

30. South Africa

South Africa has established itself as an important producer of wines, making similar volumes to Argentina, Chile and Australia. Mostly based in the Western Cape province, it has become a provider of both bulk wines and premium wines that have been well received in key export markets. At the top end of the market, it has earned a reputation for high quality for varieties such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah which thrive in its warm areas and for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, grown in cooler areas.

The first Europeans settled at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652. Over the following centuries, first Dutch and then British colonists subjugated the indigenous peoples of what became South Africa as they sought trading, territorial, economic and strategic advantage. Dutch traders also enslaved people from other Dutch territories, including modern-day Indonesia, and brought them to work on the wine plantations of the Cape. Indigenous peoples were killed in conflicts, suffered and died from diseases imported by the Europeans, or were forced into labour for them. Grape growing to produce wine has a history of more than 360 years in South Africa, ever since Europeans settled at the Cape of Good Hope. It was dependent on the labour of enslaved people until slavery's abolition in the 1860s. However, many workers were not really freed, due to a very negative feature of the colonial wine industry called the 'dop' system. Employers paid their workers in low-quality alcohol, sometimes distributing it five times a day. This curtailed economic mobility, resulted in dependence on the employer and led to high levels of alcoholism and disease. The system was formally abolished in 1961 but continued as a system of reward until 1994 and in some places beyond. It contributed to continuing significant alcohol-related problems amongst labourers.

Before the 1990s, the South African wine industry was dominated by the giant co-operative known as the KWV. It had regulatory powers to determine production volumes and prices. The KWV supported South Africa's system of racial segregation and discrimination, known as apartheid. Planting of highly productive varieties such as Chenin Blanc, Colombard and Cinsaut was required as most wine was destined for the brandy industry, with less than a third of wine grapes reaching the market as wine. By 2017, this situation had been transformed with around 85 per cent of wine grapes reaching the market as wine. Chenin Blanc continues to be the largest single planted variety, but the bigger picture has seen a more than doubling of the percentage of black varieties planted since the early 1990s, now 45 per cent of all plantings.¹

The industry has been transformed in the years since 1994 when the African National Congress won the first democratic elections. The domestic market has only developed slowly, but there has been an export-led boom in the last 30 years. However, it has not been able to overcome low prices for the great majority of its wines.

30.1. The Growing Environment and Grape Growing CLIMATE

Situated between 32–35° latitude, comparable to California and Israel in the northern hemisphere, South Africa's Western Cape has a warm Mediterranean climate. Generalisations, however, are dangerous. The climates of the growing regions are considerably influenced

**Delivering Pinot Noir**

by the Western Cape's many mountain ranges, slopes and aspects. That said, most of the grape growing areas are cooled by proximity to the ocean, allowing producers to grow both Pinot Noir in the coolest areas and heat-loving varieties such as Shiraz and Tinta Barocca successfully in most areas. The main cooling influence is the cold north-flowing Benguela current. Not only does this flow north up the western coast of South Africa, it mingles with the warmer Agulhas current from the Indian Ocean lowering water temperatures between Cape Town and Cape Agulhas. The large difference in temperature between the ocean and the land causes regular beneficial coastal fog and cooling breezes.

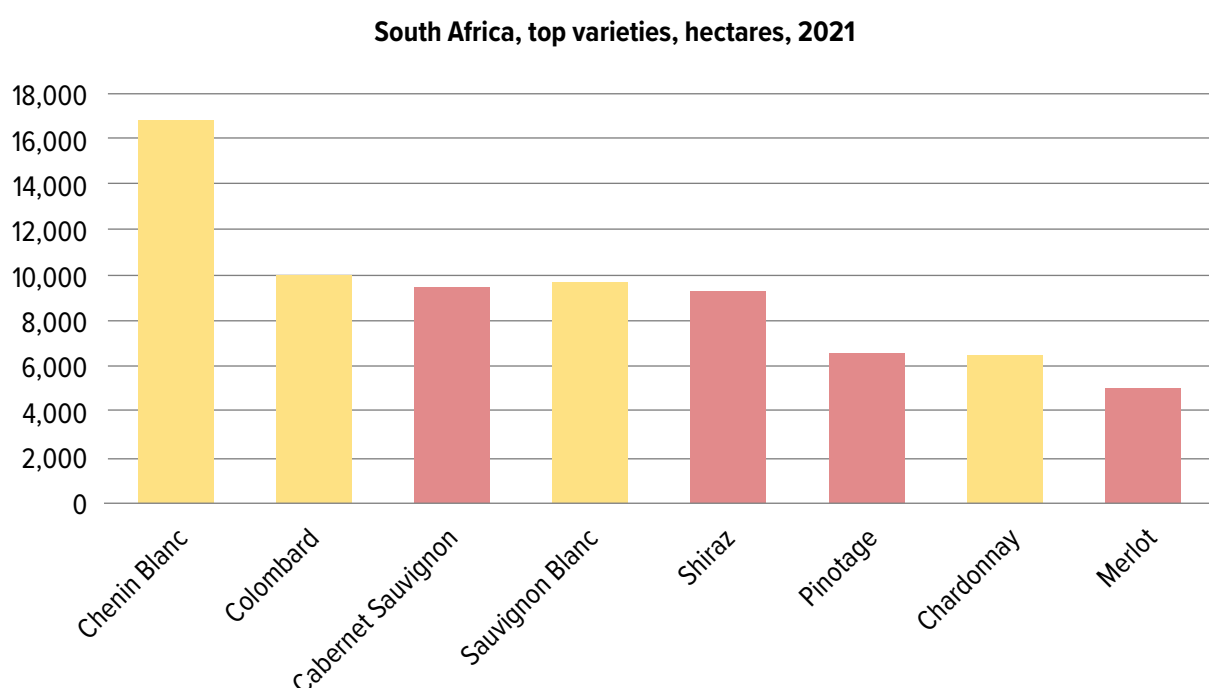
The Cape Doctor is a south-easterly wind during spring and summer and extends the impact of the Benguela current. It also has the advantage of inhibiting disease and bringing some occasional rain to the South Coast. It can, however damage leaves, thus affecting photosynthesis and ripeness, and severely affect the flowering process and berry set, reducing yields.

