



KAPWEINE
The Home of South African Wines

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Tel. 043 888 21 21
info@kapweine.ch
www.kapweine.ch



Written by 5 Oct 2018

- Jancis Robinson <https://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/circumstance-sauvignon-blanc-20167-stellenbosch>

Circumstance Sauvignon Blanc 2016/17 Stellenbosch

<https://shop.kapweine.ch/weine?weingut=172>

A South African bargain that is certified organic but is effectively biodynamic too.

I ended [my article last Saturday](#) with 'biodynamic wine can never be cheap' but this wine might just disprove that generalisation. It comes from Waterkloof, the spectacularly situated winery and restaurant seen in the extreme right of the picture below, overlooking Somerset West and the Atlantic just east of Cape Town.

Along with Johan Reyneke, Waterkloof's owner Anglo-Frenchman [Paul Boutinot](#) has long championed biodynamics in South Africa. Two years after buying the property in 2003 he started the long march to biodynamics, and eventually certification from Demeter, the leading international BD certification organisation, which they achieved in 2015.



From the restaurant you can see where the horses are stabled and see all the evidence of a holistically run farm along full Rudolf Steiner principles. They buy no agrochemicals and make all their own preparations. Their cows, sheep and chickens supply compost. All vineyards are tilled with horses except for their top Mourvèdre block which is done by hand. When a mealy-bug infestation threatened this block last year they used a certified organic treatment but couldn't get approval from Demeter in time to save the grapes so decided to



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drop Demeter certification and live with organic certification on their labels instead. Paul Boutinot says, 'It was not our intention to seek [Demeter] certification as it was simply a tool for us to make better wines from stronger vines, which is still the case. We have subsequently supplemented our biodynamic practices with the use of fermented fish extract, bokashi and many other preparations.'

Waterkloof have four different ranges. Wines labelled simply Waterkloof denote the very best wine and currently there is just one wine in the range, a Sauvignon Blanc from one particularly distinctive block where winds reduce average yields to about three rather than the usual four tonnes per hectare and result in an even more concentrated, ageworthy wine.

The Circle of Life range consists of two blends while Seriously Cool is the name they use for two wines from particularly old vineyards. Richard chose a [Seriously Cool Cinsault](#) as a wine of the week in 2014.

The widest range, of site-specific single varietals, they call Circumstance and this is the range that has already yielded two wines of the week here, a [Chenin Blanc](#) in 2010 and a [rosé](#) in 2015. They must be doing something right.

Although South African Sauvignon Blancs are two a penny (some years ago Sauvignon Blanc overtook Chardonnay as the Cape's most-planted white wine grape after Chenin Blanc and Colombard), **Waterkloof, Circumstance Sauvignon Blanc 2017 Stellenbosch** is really something special. It has that intensity and slight wildness that I find in so many wines from biodynamically grown grapes. One expects Sauvignon Blanc (grown outside Sancerre and Pouilly-sur-Loire) to be showily aromatic but this one smells so damned natural, and the bone-dry fruit even has a Loire-ish undertow of stoniness. I noted, 'Intense crystalline acidity with a certain wet-stone character. Really very good value with its own very particular character. Excellent grip on the end. An appetising blend of nettles and chalk. VGV', and suggested drinking it any time from now until 2021. Paul Boutinot suggests decanting it at this stage but I was already hugely impressed even without that aeration.

As for **Waterkloof, Circumstance Sauvignon Blanc 2016 Stellenbosch**, I see Julia has twice tasted it and given it scores of 16.5, predicting a drinking window at least to 2020. I tasted it more recently and reckon it will still be going strong in 2021 (see [my tasting note](#)). In fact of the eight tasting notes we have on this wine since the 2013 vintage, it has consistently scored 16.5 – a pretty impressive record.

Most South African whites are a bargain. This one is a bargain and biodynamic as well.

Wine-Searcher lists stockists in South Africa, the UK, Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, France(!) and Japan. UK stockists who have already bought the 2017 include Vin Cognito, Theatre of Wine of London, Hennings Wine Merchants of West Sussex, Buon Vino of Settle, Latitude Wine of Leeds, Field and Fawcett Wines of York, The Oxford Wine



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Company of Oxford, Auriol Wines of Hartley Witney, Cellar Door Wines of St Albans and The Vineyard of Dorking, according to Boutinot, the UK importer.

Unfortunately, as with so many South African wines, it does not seem to be available in the US. American wine lovers infuriated by this may like to nag retailers to stock a better selection. Broadbent and Pascal Schmidt are two US importers who specialise in interesting Cape wines.