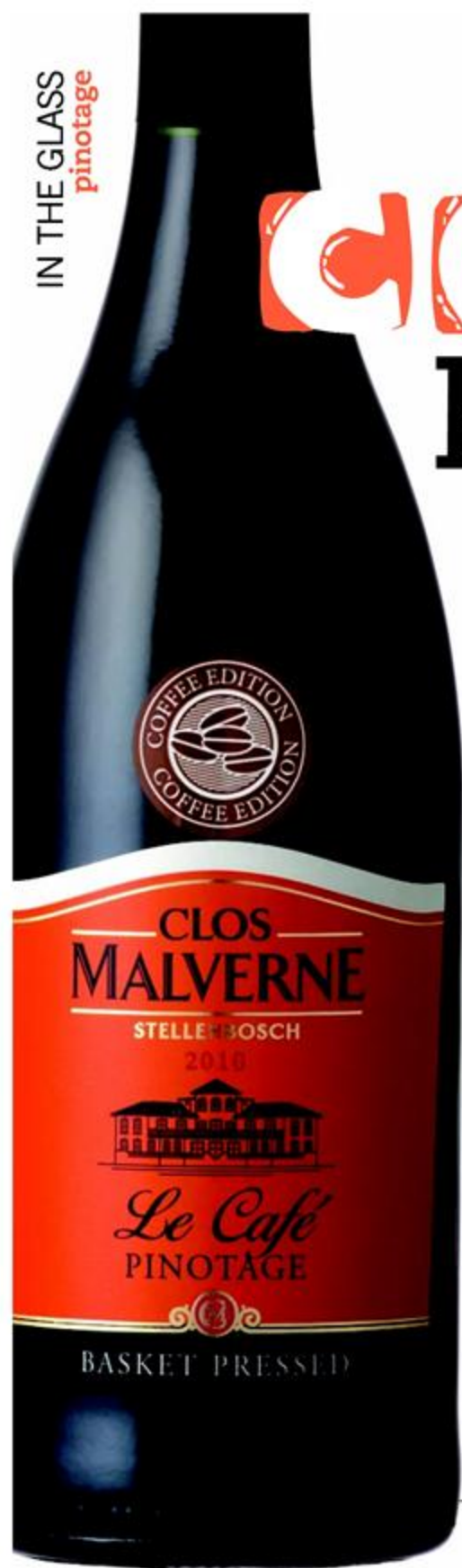


IN THE GLASS
pinotage



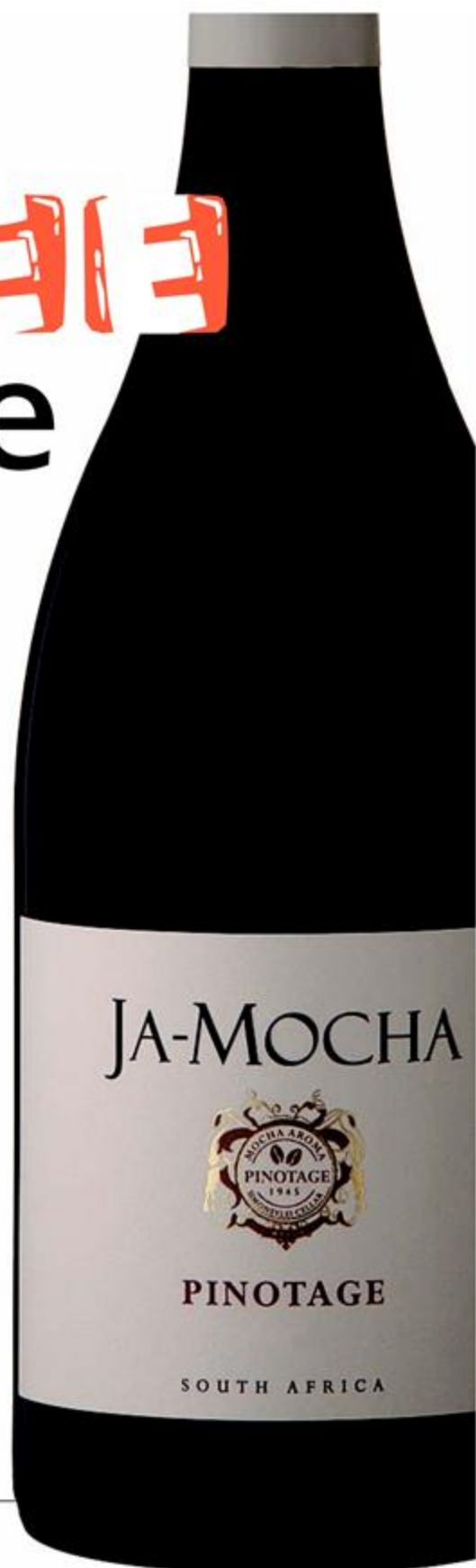
Pinotage

A
has-bean?



The argument might be terribly passé – but the coffee Pinotage fascination seems never-ending with a number of other varietals adding their own coffee-mocha-toffee-chocolate labels to shelves. Should we start serving our wine with our breakfast croissant?

Words by Jeanri-Tine van Zyl



In 2001, South African drinkers were introduced to what would become a global hit: coffee-flavoured Pinotage in the form of Diemersfontein Pinotage. Pioneered by winemaker Bertus Fourie, the red wine with the distinct coffee notes had previous non-wine drinkers in a mad craze. This was the next big, best-loved

thing. Immediately it had the wine world divided. Experts criticised it for the oak and cellar techniques intentionally applied to mask more traditional Pinotage aromas and taste, to instead amplify coffee aromas – while others simply adored it. Fourie (with the nickname Starbucks) created a similar style of Pinotage at

KWV, called Café Culture, before moving to Val de Vie wine estate in Paarl, where the famous Barista red wines are brewed by his hands. Defending his work, Fourie makes a valid statement: if this style of wine is converting previous beer and whisky drinkers to wine drinkers, then what's the harm?