**Drought-affected Chardonnay**

Spring frost can be a problem, particularly in the Bredekloof ward, but not on a regular basis. A lack of consistent winter freeze can cause issues with vines failing to rest over winter.

Rain falls mainly between May and August. In normal years rainfall is adequate for grape growing, e.g. more than 700 mm per year in Stellenbosch.² However, it reduces in the north of the Western Cape due to the decrease in the impact of the Benguela current and the protection of the mountains that follow the coastline. Irrigation or promotion of old vines is therefore essential in the drier areas. In addition, recent prolonged drought has made the issue of water availability a leading priority for the industry. While many vineyards have drip irrigation installed, access to water is likely to continue to be an issue, as in other warm grape growing regions of the world, particularly in areas like Swartland where vines are predominantly dry farmed.

GRAPE VARIETIES



Source: SAWIS³

As can be seen from the chart, white varieties are in the majority in South Africa due to the large amount of Chenin Blanc planted, more than 16,000 hectares, double that of the Loire. The other varieties all fall in the range of 5,000–10,000 hectares. These eight varieties account for more than 80 per cent of the country's total plantings. In recent years, the area under vine has steadily, if not dramatically decreased, a reduction of ten per cent in the decade to 2021.⁴

For basic information about the varieties, see Chenin Blanc in [The Loire Valley](#), Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot in [Bordeaux](#), Syrah in [The Rhône](#), Sauvignon Blanc in [The Loire Valley](#) and Chardonnay in [Burgundy](#). As in the South West of France, Colombard produces neutral white wine with medium–medium (+) acidity and is typically used in blends.

Pinotage

This variety was bred at the University of Stellenbosch in 1925 by crossing Pinot Noir with Cinsaut, then known in South Africa as Hermitage. It is early budding (but spring frost is rarely a problem in the warmer parts of the Cape where it is typically grown) and is only moderately susceptible to fungal diseases. It reaches high sugar levels in small berries, resulting in potentially high alcohol wine with deep colour that require only a short time on the skins after the end of fermentation to produce a deep colour (e.g. three days for the lighter style, five days for the fuller-bodied style). In the past Pinotage has had a poor reputation for quality. However, better vineyard practice (e.g. avoiding water stress) and better winemaking (avoiding overly high fermentation temperatures) have seen an improvement in quality.⁵

SOILS AND VINEYARD MANAGEMENT

While soils are very variable and complex, there are three main types in the Western Cape:

- Soils derived from Table Mountain sandstone: these are sandy with low nutrient and water-retention properties. As a result, vineyards on these soils may need careful attention to irrigation and fertilisation.
- Soils derived from granite: these soils are found on the foothill slopes of mountains and in hilly areas. They have good water-retention properties, indicating a potential for dry-farming.
- Soils derived from shale: these soils have good nutrient levels and good water-retention properties, indicating a potential for dry-farming.⁶

Most Cape soils are excessively acid and require heavy adjustments with lime to achieve a suitable pH for vine growing; otherwise, the nutrients in the soil would not be available to the vine and yields would be lower. Vine density is typically low with larger vines carrying more fruit. Some high-quality growers work with closer spacing.

In the modern period, the South African wine industry has had to deal with a legacy of plantings with viral diseases, especially leafroll and fanleaf, which reduced yield and added the cost of replanting badly affected vineyards. This is being tackled by planting virus-tested vines, also at an additional cost. Powdery mildew is the most common fungal disease and is typically contained by systemic fungicides or by organic methods where those have been adopted.

The most common form of training is cordon with VSP with a fruiting wire at 0.75 m for ease of pruning. Short spur pruning is common and can be mechanised, saving cost. However, most picking is done by hand due to the availability of labour.

Yields vary markedly depending on the presence or absence of irrigation, vine spacing and the age of vines. However, there is a marked difference between large-scale grape growing for inexpensive wine and unirrigated old vine grape growing. Average yields for Chenin Blanc are four times as high in Olifants River in comparison to Swartland.⁷

While few producers are accredited as organic or biodynamic, many adhere to the philosophy of integrated pest management. Additionally, the Integrated Production of Wine (IPW) system was introduced in 1998. This is very detailed and governs all aspects of growing and winemaking from carbon emissions, to staff training and conservation of soil, rivers and wetlands. 90 per cent of all South African export producers adhere to the system, representing 95 per cent of all grapes harvested. There is a high level of self-regulation required but it is also policed by means of annual audits of documentation and environmental spot-checks.

30.2. Winemaking

WINEMAKING FOR CHENIN BLANC AND PINOTAGE

Winemaking in South Africa, as in other countries, can be divided between high-volume winemaking for inexpensive wines and small batch winemaking for mid-price to premium wines. This can be illustrated in the cases of Chenin Blanc and Pinotage.

