



A bug's life

So important are ladybirds to Laibach's organic practices that they are honoured on a wine label, with The Ladybird Red 2007 being named Best Red in the inaugural Nedbank Green Wine Awards. Jeanri-Tine van Zyl reports.

“We are not from Stellenbosch,” is the first thing that Francois van Zyl, winemaker at Laibach Vineyards, tells me. “Plattelanders,” he nods approvingly. “I am from Robertson, and Michael [Malherbe, farm manager and viticulturist] is from Ceres.”

People of the earth, keeping a low profile and doing what comes naturally: growing wine like in the old days.

The first blocks for organic farming were planted in 2000: Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, the building blocks for what would become The Ladybird Red – a wine certified by the SGS (Société Générale de Surveillance) as complying with international EU organic standards.

German family-owned Laibach was one of the very first farms to venture down the organic route and had the first certified organic block in Stellenbosch, but Van Zyl remembers that their pioneering efforts received little encouragement: “People said it is impossible to farm organically in Stellenbosch. I said to them that it is only impossible if you want to spend six weeks a year away from the vineyard at your beach house in Hermanus.”

It's back to basics at Laibach Vineyards in Stellenbosch.

Instead of taking a holiday, he and Malherbe dedicated time to establishing blocks of vines that would produce grapes from which wines could be made that would “compete with the best Bordeaux blends in this country”.

They're certainly excelling on the organic front, at least, with The Ladybird Red 2007 rated as the top organic red wine in the Nedbank Green Wine Awards.

But Malherbe and Van Zyl feel that the quest is to not be categorised according to the organic classification on their label. Ideally there should be no difference between organic and non-organic wines. If anything, in fact, the organic wines should tip the scale when weighed according to expressiveness.

If awards do not accurately reflect the achievement of the label, then nature provides a more reliable measure: ladybirds. A natural enemy to mealybug (the carrier of leafroll virus), the ladybird is perhaps the viticulturist's best friend – and the more of them, the better.

If the vineyard is Malherbe's office, it is crawling with his employees. At the edges of the vines, the spotted creatures nest in shrubs of fennel planted specifically for this purpose. Initially the bugs had to be “flown in” from the Free State, but their numbers have increased >



Photographs by Denver Henderson

“Why use pesticides when you can bring life back to the vineyard?”

– Michael Malherbe

dramatically, making any further shipment unnecessary – a clear indication of a “happy” vineyard.

Nearly a decade since it was established, its vines stand amongst a thick undergrowth of natural vegetation, an important feature in a system where life provides the natural checks and balances needed for healthy grapes. The undergrowth supplies ample food for snails, keeping them from seeking out alternative grazing on the vines, explains Malherbe, while the wild pea aids fertilisation. The Latin name of the genus is *Lathyrus*, derived from the Greek word *thouros* – literally meaning stimulant. Why would you want to use anything else if nature provides you with an environmentally sensitive approach?

Since 2000 no pesticides have been sprayed on the farm. “Insect killers,” says Malherbe, emphasising the dreaded “k” word. “Why use them when you can bring life back to the vineyard?” And not just insect life: perch polls have been erected between the vines to attract falcons to prey on vineyard rodents.

Sensitivity to the environment does not stop in the vineyard, and Laibach aims to roll out organic farming methods across the whole farm to become 100% organic and completely environmentally sustainable. Currently only The Ladybird Red is certified organic, The Ladybird White being under conversion with aims to have it organically certified by 2010.

Other environmentally friendly practices on the farm include a “wormery” where earthworms are bred, recycling bins, a bio-reactor and upcoming reed-filtration stations to filter “grey” water.

Cellar practices, in terms of certification, should also comply with certain organic production standards, based on

LAIBACH VINEYARDS

ESTATE: R44, near Klapmuts
PO Box 7109, Stellenbosch, 7599
TEL: 021 884 4511
FAX: 021 884 4848
info@laibachwines.com
www.laibachwines.com
OWNER: Laibach family of Germany (since 1994)
GM/MD/CEO(S): Michael Malherbe (MD), PCA Laibach-Kuehner (chairman)
CELLARMASTER: Francois van Zyl (since Jan 2000)
VITICULTURISTS: Michael Malherbe
SALES: Mon–Fri 09:00–17:00, Sat Nov–Apr 10:00–13:00
TASTINGS: fee of R10
ESTABLISHED: 1997
PRODUCTION: 180 000 litres pa
UNDERVINE: 42ha (75% red)
FLAGSHIP: Friedrich Laibach
WINE PORTFOLIO
SINGLE VYD: Widow’s Block Cab **ORGANIC:** Ladybird (red) **D WHITE:** Chenin (U); Sauvignon (U); White Ladybird (W, Chard & Chenin & Viog) **RED WINE:** Cab (W); Friedrich Laibach (W, Cab & Merlot & Petit V & Cab Franc); Ladybird (W, Merlot & Cab Franc & Cab & Malbec & Petit V); Merlot (W); Pinotage (W); Widow’s Block Cab (W) **DESSERT:** Natural Sweet (U, Chenin)
ACCOMMODATION: Laibach Vineyards Guest Lodge



