



AFRICA

CHAPTER NINETEEN

CHAPTER NINETEEN

AFRICA

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, the candidate should be able to:

- Discuss the physical location and general climate of South Africa's major wine regions.
- Describe the significant grape varieties grown in South Africa.
- Recall South African synonyms for international grape varieties.
- Describe the basic elements of the South African appellation system and wine labeling laws.

In wine terms, "Africa" essentially means the nation of South Africa. Tropical climates, desert heat, and aridity combine to make the production of wine difficult to nearly impossible in most other countries on the continent. In northern Africa, a few locations, primarily those with a history of French occupation, produce some wine as well. For many reasons, consumption is low throughout Africa, although there are a few surprises, such as the fact that Angola (a former Portuguese colony) is Portugal's number-one destination for wine exports.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has a long history of wine production that dates back to the seventeenth century, when travel and transport of goods between Europe and the colonies and trade markets of the East meant sailing around the entire continent of Africa. The harbor at Cape Town at the southern extremity of Africa was a mandatory stop for ships to replenish their supplies, and wine was one of the items

that the cape could provide to passing ships. Vines from Europe were first planted in 1655, with the first wine made in 1659. By 1709, there were 70,000 vineyard acres (28,300 ha) in Cape Town.

Concurrent with these developments, Simon van der Stel, the governor of Cape Town, planted 100,000 vines just outside the colony in an area known as Constantia. Thirty years later, South Africa's wine industry was further influenced when 150 French refugees, known as the Huguenots, settled in the Drakenstein Valley to escape religious persecution. The area became known as Franschhoek, which translates as "French Corner." By the mid-1700s, South African wines, including the renowned dessert wines of Constantia, were being exported to Europe, receiving great acclaim and developing an international reputation.

In the late 1800s, the opening of the Suez Canal, along with the arrival of phylloxera and oidium, dealt a severe blow to South Africa's wine industry. In 1918, after losing much of its export market, the wine industry was sustained by the creation of the Koöperatieve Wijnbouwers Vereniging van Zuid-Afrika Bpkt (KWV). This cooperative produced wine, made brandy, and stabilized grape prices. While the co-op saved the industry, it also established a quota system that, for a time, emphasized quantity over quality.

With political reform and the end of apartheid in the early 1990s, decades-long boycotts prohibiting much international trade with South Africa were lifted, and South Africa rejoined the international community. The country's wine industry soon found that, while it had a solid foundation in winemaking, it was technologically behind the times. In an effort to modernize, the KWV quotas were scrapped and South Africa embarked on an ambitious program of replanting vineyards, upgrading its winery technology, and focusing on improving the quality of its wines so as to reenter the export market.

Wine Areas of South Africa

Western Cape G.U.