High volume inexpensive Chenin Blanc	Small volume premium Chenin Blanc
Fruit grown at high yields. Vineyards sprayed regularly to avoid all botrytis. Minimal or no sorting of harvested fruit.	Fruit grown at low yields, often on old, dryland vines. A small amount of Botrytis may be allowed if this is a desired element in the final wine. Careful sorting of harvested fruit.
Chenin Blanc may be blended with up to 15 per cent of a less valuable variety, e.g. Colombard.	100 per cent Chenin Blanc.
Acidification a normal practice, no malolactic conversion (to preserve natural acidity), cultured yeast.	Acidification typically avoided, no malolactic conversion (to preserve natural acidity), ambient or cultured yeast according to producer choice.
Cool fermentation temperature in stainless steel or concrete tanks to retain primary fruit.	Cool fermentation temperature in inert vessels, including larger format, older barrels, to retain primary fruit. Increasing use of 'eggs' and amphora. Of those producers using new oak, most ferment in barrels for better fruit-oak integration.
Wine typically rested in stainless steel tanks or old oak for a few months. Oak flavour may be added (chips or staves).	Lees aging for 3–9 months typical for those fermented in stainless steel or concrete. Those using old oak, 'eggs' or amphora will age 10–12 months in those vessels while those seeking a more obviously oaked style, would age French oak barrels for 10–12 months, variable amounts of new oak according to style. <i>Bâtonnage</i> carried out if richer style desired.
Residual sugar may be adjusted using concentrated grape must to 5 or more g/l (from 1.5–3.0 g/l) depending on the target market.	Wines bottled without adjustment of sugar (in a range of 1.5–6 g/l).
Wine stabilised, fined and filtered for early release.	Wine stabilised, light fining and filtering as required.
Wine often transported in bulk and bottled in final market.	Wine bottled in South Africa and transported to final market.



New concrete fermentation tanks, Franschhoek

Wines made from Chenin Blanc have medium to pronounced intensity, ripe yellow apple or peach fruit with tropical fruit notes, high acidity and medium alcohol and body. They may have vanilla and toast aromas from oak. High volume wines are acceptable to good in quality and inexpensive to mid-priced, while higher quality wines are very good to outstanding in quality and mid- to premium priced, with a small number of super-premium wines. Significant producers include DeMorgenzon and Ken Forrester.

In the case of Pinotage, the same contrast can be drawn about yields and levels of sorting. For premium wines, the fruit may be given a period of cold soak before crushing to improve colour extraction. For both inexpensive and premium wines, pumping over and punching down take place typically at the start of fermentation (when there is a lower level of alcohol in the solution and therefore less tannin is extracted).

Producers of premium Pinotage wines choose between a traditional fuller-bodied, more tannic style and a lighter, more elegant style. In the traditional style, the wines are deep ruby with red plum and blackberry fruit, high tannins, a full body and high alcohol. These wines are kept on the skins for 3–5 days post-fermentation. In the lighter style, the grapes may have been grown on cooler sites and picked at lower levels of ripeness. The wines are medium ruby in colour, red-fruited and have medium tannins. These are typically not macerated on the skins post-fermentation.

The maturation of the wines is very different:

- Inexpensive wines are aged in stainless steel or used barrels. Oak alternatives (staves or chips) may be used to add oak flavours. These wines can be released early, e.g. 6–12 months after vintage.

- Premium wines are typically aged for an extended period (12–15 months) in French oak barriques (often more than 50 per cent new) and released two years after the vintage. While a high proportion of new oak used to be the norm with Pinotage there is an increasing number of producers who have dramatically cut their new oak content. Both the time and the use of new oak add significantly to cost.

The inexpensive wines are typically good to very good in quality and inexpensive in price, while the higher quality wines are very good to outstanding in quality and mid- to premium priced. Examples of some significant producers are given under the wine regions.

WINE STYLES

Most regions grow the ‘big six’ varieties: Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay for white wines and Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Pinotage for red wines. (The big six excludes Colombard that typically either goes into blends or is grown for brandy or distillation.) From these varieties, both single variety wines and blends are made across all the regions. Though there is some variation in the percentages of these varieties in the different regions, broadly speaking they are common to all the regions.

In addition to the varietal wines, there are three main blends:

- **White Cape blends** – typically Chenin-dominant blends but with white Rhône varieties, Chardonnay, Semillon or Sauvignon Blanc
- **Red Bordeaux blends** – some white Bordeaux blends are made too
- **Red Cape blends** – this is a broader category for blends with a significant proportion of Pinotage and/or black Rhône varieties

In addition, a range of other styles is made including Cap Classique (see South Africa in D4: Sparkling Wines), botrytis-affected sweet wines and fortified wines.