RIGHT: Currently only The Ladybird Red is certified organic. But Laibach plans to roll out organic methods across the whole property.

the minimum standards of the European Union (EU). Although The Ladybird does contain added sulphur, it is kept to a minimum – below 10mg/l. Because the grapes are grown on dryland vines, the berries are small and condensed, resulting in a tannic structure that aids maturation without the help of too much added sulphur. And the Ladybird is very much made to age.

Van Zyl refuses to follow recipes in the cellar, and he stays out of the cellar laboratory as much as possible: “If I wanted to be a pharmacist...” Each wine is treated as if it were a maiden vintage and absolutely unique. One rule of thumb, however, is that yeast inoculation is kept to a minimum with wild yeast receiving preference.

Merlot is the heart of The Ladybird,

with Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc in support together with small percentages of Petit Verdot and Malbec. To combat vegetative character, green berries and stalks are removed at the sorting table by hand.

“It is a slow process, like everything at Laibach,” laughs Van Zyl.

A percentage of the wine is fermented in open tanks, allowing for punch downs and “olfactory selection”, as Van Zyl puts it. “I can tell from the smell of the wine how I want to structure it.”

Maceration follows, for up to 34 days in closed tanks (a method Van Zyl says aids a “typical French style”), and then comes maturation for 12 to 14 months in barrel, 30% new. French oak of course: “No American barrels,” he insists. “We are not making Mickey Mouse wines.” Indeed.

The French elegance reverberates in the wine. “A sexy, full wine,” muses Van Zyl. “With bitter chocolate from the Merlot, no clumsiness...”

A wine of the earth, like the people who made it. ■

BELOW: Cellarmaster Francois van Zyl (right) spends as much time as possible in the vineyards with farm manager and viticulturist Michael Malherbe (left). **INSET:** The architecture of the cellar reflects its German ownership by the Laibach family since 1994.





Nedbank Green Wine Awards

AUDITED RATINGS

About the category: For the inaugural Nedbank Green Wine Awards, producers were asked to submit wine from organically grown grapes, a condition of entry being that submissions be accompanied by valid certification, such as that issued by the Société Générale de Surveillance (SGS). A distinction needs to be drawn between wine made from "organically grown grapes" and "organic wine", with the former covering practices in the vineyard alone and not in the cellar. Organic viticulture can be defined as grape growing that shuns manmade pesticides, herbicides, fungicides or fertilisers. Full-blown organic wines also require a particular approach to the winemaking, with restrictions placed on how the grapes are processed. In particular, permitted levels of sulphur dioxide (a preservative) are lower. Hence, this was very much a tasting of wines from organically grown grapes rather than of organic wines.

Judging procedures: There were 51 entries from 19 different producers, and these were divided up into categories according to grape variety or style and tasted blind by the five-person panel, with scoring done according to the 20-point/5 Star system.

The panel set about examining each wine purely on its own merits. Given that the line-up was so disparate, the feeling was that it would be best to decide on what to award only after judging had been completed. Rather neatly, one white and one red emerged a clear step above the competition, these being Lazanou Organic Vineyards Chenin Blanc 2008 and Laibach The Ladybird Red 2007 respectively.

Key findings: Are wines from organically grown grapes organoleptically different to wines from conventionally grown grapes? Not really, was the feeling. Quality brackets were more or less proportionate to those of

the overall wine industry.

Perhaps more wines than usual showed insufficient flavour development and the speculation here was that organic growers are inclined to pick earlier than normal: extra hang-time becomes particularly nerve-wracking when you don't have recourse to chemical treatments in the event of natural calamity.

There were simultaneously quite a few wines that showed oxidation, causing the panel to wonder whether some producers were applying unrealistically low sulphur regimes in the cellar.

Perhaps the most interesting point of debate concerned the prospects of the organic movement, whose premise is the notion that nature is self-balancing. Encourage biological diversity and the vineyard will develop natural defences against attack from pest and disease. Soils, meanwhile, will be preserved and enhanced. There are thus economic gains to be had as a result of less expenditure on chemical treatments while it is also the morally responsible course of action. It furthermore has a marketing advantage: organic products are attractive to the consumer in terms of food safety while also appealing to his or her better nature.