Traditionalists argue against this democratisation of wine, purely because “it is not Pinotage” – according to one avid member of the Pinotage Association.

Diemersfontein, incidentally, also produces one of South Africa’s prime examples of the varietal. The Carpe Diem Pinotage – the ‘03 vintage won the SA Red Wine Trophy at the International Wine Challenge in 2005 and was auctioned at the Nederburg Auction – impresses with aromas of ripe, red fruit and, intriguingly, hints of white chocolate. On his blog, baristawine.co.za, Fourie quoted Diemersfontein owner David Sonnenberg’s interesting analogy to the argument: “I feel like the parent of two teenage daughters – one is a classically trained violinist who dresses modestly and pulls the crowds in the exclusive concert halls; the other, a mini-skirted and occasionally provocative pop star who wows the younger generation but has fans of all ages.” Is it therefore safe to

THE CHOCOLATE BLOCK

WORTH A LOOK

Examples of mocha/coffee-flavoured Pinotages:

- Diemersfontein Pinotage R64
- Val de Vie Barista R60
- KWV Café Culture R46
- Boland Cellar Cappupino Ccinotage R42.50
- Simonsvlei Ja-Mocha R75
- Clos Malverne Le Café Pinotage R76

Other wines made in a flavoured style:

- Simonsvlei Toffee Chunk Shiraz R85
- The Chocolate Block R129.41
- De Krans Tinta Mocha R38.16
- Vrede En Lust Mocholate Malbec R80

