested late in the season and therefore sweeter. The residual sugar content shall be at least 20g/l. **Natural Sweet/Sweet Natural** wines must have a residual sugar content of more than 20g/l. **Noble Late Harvest (NLH)** dessert wines show a noble rot (botrytis) character as they are made from grapes infected by the botrytis cinerea fungus. This is a mould which, in warm, misty autumn weather, attacks the skins of ripe grapes and causes the evaporation of most of the juice. The sweetness and flavours become more concentrated as the berries wither. They must be harvested at a minimum of 28 degree Balling and the residual sugar must exceed 50g/l, according to the dictates of South African law. **Special Late Harvest (SLH)** is a lighter style of dessert wine and the grapes must be harvested at a minimum of 22 degrees Balling. If, however, it is below 20g/l, the label must state extra dry, dry, semi-dry or sweet accordingly (refer to the chart below). The minimum stipulated alcohol is 11% by volume. **Wine from Naturally Dried Grapes** could contain a component of botrytised grapes. Straw wine (Vin de Paille) is made from grapes that have been dried out on a bed of straw – as the water content evaporates, the sugar becomes more concentrated. Dessication is also being utilised by several producers in South Africa – the stalks of grape bunches on the vine are twisted prior to harvest to concentrate the flavours and used both for making sweet wines and to add body to dry wines. They must be harvested at a minimum of 28 degrees Balling.

Méthode Cap Classique (MCC) & Sparkling Wines

Under an agreement with France, South Africa does not use the term Champagne, which describes the sparkling wines produced in the Champagne area. **Méthode Cap Classique (MCC)** is the term used to describe sparkling wines made by the classic method of undergoing second fermentation in the bottle, as is done in Champagne. There are quality standards that all producers adhere to voluntarily, apart from the minimum time on the lees (nine months) and the bars of pressure, which are mandatory in order to use MCC on the label. **Charmat** undergoes its second fermentation in a tank and is then bottled under pressure. **Carbonated sparkling** wines are given their effervescence by the injection of carbon dioxide (the same process used in making fizzy soft drinks).

Fortified/Dessert Wines

According to South African legislation, fortified wines are wines that have been increased in alcoholic strength by the addition of spirit, usually brandy, to a minimum of 15 percent and not exceeding 22 percent. The Cape winelands have a long history of making sweet wines or 'stickies' (also called 'soetes' in Afrikaans). This dates back to the luscious dessert wines of Constantia which were world-famous in the 18th and 19th centuries. This category remains consistently strong in South Africa. **Hanepoot** wines are made from Muscat d' Alexandrie, which is called Hanepoot locally. **Jerepiko** (also spelled Jerepigo) is a red or white wine, produced without fermentation – grape juice is fortified with grape spirit, which prevents fermentation. It is very sweet, with substantial unfermented grape flavours. **Muscadelwines** are made from Muscat de Frontignan.

Port- & Sherry-style Wines

Due to an agreement between South Africa and the European Union, **ports and sherries** made here may not carry those names after 2012.

Port-style wines are blended wines, generally from varieties such as Tinta Barocca, Touriga Francesa, Touriga Nacional and other Portuguese varieties. The following styles were defined by legislation:

Cape Pink – non-muscat grapes, matured for at least six months.

Cape White – non-muscat grapes, wood-aged for a minimum of six months, any size vessel.

Cape Ruby – blended, fruity, components aged for a minimum of six months up to three years, depending on size of vessel. Average age is a minimum of one year.

Cape Vintage – fruit of one harvest in year of 'recognised quality'. Preferably aged for a minimum of one year, vats of any size, sold only in glass.



Cape Late Bottled Vintage (LBV) – fruit of single ‘year of quality’, full-bodied, slightly tawny colour, aged three to six years (of which a minimum of two years in oak).

Cape Tawny – wood-matured, amber-orange (tawny) colour, smooth, slightly nutty taste (white grapes not permitted).

Cape Dated Tawny – single-vintage tawny.

Sherry-style wines are marketed as Fino, Amontillado, Oloroso, Pale Cream, Pale Dry, Medium Dry, Full Cream and Old Brown in South Africa.

Residual Sugar

Official sweetness levels in South African wines are listed below:

	Sugar (g/l)
Still wines	
Extra-dry	≤2.5
Dry	≤5 (or not exceed 9 g/l if the total acidity is more than 2 g/l below the sugar content)
Semi-dry	5≤12 (or not exceed 18 g/l if the total acidity is not more than 10 g/l below the sugar content)
Semi-sweet	>5 <30
Late Harvest	≥20
Special Late Harvest (SLH)	–
Natural Sweet (or Sweet Natural)	>20
Noble Late Harvest (NLH)	>50
Naturally dried grape wine (straw wine)	>30
Sparkling wines	
Brut nature	<3
Extra brut	<6
Brut	<12
Extra-dry	>12–<17
Dry (Sec)	>17–<32
Semi-sweet (Demi-sec)	>32–<50
Sweet (Doux)	>50