

Kanonkop at Mosaic: what's not to love?

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Contributors: Georgina Crouth



Wine bottles ageing in Kanonkop's cellar outside Stellenbosch. Photo: Supplied



PRETORIA – It's widely regarded as the South African equivalent of a Premier Cru or First Growth vineyard and its winemaker, Abrie Beeslaar has won the International Wine and Spirit Competition's International Winemaker of the Year award twice, last year and in 2008.

Beeslaar, Kanonkop's modest winemaker was also recognised as Tim Atkins' Winemaker of the Year for 2016 – recognition which came just ahead of a recent tasting Beeslaar presented at Restaurant Mosaic at the Orient Private Hotel.

The hotel hosts regular wine tastings, with leading winemakers presenting their own wines. This tasting, fortuitously arranged before news of the Atkins affirmation, was a coup, Orient owner Cobus du Plessis told me excitedly, clutching his freshly printed copy of the report.

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Kanonkop's a pedigreed fourth generation family estate, which was originally bought by former Union of South Africa cabinet minister JW Sauer. His son, Paul, was also a minister in the cabinet.

In 1968, Jan "Boland" Coetzee joined the younger Sauer as winemaker on the farm. By 1973, Coetzee and Sauer's son-in-law Jannie Krige produced the first estate bottled wines.

Beyers Truter (of Beyerskloof fame) became winemaker in 1980 – 22 years later, in 2002, Beeslaar took over at Kanonkop. His predecessor won the IWSC Winemaker of the Year back in 1991, for his 1989 pinotage.

Production on the estate centres on pinotage (50% planting) and cabernet sauvignon (35 percent), Beeslaar said, because Kanonkop has an ideal micro-climate for red wine production. The other varieties, used in their Bordeaux blends, include merlot (7,5 percent) and the rest, cabernet franc.

Their bush vine pinotage is among the oldest in the country – they're all over 60 years old. The cabernet grapes are trellised.

The tasting comprised a first flight of the best of pinotage: Kanonkop's 1991 (a complex wine with black cherries, banana, dark chocolate and licorice on the nose) and 2012 (a big, elegant wine with pronounced bananas – a characteristic of the variety – and dark berries on the nose) pinotage as well as the Kanonkop Pinotage Black Label 2012 (big tannins, complex and almost pinot-noir in style).

Only 1,500 bottles of the Black Label were produced, sourced from a single 60-year-old block.



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The magisterial Kanonkop Black Label Pinotage 2015. Now available from [@WineCellarCoZa](https://www.winemag.co.za/kanonkop-black...) [winemag.co.za/kanonkop-black...](https://www.winemag.co.za/kanonkop-black...)

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This was followed by a second flight: The best of Cabernet Sauvignon, 2004 (a full-bodied, slightly smoky cab, with meatiness on the nose and intense mocha, dark berry and cherry notes) and 2012 (sweet red fruit on the palate and quite perfumed) vintages.

The third flight was the Best of Paul Sauer – the 2009 (very intense bouquet with mint and liquorice on the nose and a beautiful creaminess on the palate) and 1991 (surprisingly fresh for such an aged wine, with aromas of red and black berries, banana and plum on the nose and white pepper, banana and berries on the palate) vintages.

The Paul Sauer 2009 is very special: Kanonkop became the first winery in the world to win Best Blended Red Wine for the fourth time at the International Wine & Spirit Competition.

Guests were also treated to a surprise tasting of the 2016 vintage from the barrel, which the Mosaic team helped with during a visit to the estate at harvest time this year.