

SA's finest vintages on auction

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Website screenshot

Durban - It remains an industry debate on why particular time periods deliver great vintages, discussed decades after their existence, when others can merely pass by unnoticed.

This year's Nederburg Auction being held in September seeks to honour some of those outstanding vintages in South Africa's history.

Local wines made during the 1960s and 1970s were often produced in a more simplistic fashion with varieties frequently substituted in a way that today bears remarkable fruit. The irony is the label and the contents may also have little correlation as the legislation governing minimum percentages are a far cry from those dictations today.

Yet, that takes nothing away from the beauty and experience of those wines when savoured decades later.

This year's 41st auction has a strong representation from wines of that bygone era, with auction manager Dalene Steyn indicating that the selection panel has made a concerted effort to seek out benchmark wines to prove South African wines have the capability for aging.

She says this year's selection contains several of these "heroes of the past" where the wines have consistently impressed local and international wine critics and which the organisers believe will create competitive bidding among buyers.

More noteworthy was that the wines were never made for aging 40 or 50 years, thus finding perfectly stored vintage South African wines is rare.

Among the older wines on auction is a Lanzerac Cabernet Sauvignon 1957, the first wine bottled under the Lanzerac label. Two cases of three 750ml bottles each are on offer at a R2 000 reserve price for the case.

Another legendary 50-year-old wine is the Chateau Libertas 1965 that featured on the 2011 and 2013 auctions and changed hands for R11 000 a case. **The Zonnebloem Cabernet Sauvignon 1965 sold for R22 000 on the 2012 auction and this year carries a R1 500 reserve price for a three-bottle case.**

Other renowned offerings include the Alto Cabernet Sauvignon 1975 and Meerlust Rubicon 1986, but it might be the dessert wines where the credits will roll. The Jaubert Family Muscat 1800 makes its debut as South Africa's oldest wine.

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Bottled from a single 115-litre barrel that has been in the Joubert family's care for more than 200 years, it is literally a once-in-a-lifetime purchasing opportunity with just two 275ml bottles being offered at a R42 500 reserve price.

Custodian Cobus Joubert partially tops up the barrel every five years using muscat sourced from Barrydale to continue the slow oxidation process.

It is a wine Neal Martin of Robert Parker's Wine Advocate tasted in 2011 and awarded 99 points – the highest score ever achieved for a South African wine.

KWV Port is a long-standing feature of the auction, this year with a KWV Limited Release Port 1948 and a KWV White Port 1966 coming under the hammer. The 1948 tawny has typical nutty characteristics with dry, integrated tannins, while the 1966 belies its age in being a fresh, lively wine with an abundance of fruit aromas and a lingering finish.

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