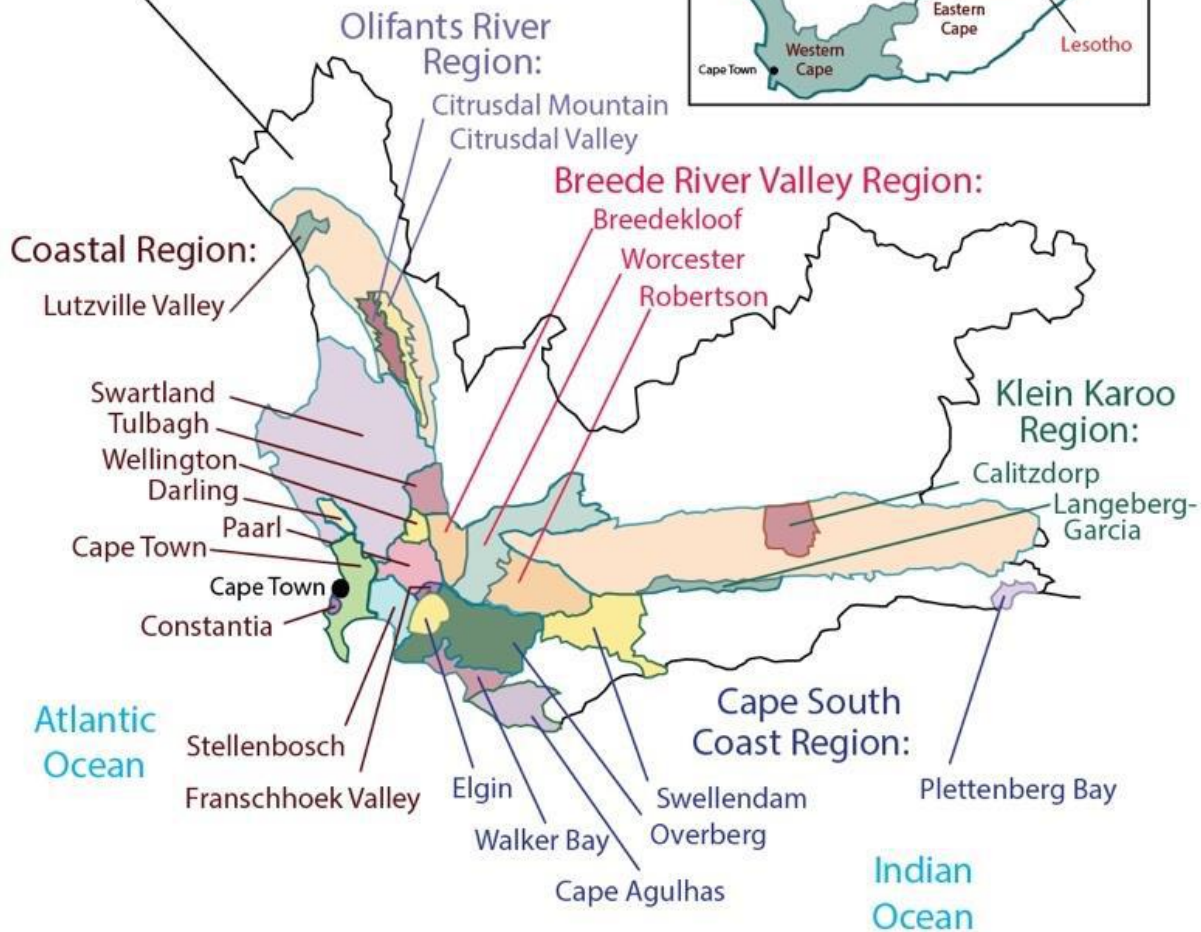


Figure 19–1: Wine areas of South Africa

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

South Africa is the only country in Africa that extends much beyond the 30° line marking the beginning of the winegrowing latitudes. The interior of the country has a semi-arid continental climate, and the eastern coast is subtropical and humid. However, the southwest around Cape Town enjoys a Mediterranean climate and is well suited

to grape growing.

Many of the prime winegrowing areas of South Africa benefit from the cool, moist breezes blowing in from the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The Benguela Current, a cold ocean current that flows up the western coast from Antarctica, helps to generate moist fogs and cooling breezes as well the *Cape Doctor*. The Cape Doctor is a strong, often persistent southeasterly wind that helps to dry out the vineyards and minimize the risk of fungal diseases—but can also be ferocious enough to damage the vines. Geologically, South Africa is home to some of the oldest soils on earth, traceable to the first supercontinent one billion years ago. The range of soils includes sandstone, granite and shale, and clay.

GRAPE VARIETIES

The vineyards of South Africa are fairly evenly divided between white and red varieties; however, the leading grape remains Chenin Blanc. Chenin Blanc, sometimes referred to by the local name *Steen*, has long been the most widely planted variety and presently accounts for 18% of all grape production. South African Chenin Blanc is made into many styles of wine, including both oaked and unoaked table wines and sweet wines, as well as a range of sparkling wines. Chenin Blanc and Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains (sometimes archaically referred to as *Muscat de Frontignan*) are also used to produce late-harvest and botrytis-affected (*Noble Late Harvest*) dessert wines.

Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc are also widely planted and used in a range of wine styles. Muscat of Alexandria (traditionally referred to as Hanepoot) is often used in rich, flowery dessert wines, but produces complex dry wines as well. Other notable white grapes include Semillon, Viognier, Crouchen Blanc (formerly known as Cape Riesling), and Colombard (widely planted but often used in the production of brandy).

Cabernet Sauvignon is the leading red grape variety, followed closely

by Shiraz (Syrah). Another popular red variety is Pinotage, an indigenous crossing of Pinot Noir and Cinsault that was developed almost a century ago at Stellenbosch University. In addition to showing up as a varietal wine, Pinotage is also used in a uniquely South African wine known as a Cape Blend. A Cape Blend is (unofficially) defined as containing between 30% and 70% Pinotage; the remainder being traditional Bordeaux red varieties. Other widely grown red grapes include Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Pinot Noir, Cinsault, and Ruby Cabernet.