30.3. Wine Laws and Regulations

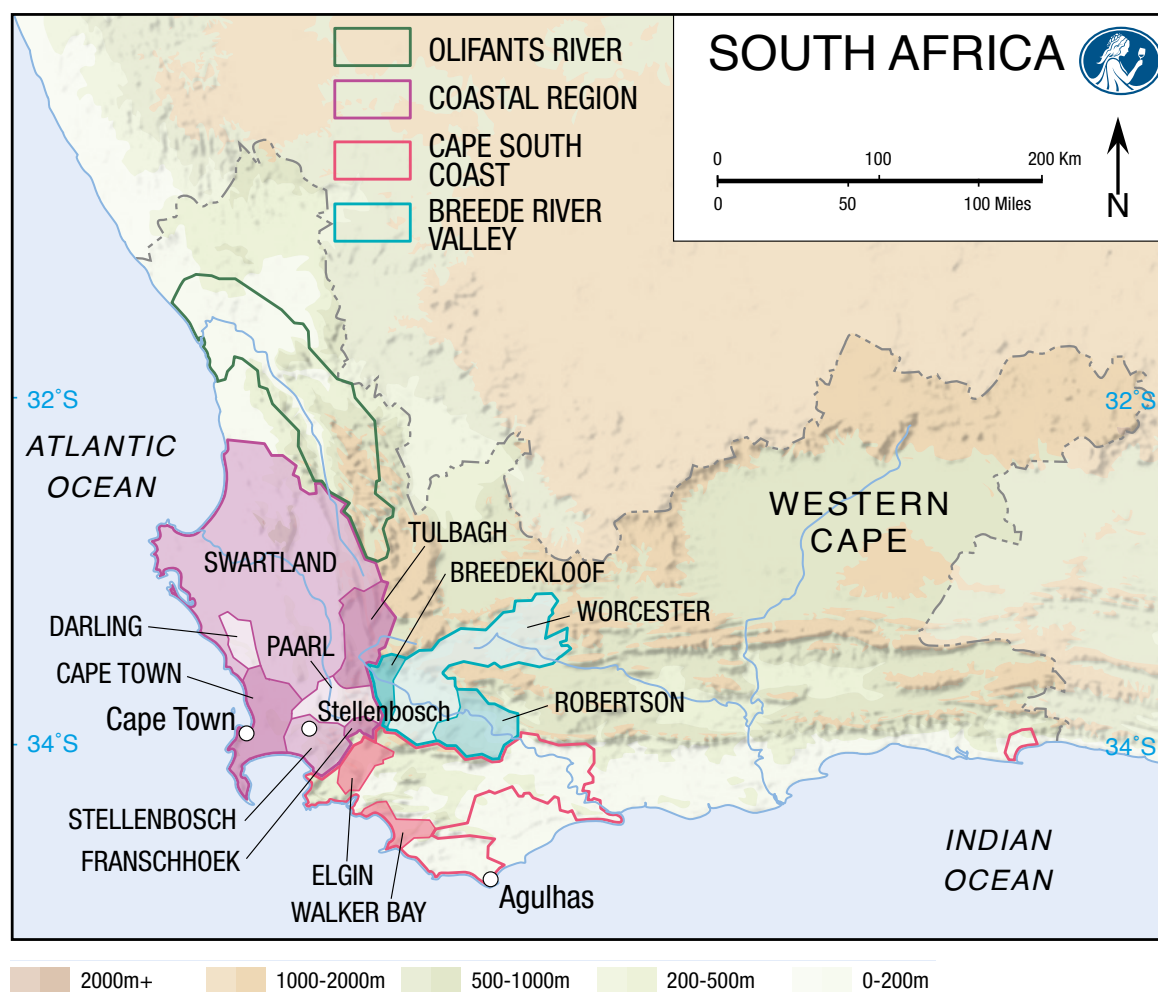
WINE OF ORIGIN AND CERTIFICATION

Production areas are defined in terms of an official Wine of Origin scheme:

1. **Geographical unit** – very large areas, e.g. Western Cape, which accounts for nearly all South African wine by volume
2. **Region** – large areas named after major feature, e.g. Coastal Region or Breede River Valley
3. **District** – e.g. Stellenbosch or Walker Bay
4. **Ward** – defined area within a district, e.g. Simonsberg-Stellenbosch

The first two units make use of political or geographical units. At the ward level, the scheme is based on common soils, climate and ecological factors. Districts are defined in a similar way but with wider categories, for example a major centre or a mountain range. Some districts have no wards and some wards have no district but relate directly to a region.

Registered ‘estate wines’ have to be grown, made and bottled on the estate. There are also regulations about single vineyard wines if the name is to be used as part of the label.



They must be registered, be planted with a single variety and not be larger than six hectares. The alternative is to bottle the wine under a brand name.

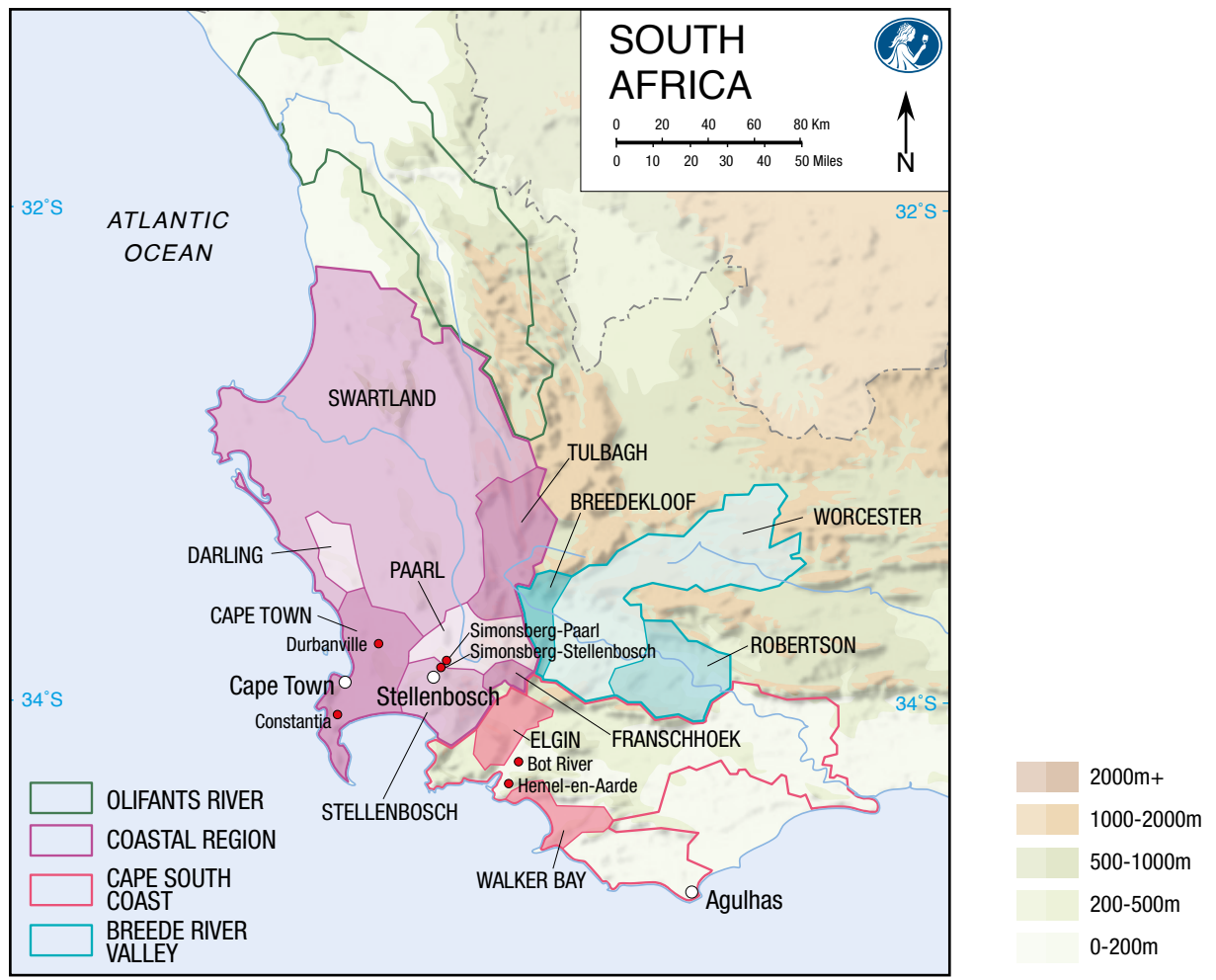
More generally, the entire Wine of Origin scheme is subject to a certification that aims to ensure that the claims made on the packaging are true – for example, if the term Wine of Origin Swartland is used, it confirms that 100 per cent of the grapes contained in that wine came from the Swartland. To claim vintage, 85 per cent of wine must be from that vintage. To claim variety, 85 per cent of wine must be from that variety.