All that said, there were various factors militating against the growth of the organic movement. Neighbours that farm according to conventional methods can easily contaminate organic vineyards so typically these have to be secluded in order to acquire and retain organic status. Practising organic viticulture is also hugely risky: in the face of a severe downy mildew epidemic, for instance, organic methods of fungicide will be inadequate and could lead to the loss of an entire crop. Acquiring official accreditation has its own set of expenses and can be cumbersome. And then, of course, it presumes a level of engagement with the issues from the consumer that often isn't there. Moreover, too many wines from organic grapes have historically been below par in quality terms. Perceptions that "organic wines" aren't up to scratch further removes the impetus necessary to grow the category.

Perhaps what's most important, for those who care about not only the future of the South African wine industry but also the future of the planet, is that "organic" and

"environmentally sustainable" are related but not synonymous: sustainable production needs to be broadly defined, and it doesn't start and stop in the vineyards.

THE JUDGES

Editor of WINE magazine Christian Eedes (chairman) (CE), honorary member of the Institute of Cape Wine Masters Colin Frith (CF), Cape Wine Master Cathy van Zyl (CvZ), wine writer Angela Lloyd (AL), winemaker and Wine Judging Academy graduate Trizanne Barnard (TB).

WHITE WINES

★ ★ ★ ★ **FOUR STARS**

Lazanou Organic Vineyards Chenin Blanc 2008

CELLAR PRICE R60

Alc 14% RS 2g/l TA 6.31g/l pH 3.38

Deep yellow. Waxy, leesy notes on the nose. A complex palate with good fruit expression and bright acidity. Citrus through tropical fruit flavours. Well balanced with a long finish – a distinctive wine. Drink now or over 2 years.

CE 18 CF 15 CvZ 15 AL 17 TB 15

★ ★ ★ ☆ **THREE AND A HALF STARS**

Stellar Organics Chenin Blanc 2009* R19.95

Reyneke Reserve White 2008 R160

★ ★ ★ **THREE STARS**

Stellar – Woolworths Organic R29.95

Swooping Swallow

Sauvignon Blanc 2009* **ARP**

The Ruins CVV 2008* (Bon Cap) R40

Bon Cap Viognier 2009 R60

Tukulu Organic R68.82

Chardonnay 2008 **ARP**

★ ★ ☆ **TWO AND A HALF STARS**

Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture R35

Semillon Sauvignon Blanc 2008*

Spier Organic R70

Sauvignon Blanc 2009 **ARP**

La Motte Pierneef Collection R94

Sauvignon Blanc 2008

WORTHY OF INVESTIGATION

**La Motte
Pierneef Collection
Sauvignon Blanc 2008
Panellist Angela Lloyd**

says: "The nose shows passionfruit and some perfume. Gentle yet persistent flavours. Acidity is firm but not harsh. Long tail." AL's score: 16/20.



★ ★ TWO STARS

Stellar - Woolworths Organic	R36.95
Feeding Duck Chardonnay 2009* ARP	
The Green House	R40
Sauvignon Blanc 2009 (Bon Cap)	
Reyneke Organic Grapes	R80
Sauvignon Blanc 2008	
La Motte Pierneef Collection	R94
Sauvignon Blanc 2009*	

★ ONE STAR

Groot Parys Die Tweede Droom	R39
Spontane Gisting Chenin Blanc 2009 (vinolok)	
Boland Natural Ferment	R40
Chenin Blanc 2009	
Groot Parys Die Tweede Droom	R54
Vatgegis Chenin Blanc 2008	

RED WINES

★ ★ ★ ★ FOUR STARS

Laibach The Ladybird Red 2007

CELLAR PRICE R81

Alc 14% RS 2.6g/l TA 6.7g/l pH 3.59

Intense black. A brooding nose showing dark fruit and some herbal notes. The palate is rich and full but balanced. Solid fruit core, firm, chewy tannins and bright acidity. Still youthful – keep for 2 to 3 years.

CE 17 CF 15.5 CvZ 15 AL 16 TB 15.5

★ ★ ★ ☆ THREE AND A HALF STARS

Bon Cap Cape Blend 2006	R60
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★ ★ ★ THREE STARS

The Ruins Pinotage 2008* (Bon Cap)	R40
Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture Shiraz 2005	R47
Lazanou Organic Vineyards Syrah Mourvèdre 2008	R80
Reyneke Cornerstone 2008	R80
Laibach The Ladybird Red 2008	R81
Reyneke – Woolworths Cabernet Sauvignon Syrah 2007 ARP	R89.95
Lazanou Organic Vineyards Syrah 2007	R90
Reyneke Reserve Red 2007	R320

WORTHY OF INVESTIGATION

**Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture Shiraz 2005
Panellist Trizanne Barnard**

says: "Some bottle age character on the nose but also some pleasant Syrah fruit that follows through to the palate. Well balanced with ample length." TB's score: 16/20.