LEADING GRAPE VARIETIES OF SOUTH AFRICA	
Red Grapes	White Grapes
Cabernet Sauvignon	Chenin Blanc
Shiraz	Colombard
Pinotage	Sauvignon Blanc
Merlot	Chardonnay
Ruby Cabernet	Hanepoot (Muscat of Alexandria)
Cinsault	Semillon
Pinot Noir	Muscat Blanc à Petits Grains
Cabernet Franc	Viognier

Figure 19–2: Leading Grape Varieties of South African

SOUTH AFRICAN WINE LAWS

The appellation system in South Africa, known as the Wine of Origin (WO) Scheme, was introduced in 1973. The emphasis is on place-of-origin, with regulations defining differing sizes of geographical areas without any specific restrictions on the grape varieties used or types of wine produced. The various categories of areas, from largest to smallest, are the following:

- Geographical units
- Regions—larger encompassing areas
- Districts
- Wards—defined by soil, climate, and geological factors

The Wine of Origin Scheme is administered by the South African Wine and Spirit Board, which certifies all wines that list a specific place of origin, grape variety, or vintage date on the label. Wines that comply with the WO regulations receive a white paper seal affixed across the wine capsule. Certification requires that 100% of the wine come from the geographic area, estate, or vineyard listed on the label, or multiple areas adding up to 100%. If the vintage or grape variety is stated, 85% of the wine must be made from that year or variety. In addition, the wine must be sampled and approved by the board.

SOUTH AFRICAN APPELLATIONS

South Africa's primary geographical unit, the Western Cape, surrounds Cape Town and is home to most of the country's regions, districts, wards, and vineyards. Only about 5% of the vineyards land lies outside the Western Cape, most of which is located well inland in the valley of the Orange River in the Northern Cape geographical unit.

The Coastal Region

Within the Western Cape, the Coastal Region is located along the western coast of the Cape and extends inland, encircling the original colony (and now city) of Cape Town. The Coastal Region is divided into nine districts: Stellenbosch, Cape

Town, Paarl, Tulbagh, Darling, Franschhoek Valley, Wellington, Swartland, and Lutzville Valley (previously considered part of the Olifants River Region). Outstanding features of some of these districts are discussed below:

- The Stellenbosch District, located just east (and slightly south) of the city of Cape Town, is one of the oldest and most respected winegrowing areas of South Africa. Cabernet Sauvignon is the leading red wine of the area, which is also known for Chardonnay, Chenin Blanc, and Sauvignon Blanc.
- The Paarl District lies north of Stellenbosch and is a bit warmer, although it is still reasonably close to the ocean. This larger area is home to some of the more familiar South African brands and produces a full range of wines.
- The Franschhoek Valley District still shows its early French influence. The leading grapes include Chardonnay, Semillon, Syrah, and the red Bordeaux varieties.
- The Constantia Ward is located on the peninsula south of Cape Town, with a cool maritime climate and decomposed granite soils. The first vines in South Africa were planted here in the 1600s. Vin de Constance—the luscious, Muscat-based sweet white wine of the area—became quite famous in Europe during the 18th century and was for a while a leading export. However, the wine faded out of existence after phylloxera devastated the vineyards. Today, several wineries—including Groot Constantia and Klein Constantia—are once again producing the famous dessert wine. The region is also being revived as a wine growing site for dry white and red table wines.
- The Swartland District is a very rugged area despite being only an hour's drive north of the city of Cape Town. Its Mediterranean climate provides intensive, dry summer heat and cooler nights. Soils vary, but they permit the vines to develop deep roots, enabling dry farming as well as the use of untrellised bush vines. A renaissance is taking place here, as growers and winemakers are reestablishing vineyards and gaining critical recognition for this new district, which is

predominantly planted to Rhône varieties and Chenin Blanc.



Figure 19–3: Groot Constantia Winery

The Cape South Coast Region

The Cape South Coast Region stretches some 250 miles (402 km) along the southwestern and southern coast of South Africa. This region contains 6 districts—Cape Agulhas, Elgin, Overberg, Plettenberg Bay, Swellendam, and Walker Bay—as well as a few stand-alone wards. The leading producers of the Cape South Coast Region include the following:

- The Elgin District is an up-and-coming area in the hills southeast of Stellenbosch, where the altitude provides cooler temperatures, which results in the slow ripening of grapes.
- The Walker Bay District is located in the southernmost part of the country, close to the shore and subject to winds off the Indian Ocean. Proximity to the sea near Hermanus and Cape Agulhas makes this one of the most maritime-influenced of all South African areas, and therefore one of the coolest winegrowing regions of the country. This zone is ideal for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

The Breede River Valley Region

About 100 miles (160 km) east of Cape Town, the Breede River provides irrigation to the warm interior wine regions of the Breede River Valley. The region was initially best known for its fortified wines and dessert wines and has recently distinguished itself with its

Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc wines. The district of Robertson, known as the Valley of Vines and Roses, has undergone a dramatic wine evolution in the last few decades. A red wine project, started in the early 1990s, has brought the region's Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon to the attention of wine consumers both locally and internationally. Nearby, the vineyards of Worcester grow approximately 25% of the nation's wine and a good portion of the table grapes. They also produce a high-quality brandy.