The Wine of Origin Scheme also ensures that the wine is of good quality (as evaluated by the Wine and Spirit Board). All wines that makes claims about origin, variety or vintage have to be certified. A certification seal with its identification number appears on the packaging.

30.4. Wine Regions

COASTAL REGION

This region on the western coast accounts for 46 per cent of all the area under vine in the country, due to the areas planted in Stellenbosch, Paarl and Swartland.⁸ However, yields are typically lower here than in regions that specialise in high yield production. Many inexpensive wines are labelled Coastal Region as this allows producers to source grapes from across the whole region. The region also contains many important districts, such as Cape Town, Darling, Franschhoek Valley, Paarl, Stellenbosch and Swartland.



District: Cape Town

The Cape Town district, established in 2017, encompasses four wards including Constantia and Durbanville. Its predecessor, Cape Peninsula, was repealed at the same time. The new name is intended to make the connection between the vine growing area and the tourist destination, Cape Town.

Ward: Constantia – The Constantia ward has a wine history dating back to 1685 and is the home of Vin de Constance, a dried Muscat dessert wine from Klein Constantia. The vineyards are planted on east-facing slopes of Constantiaberg, which extends south from Table Mountain. False Bay is 10 kilometres (6 miles) away bringing cooling sea breezes. Low vigour granite soils sit above a layer of sandstone providing good drainage. Rainfall is relatively high at 1,000 mm per year. Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz are the main varieties that are planted, with a notable absence of Pinot Noir, which fares less well in the windy conditions. There are only a small number of producers, all focusing on quality production often with related tourism businesses – the ward is very close to Cape Town. Significant producers include Klein Constantia and Steenberg.



Constantia hillside vineyard



Wine tourism, Constantia

Ward: Durbanville – This ward, which includes the northern suburbs of Cape Town, is situated on the shale soils of Tygerberg hills with vineyards facing east at an altitude of 100–300m. Rainfall is half that of Constantia due to the protection of the Tygerberg. Unusually the soils have a high water-holding capacity allowing dry farming. Warm summer weather is mitigated by midday cooling breezes from False Bay until the evening mists roll in, reducing

the temperature by up to 5°C (9°F). Its most planted variety, Sauvignon Blanc is predominantly planted on the cooler exposed sites with a style towards the greener end of the flavour spectrum. Significant producers include Bloemendal and Diemersdal.

District: Stellenbosch

The Stellenbosch district surrounds the town of Stellenbosch that is both the business and educational hub of South Africa wine. It is home to Stellenbosch University, which offers the only degree in oenology in the country. After Constantia, it is the oldest of South Africa's wine regions and the one that did most to establish the country's reputation for high quality wines, especially based on Cabernet Sauvignon. Historic estates with revitalised wineries sit alongside a range of wine businesses: Distell (South Africa's largest wine and spirits producer), new estates backed by investments from home and abroad, and growers who sell fruit to co-operatives, merchants and wineries.⁹

The major contributors to quality are the cooler mountain slopes, varied soil types and breezes off False Bay that moderate summer temperatures. There is a range of sites from the valley floor close to False Bay with sandy and alluvial soils to the predominantly granite and shale soils on the slopes of Simonsberg, the Bottelary Hills, Stellenbosch Mountain and Helderberg. The rainfall varies from 600–900 mm and a warm climate allows the traditional black varieties Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinotage to ripen. Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin Blanc and Chardonnay are the main white varieties planted. Picking time and yield play an important role in the end style and body of the wines. For example, some growers are reducing the yield and picking early to have fruit that is fresher, slightly lower in alcohol but still has fully ripe seeds and skins. Stellenbosch's reputation as one of South Africa's leading winemaking regions is based on very good to outstanding quality, premium priced Cabernet



Stellenbosch vineyard

Sauvignon and related blends, Shiraz and Chenin Blanc. Significant producers, among many, include Rust en Vrede and Raats Family Wines.

