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The Home of South African Wines

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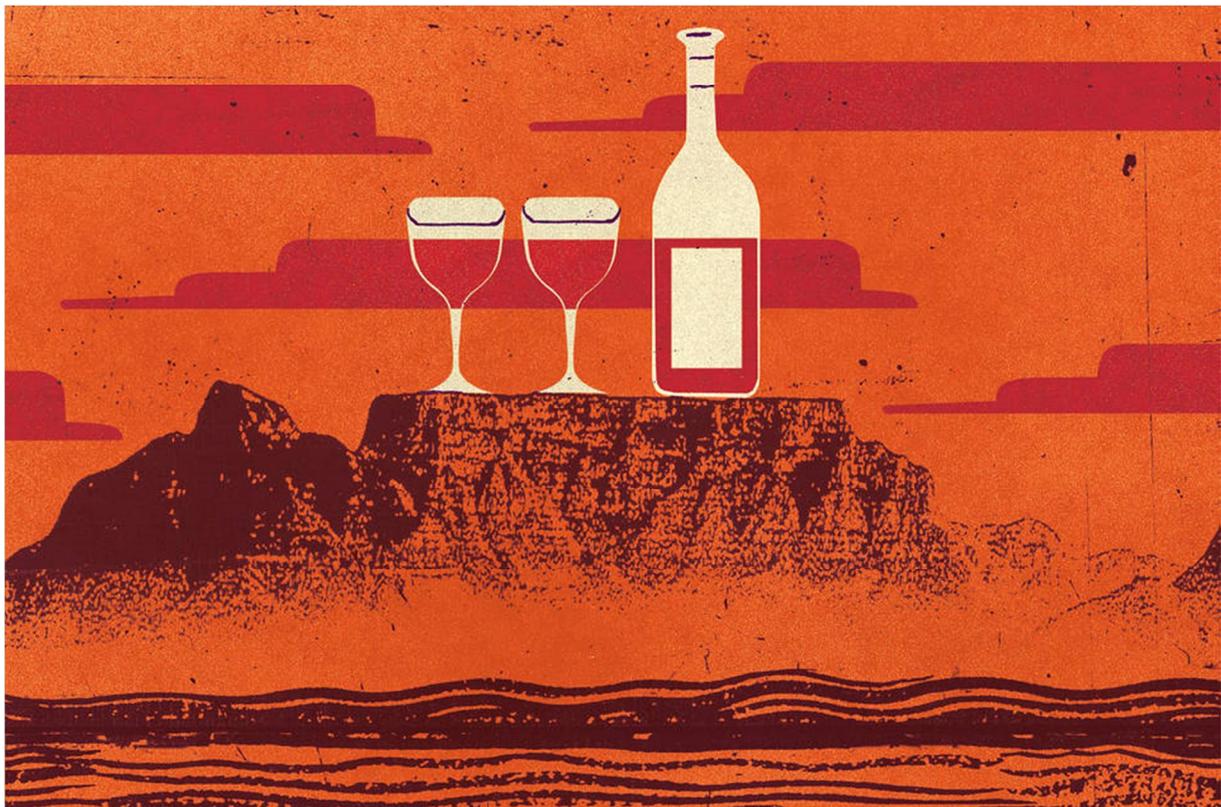
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## South Africa: The Best Fine Wine for Your Money

**Looking for the best fine wine at the best price? South Africa's classic Bordeaux-style blends are dark, sumptuous and great value for money.**

Will Lyons | July 23, 2015



**I WAS RECENTLY ASKED** which wine region offers the best bang for your buck. My questioner wasn't talking about branded, commoditized wine—or I would have suggested South America or Central California—but the fine-wine sector. I didn't hesitate: the one country that consistently offers outstanding value is South Africa.

There's been a lot of chatter in the industry recently about the new breed of winemakers in Swartland, an area north of Cape Town, on South Africa's west coast. Pioneers like Eben Sadie have been making a name for themselves with Chenin Blanc, cool-climate Chardonnay and Mediterranean-style red blends.

While there's no doubt that this is the region of the moment—especially when it comes to Syrah-based Rhône varietals, which have been delighting critics—it would be a mistake to overlook the classics: South Africa's Bordeaux-style blends.

These dark, sumptuous red wines offer the structure and freshness of their European counterparts while having their own identity. You can taste something distinctly South African in these wines.

As Master of Wine and South African importer Greg Sherwood, of Hanford Wines in London, says: “They can have a little sunshine on the fruit but the very best, with age, are difficult to distinguish from their Bordeaux counterparts.”

“The wines which put South Africa on the map were either Cabernet Sauvignon or Bordeaux-style blends, and that still has not changed,” he adds. “It's great that there are a new bunch of young winemakers making a name for themselves, but let's not lose perspective on the regions and wines which excelled in the past.”

These Bordeaux-style wines come from a small area in the Western Cape, clustered around Stellenbosch and the Simonsberg mountains. Here is some of the oldest geology on the world wine route, with vines planted on decomposed granite, noted for its good drainage, and a climate not dissimilar to Bordeaux, albeit with a shorter, warmer growing season.

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Broadly speaking, the estates that are planted at altitude or that experience the cooling sea breezes from False Bay produce the most structured and appealing wines. Producers to look out for include De Toren, Ernie Els, Jordan, Kanonkop, Le Riche, Meerlust, Oldenburg, Rustenberg, Thelema, Vergelegen and Warwick.

South Africa's red blends aren't without their problems: Heat spikes around harvest time in March can cause overripeness and high alcohol levels. But techniques such as picking at night or in the early morning, before the sugar levels rise, and picking slightly earlier in the growing season can help offset this.

These wines will also age well. I recently attended a tasting hosted by André van Rensburg, the winemaker at Vergelegen, with a range of different estates, all trophy winners, dating back to 2001. I was impressed by the freshness, the bright natural acidity and evolved fruit of the wines. They may not quite reach the heights of Bordeaux's very best—but at a fraction of the price, they deserve to get the chattering classes talking again.

## DRINKING NOW // Three Stellenbosch Wines Worth Seeking Out



### **2001 Meerlust Rubicon** | \$25 or €20

One of the standout South African reds, this blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc is brick-red, with an attractive nose of sweet fruit and black cherry, spicy tannins and lively energy that makes for a crisp, dry finish. *Alcohol: 13.5%*

### **2009 Kanonkop Paul Sauer** | \$50 or €35

I was introduced to this estate through its sumptuous Pinotage, but its Paul Sauer—a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc—is even better. With silky acidity and rounded, polished tannins, it has a fresh, taut structure. *Alcohol: 14%*

### **2000 Vergelegen GVB Red** | \$49 or €45

Close your eyes and you could be in Bordeaux. This blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Cabernet Franc is reddish-brown, with a sweet, tobacco nose, silky tannins and a gentle feel. Very impressive. *Alcohol: 14.5%*