Figure 19–4: South African vineyards with Table Mountain in the background

NORTHERN AFRICA

In the Northern Hemisphere, the entire North African coast on the Mediterranean Sea is above the 30th parallel, making wine production theoretically possible. However, there are additional challenges to winegrowing here, including the lack of water in these northern fringes of the Sahara Desert and the absence of significant maritime cooling, as the Mediterranean Sea does not get as cold as most ocean waters.

Despite these major hurdles, wine is produced in northern Africa.

The most active wine industries are found in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia—areas that were under French control during the nineteenth or early twentieth century.

Algeria, a French overseas département until its independence in 1962, was once a major source of blending wine and basic table wine for France, producing well over 200 million cases of wine a year.

Today, that industry has declined, although Algeria remains the second largest wine producer in Africa. Most of the vineyard land is located in the foothills of the Atlas Mountains, and the vines are planted in sandy soils.

With the Sahara and the forbidding Atlas Mountains inland, grape growing in Algeria and the rest of northern Africa is largely confined to the Mediterranean coast and northern mountain slopes, where the coolest climatic conditions are found.

Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia all have appellation systems (appellation d'origine garantie/AOG, or appellation d'origine contrôlée/AOC) modeled after the French system, with several designated regions. Carignan, Grenache, Cinsaut, and Muscat are among the top grape varieties grown.

Table 19–1: South African Appellations

SOUTH AFRICA: GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS		
Western Cape Geographical Unit		
Region	District	Wards
Cape South Coast	Cape Agulhas	Elim
	Elgin	
	Lower Duivenhoks River	
	Overberg	Elandskloof/Kaaimansgat, Greyton, Klein River, Theewater
	Plettenberg Bay	
	Swellendam	Buffeljags, Malgas, Stormsvlei
	Walker Bay	Bot River, Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge, Hemel-en-Aarde Valley, Sunday's Glen, Springfontein Rim, Stanford Foothills, Upper Hemel-en-Aarde-Valley
	(no district)	Herbertsdale, Napier, Still Bay East
Coastal Region	Cape Town	Constantia, Durbanville, Hout Bay, Philadelphia
	Darling	Groenekloof
	Franshhoek (Valley)	
	Lutzville Valley	Koekenaap
	Paarl	Agter-Paarl, Simonsberg-Paarl, Voor-Paardeberg
	Stellenbosch	Banghoek, Bottelary, Devon Valley, Jonkershoek Valley, Papegaaiberg, Polkadraai Hills, Simonsberg-Stellenbosch, Vlottenburg
	Swartland	Malmesbury, Paardeberg/Perdeberg, Paardeberg South, Piket-Bo-Berg, Riebeekberg, Riebeeksrivier, St. Helena Bay
	Tulbagh	
	Wellington	Blouvillei, Bovlei, Groenberg, Limietberg, Mid-Berg River
	(no district)	Bamboes Bay, Lamberts Bay

Table 19–1: South African Appellations, continued

SOUTH AFRICA: GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS

Western Cape Geographical Unit

Region	District	Wards
Breede River Valley	Breedekloof	Goudini, Slanghoek
	Robertson	Agterkliphoogte, Ashton, Boesmansrivier, Bonnievale, Eilandia, Goedemoed, Goree, Goudmyn, Hoopsrivier, Klaasvoogds, Le Chasseur, McGregor, Vinkrivier, Zandrivier
	Worcester	Hex River Valley, Nuy, Scherpenheuvel, Stettyn
Klein Karoo	Calitzdorp	Groenfontein
	Langeberg-Garcia	
	(no district)	Cango Valley, Koo Plateau, Montagu, Outeniqua, Tradouw, Tradouw Highlands, Upper Langkloof
Olifants River	Citrusdal Mountain	Piekenierskloof
	Citrusdal Valley	
	(no district)	Spruitdrift, Vredendal
(No region)	Ceres Plateau	Ceres
	Prince Albert	Kweekvallei, Prince Albert Valley, Swartberg
	(no district)	Cederberg, Leipoldtville-Sandveld, Nieuwoudtville

Northern Cape Geographical Unit

(No region)	Douglas	
	Sutherland-Karoo	
	Central Orange River	Groblershoop, Grootdrink, Kakamas, Kelmoes, Upington
	(no district)	Hartswater, Prieska

Eastern Cape Geographical Unit

(No region)	(no district)	St. Francis Bay
-------------	---------------	-----------------

Kwazulu-Natal Geographical Unit

(No region)	Central Drakensberg	
	Lions River	

Limpopo Geographical Unit

Free State Geographical Unit

(No region)	(No district)	Rietrivier FS
-------------	---------------	---------------

Source: Wines of South Africa (WOSA), December 2022