Ward: Simonsberg-Stellenbosch – This ward, on the lower slopes of the south-west side of the Simonsberg, is slightly warmer than the sites closer to False Bay and on the slopes of the Stellenbosch Mountain and Helderberg but its vineyards are still relatively open to the ocean breezes, providing a higher diurnal range than the flatter sites. It is especially recognised for Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Sauvignon-based blends and Pinotage, which can lose acidity quickly on lower, warmer sites. Significant producers include Kanonkop and Rustenberg.

District: Paarl

The district of Paarl lies north of Stellenbosch and, while it is warmer, has many mesoclimates, soils and aspects so can succeed with a variety of styles and grapes. It has an average rainfall of 800–900 mm. The Berg River flows through it, which can provide water for irrigation when required. The large number of varieties that thrive here provide wines with a distinct ripeness and fuller body compared to Stellenbosch. Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Shiraz and Pinotage are the most grown. Mediterranean varieties Viognier and particularly Mourvèdre are being planted on the warmer sites. Increasingly, the ward of Voor Paardeberg is being acknowledged as a source of top-quality grapes. Important companies here include Nederburg (part of the Distell group) and, for wines at super-premium prices, Vilafonté.

Ward: Simonsberg-Paarl – This ward, on the warmer, other side of the Simonsberg to Stellenbosch-Simonsberg, is at slightly higher elevation than the rest of the Paarl district. This provides a slightly higher diurnal range and a longer and slightly cooler ripening season. Its Chardonnay shows a distinct freshness and intensity, as do its Shiraz and red blends. Significant producers include Glen Carlou and Plaisir de Merle.

District: Franschhoek Valley

South-east of Paarl, Franschhoek is wrapped around on three sides by mountains offering a varied topography giving shelter and warmth. Initially, grape growing was based on the valley floor at around 300 m of altitude but increasingly higher sites up to 600 m are being used. These bring a marginally cooler climate and higher diurnal range. While there is 800 mm a year of rain a year, irrigation is often required as the soils are fast draining. Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Shiraz are the most grown varieties, though old vine Semillon (some over 100 years old) is also present. Fruit from Franschhoek is often prized for its fresher qualities as a blending component. Franschhoek is home to some leading producers of Cap Classique sparkling wines. Significant producers include Boekenhoutskloof (most of whose wines are made from bought-in grapes including the very successful Chocolate Block brand) and Cape Chamonix.

District: Darling

North of Cape Town, Darling contains a range of hills that run parallel to the cold West Coast, 10 kilometres (6 miles) away. Its slopes, including in its acclaimed Groenekloof ward, have many different aspects, allowing vines to benefit from ocean breezes off the Atlantic. Comparisons are made with Durbanville for a dominance of Sauvignon Blanc and fresher versions of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Shiraz. The weathered granite soils have a higher

water holding capacity than in some areas and so dry farming and bush vines are common. Significant producers include Neil Ellis (based in Stellenbosch but buys grapes from the area) and Groote Post.

District: Swartland

The district of Swartland has a warm dry climate. Rainfall is around 500 mm per year, though a good proportion of it falls in the growing season. This requires the use of irrigation to guarantee yields or the cultivation of old vines (for which the area is famous) and lower yields. A range of varieties is grown, as in other regions. Soils are diverse but mainly of low fertility granite and shale, particularly around the Paardeberg, which is farmed by many of the top producers.

Broadly speaking there are two different sectors in Swartland. First, older businesses, often co-operatives, produce good to very good quality, inexpensive and mid-priced wines. Examples include Perdeberg Wines or Riebeek Cellars (now called Riebeek Valley Wine Co). Second, since the year 2000, Swartland has seen a steady influx of talent, both in terms of winemakers and grape growers and a re-inventing of the styles of wine produced. This movement was started by Charles Back at the Spice Route winery and was followed up by his former employee Eben Sadie and others including Chris and Andrea Mullineux. In this sector, common themes are low yields, dry farming, often organic or biodynamic farming, old vines, ambient yeasts and maturation in old oak. Many of these wines have enjoyed critical success, typically are very good to outstanding in quality and premium and super-premium in price. As a result of these wines, Swartland has joined traditional areas such as Stellenbosch as a centre for very high-quality wine production.

Swartland is an important source of fruit for premium Western Cape white and red blends. These are made from the 'big six' varieties and other white and red varieties. Cinsault, Mourvèdre, Marsanne, Roussanne, Semillon, Grenache Blanc and Viognier are present in small amounts.

District: Tulbagh

The district of Tulbagh is part of the Coastal region although it has no physical contact with the coast and no coastal influence on its climate. It is a very warm, dry, sheltered valley surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped mountain range. Cooling influences include altitude for the vineyards on the higher slopes (400–500 m), shade thrown by mountains and the trapping of cold morning air in the valley. The good water-holding capacity of the soil and



New plantings, Swartland

water management systems (collecting the rain that falls on the upper slopes in a series of ponds that can provide water for irrigation) are key to success in this district. Chenin, Shiraz and Colombard are the most grown varieties reflecting the district's history as a provider of inexpensive wines. However, some of the Pinotage grown here is blended into premium Cape Blends. Significant producers include Saronberg, known for Shiraz and Shiraz blends.

District: Wellington

This burgeoning district, 45-minutes north-east of Cape Town is building a reputation for Shiraz and powerful red blends. Some of the wineries stretch over alluvial terraces (or benches) towards the Swartland's rolling hills, while others are found in the foothills of the Hawequa Mountains, where folds and valleys create varied mesoclimates. Wellington is also home to many nurseries that collectively supply over 85 per cent of the South African wine industry with cuttings. Significant producers include Bosman Family Vineyards.