★ ★ ☆ TWO AND A HALF STARS

Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture Cabernet Sauvignon 2004	R30
Bergwater Organically Grown Shiraz 2008*	R35
Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture Cabernet Sauvignon Merlot 2007	R60
Schonenberg Organic Syrah 2008	R78
Upland Organic Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2004	R80
Domain Org de Rac Family Reserve Shiraz 2005	R85
Tukulu Organically Produced Sangiovese 2007 ARP	R86.54
TMV – Woolworths Syrah Mourvèdre 2005 (Tulbagh Mountain Vineyards) ARP	R190

★ ★ TWO STARS

Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture Cabernet Sauvignon Shiraz 2006	R40
Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture Cabernet Sauvignon 2005	R49
Domain Org de Rac Cabernet Sauvignon 2006	R50

Waverley Hills Organic Viticulture Cabernet Sauvignon 2006	R65
Upland Organic Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2005	R80
TMV – Woolworths Syrah Mourvèdre 2006 (Tulbagh Mountain Vineyards) ARP	R190

★ ONE STAR

Waverley Hills Organic No Added Sulphites Cabernet Sauvignon 2009*	R45
Domain Org de Rac Merlot 2006	R50
Domain Org de Rac Shiraz 2006	R50
Upland Organic Estate Cabernet Sauvignon 2001	R100

ALSO TASTED

Schonenberg Organic Syrah 2007	R78
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OTHER WINES

★ ★ ★ ☆ THREE AND A HALF STARS

Heaven on Earth Organic Sweet Wine 2009 (Stellar)	R55.06
Groot Parys Die Tweede Droom Vin de Paille 2008	R89

★ ★ ★ THREE STARS

Upland Organic Estate Guinevere Cape Ruby 2006	R90
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★ ★ ☆ TWO AND A HALF STARS

The Ruins Sparkling Brut 2009 (Bon Cap)	R40
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★ ★ TWO STARS

Winds of Change Cabernet Sauvignon Dry Rosé Sparkling Wine (Sonop)	R47
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PRICES: wines in each quality grouping are listed in order of ascending price – all ex-cellar unless otherwise stipulated.

ARP Approximate retail price
* Bottled under screwcap

Nedbank is proud sponsor of the inaugural Green Wine Awards, carried out in conjunction with WINE magazine. Via the financial institution's involvement in the Green Trust, it has supported the Biodiversity & Wine Initiative (BWI) since its inception in 2004. This project ensures that many rare

and endangered species and vegetation types are being conserved but, in addition, it also goes a long way to differentiating local wine from the rest of the world: the Cape Floral Kingdom is the smallest and richest of the six on earth and this abundance is a clear indication of the potential that South Africa has to make authentic and distinctive wines. The Green Wine Awards are a natural extension of Nedbank's involvement in both conservation and wine.

THE GREEN WINE AWARDS CONSISTS OF TWO PARTS:

BEST WINES FROM ORGANICALLY GROWN GRAPES

Producers were asked to submit wine from organically grown grapes to be rated according to established WINE magazine procedures.

The judges were WINE magazine editor Christian Eedes (chairman), honorary member of the Institute of Cape Wine Masters Colin Frith, Cape Wine Master Cathy van Zyl, wine writer Angela Lloyd, and winemaker and Wine Judging Academy graduate Trizanne Barnard.

The best white and best overall in the competition was Lazanou Chenin Blanc 2008 (see p. 50); the best red Laibach The Ladybird Red 2007 (see p. 54). A full tasting report appears on p. 118.

BEST ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES AWARD

Each producer was asked to provide a comprehensive motivation as to why it should be considered as the leading proponent of viticultural and winemaking practices that are both environmentally sustainable and focused on excellence. A condition of entry was conformance to guidelines set out by the Integrated Production of Wine (IPW), the voluntary environmental sustainability scheme established in 1998.

The judges were Inge Kotzé, project coordinator of the Biodiversity & Wine Initiative, Tom McLaughlin, good business journey specialist at Woolworths, and Lourens van Schoor, a registered professional soil and environmental scientist and director of environmental auditing firm Enviroscientific.

The winner was Oak Valley in Elgin (see p. 58), which receives an IPW audit worth R11 000 provided by Enviroscientific for both farm and cellar towards EnviroWines certification (www.envirowines.com).

Waverley Hills outside Wolseley was first runner-up. >



C Eedes



C Frith



C van Zyl



A Lloyd



T Barnard



T McLaughlin



I Kotze



L van Schoor



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