BREEDER RIVER VALLEY REGION

This generally warm and dry region produces the most wine in South Africa at relatively high yields. In addition to grapes for wine, it produces a large volume of grapes destined for South Africa's distillation industry. Irrigation, using water from the Breede River, is a key resource. Alongside large volume production, there are also high quality estates.

District: Breedekloof

This district in the upper area of the Breede River has adequate rainfall. As a result, grape growing can be successful without irrigation, a marked difference to neighbouring Worcester and Robertson. The winter and spring frosts are most often delay budburst but, when they do



Rhône-style planting, Breedekloof

not, spring frosts can damage the buds. The warm continental climate allows longer hang-time and a later harvest. Cooling summer south-east winds moderate temperatures and reduce the incidence of fungal diseases.

The varied soil types and aspects allow Chenin, Colombard and Chardonnay to be planted, as well as Pinotage, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. Important wineries include the co-operative Du Toitskloof Cellar and Deetlefs.

District: Worcester

This district has very low rainfall (400 mm),¹⁰ due to the rain shadow of the surrounding mountains) and relies heavily on irrigation. The loamy soils are very fertile and historically were planted for high volume production and the needs of the brandy industry. Worcester still chiefly produces grapes for distilling but Colombard and Chenin Blanc have now been joined by Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Viognier and Shiraz.

District: Robertson

This district is warm, again with very low rainfall, making irrigation necessary. South-east winds are a cooling influence and bring moisture-laden air from the Indian Ocean, 100 kilometres (60 miles) away. The flat plains provide relatively fertile growing conditions, making parts of the district suitable for high yields. Indeed, Robertson was historically a white wine district growing grapes from the brandy industry.

However, there are also parts of the district with limestone soils, unusual in South Africa, and, as a result, Chardonnay, both for still and sparkling wine, is an important variety. In addition, Colombard, Chenin Blanc and Sauvignon Blanc are the most planted whites. The district is increasingly recognised for Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon. Significant wineries include the very large co-operative Robertson Winery, Cap Classique specialist Graham Beck and the pioneer of Chardonnay in the district, De Wetshof.



Large co-operative winery

OLIFANTS RIVER REGION

This is the most northerly region of the Western Cape with a very dry (some parts are below 200 mm rainfall per year), warm climate, necessitating the use of irrigation from the Olifants River. Historically grapes were grown at high yields with much of the wine, made in co-operatives, destined for distillation. However, increasingly the wine is being made to sell as wine. The very large company now known as Namaqua Wines (created by the amalgamation of two large wineries) has had considerable success in both the South African and the UK markets for inexpensive wines.¹¹

The region – particularly its Citrusdal Mountain and Lutzville Valley districts and Bamboes Bay and Piekenierskloof wards – is also the source of fruit from dry farmed, old vines made into wine by well-known growers in more prestigious regions. Altitude of 450–550 m and cooling influences from the Atlantic Ocean combine to produce conditions for growing very high-quality fruit. These wines are very good to outstanding in quality and are sold for premium and super-premium prices. Significant producers include Sadie Family Wines and Alheit Vineyards.

Read more about growers from other regions tending plots of old vines in Olifants River: [On the Magic Mountain that is Skurfberg](#).¹²

CAPE SOUTH COAST REGION

This region and its districts are strongly influenced by the cooling influence of the Atlantic Ocean, making it suitable for varieties like Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. While these districts have become well known for very good and outstanding quality wines, most plantings are recent (1990s on) and small compared to other South African regions (less than three per cent of the national planting).¹³

District: Walker Bay

This cool region immediately adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean came to prominence following the pioneering planting of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir by Burgundy-loving Tim Hamilton-Russell from 1975. Others followed from 1989 onwards. The district has since been divided into wards, including Bot River and three wards related to Hemel-en-Aarde.

Ward: Hemel-en-Aarde – The collective name referring to three wards projecting inland from the seaside town of Hermanus. Cooling winds reduce the risk of over-ripening and reduce vigour. The vineyard aspect is generally towards the north, which helps with achieving ripeness in a relatively cool area. Clay can reach up to 55 per cent in the soil in parts of Hemel-en-Aarde (similar to Burgundy) which improves the water holding capacity of the soil. Cover crops are often used to reduce water evaporation. While Chardonnay and Pinot Noir rule here, all of the ‘big six’ varieties are grown here and there are experiments beyond the standard varieties, including, for example, with Albariño and Viognier.

Hemel-en-Aarde Valley (ward) is the lowest in altitude yet closest to the cooling Atlantic and is the original planting area. Pinot Noir and Chardonnay thrive here and produce a style fresher and brighter than the areas further inland in the Western Cape, but still with a distinct ripeness. Pinot Noir has the ability to reach upwards of 14% abv. The neighbouring **Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley** (ward) is slightly higher in elevation. Vineyards in both these wards have mostly north and west aspects. The **Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge** (ward) is located deeper inland. It is the smallest but also the coldest and highest ward with vineyards that approach

400 meters in elevation and face south and east. The nearby Babylonstoren Mountains act as a cloud trap, collecting moisture and providing regular shade. In addition to Hamilton-Russell, significant producers include Bouchard Finlayson (Hemel-en-Aarde Valley), Newton Johnson Family Vineyards (Upper Hemel-en-Aarde Valley) and Creation (Hemel-en-Aarde Ridge).

Ward: Bot River – This ward stretches from the Bot River Lagoon that funnels cold winds towards the slopes of the nearby mountain ranges. Slightly warmer than Hemel-en-Aarde, but cooler than Paarl and Stellenbosch, the relatively long growing season allows brighter and fresher styles of Sauvignon Blanc and Chenin to be produced. There is enough warmth to ripen Rhône varieties and red- fruited Pinotage. Significant producers include Beaumont.



Hemel-en-Aarde Valley with cloud cover

District: Elgin

The Elgin district, 70 kilometres (40 miles) south-east of Cape Town, is situated on an inland plateau 200–400m above sea level. The climate here is considerably cooler than other parts of the South African wine lands with just over three quarters of the heat summation days of



Elgin vineyard with supplementary irrigation

Stellenbosch.¹⁴ The altitude, cloud cover and the cooling influence of the ocean makes for lower temperatures overall, cold nights and cooling summer breezes. This results in a slow growing season and fruit with more elegance and higher acidity than further inland.

There is plentiful rain for grape growing with just over 1,000 mm per year, and although action has to be taken against common fungal diseases, it allows some wineries to produce sweet botrytised wines. Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Merlot and Shiraz do well here with a fresher, more fragrant style compared to further inland. Significant producers include Paul Cluver and for super-premium Chardonnay, Richard Kershaw Wines.

KLEIN KAROO REGION

This semi-arid region almost four hours east of Cape Town is best known for port-style wines from Portuguese varieties grown in its Calitzdorp district, fortified Muscats, and Chenin Blanc and Colombard for the brandy industry. A handful of producers make table wines, the best-to-date from mostly black varieties. Small plantings of Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Shiraz are showing promise in cooler sites in mountain ranges between it and the Indian Ocean to the south.

30.5. Initiatives

In addition to the Wine of Origin and the certification schemes, a number of initiatives have been created to bring together the industry to form common goals. Ultimately, it is planned to display these initiatives using one seal.

- Created in 1998, **Integrated Production of Wine (IPW)** is an independently audited set of guidelines for sustainable farming that covers environmental impact, water usage, health and safety and biodiversity protection. 95 per cent of South African growers and cellars adhere to the guidelines.¹⁵
- **Biodiversity and Wine Initiative (BWI)** was created in 2005. By 2015 over 90 per cent of the South African wine industry was able to certify their wine as being environmentally friendly.¹⁶ This name has fallen away, and is being replaced by the **WWF-SA Conservation Champion Programme**, which recognises producers who commit to biodiversity conservation and improvement of production practices, energy-efficient measures and water stewardship.
- The Wines and Spirits Board (WSB), together with IPW and WOSA, released the world's first industry-wide **Integrity and Sustainability** seal in 2010 that guarantees a certified wine's environmental credentials such as chemical usage, water management and introduction of natural predators. This seal also links with the Wine of Origin scheme to increase traceability.
- **Sustainable Wine South Africa (SWSA)** is the alliance between the WSB, IPW, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and WOSA.
- The **Wine and Agricultural Ethical Trade Association (WIETA)** is a voluntary association of businesses that committed to an audited scheme of ethical trade with a focus on reasonable working conditions for workers. 60 per cent of South African wine production is ethically accredited.¹⁷ It has introduced a new seal to be used alongside the others. South Africa is the largest producer of **Fairtrade** wine globally, and accounts for around two-thirds of Fairtrade wine sales.¹⁸

30.6. Wine Business

The coming of democracy in 1994 is regarded as the beginning of the modern period for the South African wine business. (Independent industry participants had been impatient for change since the 1970s.) Trade sanctions were removed, opening up the possibility of exports. Foreign investors brought with them new expertise and capital investments.

Starting in 1992, the KWV's rights were systematically repealed and it was finally re-organized into a private business in 1997. Its tremendous powers had included the right to fix the prices of both distilling and beverage wine; approve all wine purchases between producers and merchants (producers were prohibited from selling direct); set quotas for plantings and production; and control the importation, propagation and distribution of vine cuttings. With the end of this highly regulated system that did not support free-market principles, grape growers and wine producers shifted their focus to quality wine production in order to sell their grapes and wines to other buyers or set up local and international sales channels themselves.

When South Africa re-entered the international arena in the early 1990s, Wines of South Africa (WOSA), funded mainly by export levies, was established to promote the South African wine category in international markets. From a peak of 51 per cent of volume exported in 2018, 2021 saw 43 per cent exported.¹⁹

Wine consumption per capita continues to be low and has been broadly stable in the past two decades.²⁰ Value packaging, e.g. 1-litre bricks, is a popular format and sales are growing rapidly. The Distell group dominates the market with more than 40 per cent of volume sold.²¹

Watch the video on South Africa's Integrity and Sustainability seal: Watch the video on South Africa's Integrity and Sustainability seal: [A new seal for South African wines a world first.](#)



Large volume distribution



Multiple formats, Chardonnay

As noted, South Africa has achieved success in volume wine exports over the past 25 years, with volumes increasing from 22 million litres in 1992 to a peak of 525 million litres in 2013. In 2021 the figure was 390 m, recovering from lower levels in the preceding two years.²² Thirty years ago, South Africa was exporting to around 20 countries, with the UK accounting for most of the volume. Today, it exports to over 135 countries. While the UK remains very important, it now accounts for around 25 per cent of total exports by volume (2021 figures). The top three markets in volume and value are UK, Germany and USA.²³ While South Africa is aiming to increase its proportion of packaged wine, as opposed to bulk, this has proved difficult. The value of bulk wine has increased in recent years but much of it is still very inexpensive.²⁴ This has meant that growers have received lower prices than they might have expected and jobs have been lost (and not created) in finishing and packaging, in a country with high levels of unemployment.²⁵

The quality of South African wine at all price levels continues to be well regarded. However, a high proportion of South African wine producers are farming below a sustainable level of income for their business. This, plus the effects of Covid and the temporary bans on exporting and selling wine in the country, raise questions about viability and size of the industry.²⁶

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