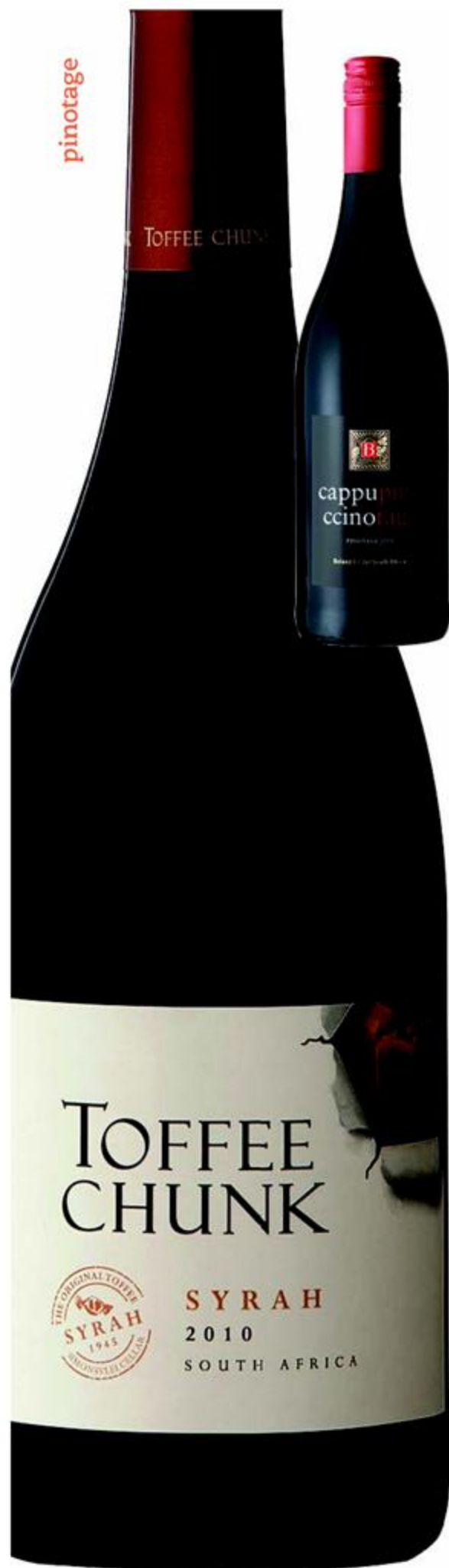
conclude that the majority of South African wine drinkers prefer Bieber to Bach?

Wineries have been quick to cotton-on to this marketing wave. Since the launch of the Diemersfontein Pinotage, the wine-drinking public has been inundated with examples of wines with coffee aromas. The list is long and has been extended to include other varieties apart from the ‘traditionally accepted’ Pinotage (see box above for some examples).

Pinotage is South Africa’s very own, indigenous, wine grape. It was pioneered on local soil by Professor Perold when he crossed Pinot Noir with Cinsault (previously known as Hermitage), with the first bottling taking place at Lanzerac in 1959. It has since evolved into a varietal with a fair amount of supporters – and detractors.

It has been observed that three styles of Pinotage exist: those which take after their Burgundian line with aromatic, red berry aromas with a medium-bodied structure





and velvety tannins; those that are riper in style displaying black fruit, prune and are intense and concentrated on the palate; and, finally, the coffee-mocha styles. The latter being a bit of a broad descriptor to denote the variety, as coffee is a philandering style that can be found in everything from Malbec to Cabernet.

Although it remains Pinotage which seems most susceptible to this coffee style. Is it something worth pursuing? In 2009, after having tasted 25 examples of Pinotage at Wosa's London Megatasting, Richard Hemming, a contributor to Jancis Robinson's website, observed: "The Pinot Noir style, while often tasty, didn't seem to contribute anything new or unique, and will never reach the pure excellence of its progenitor... So, for my money, the pioneering Diemersfontein coffee style is the way ahead, because it is simultaneously excellent quality and completely unlike any other wine style I have tried, and that lends it most value to the diversity of the wine world, as well as giving South African wine a quite unique flagship."

Winemaker Beyers Truter, of Beyerskloof, as chairman of the Pinotage Association, is perhaps the most devoted of Pinotage's many guardians, but he is wary to comment on the coffee-Pinotage styles, precisely because he doesn't agree that it shows the wine in its best, truest form.

Truter, together with the Pinotage Association, has been instrumental in guarding the reputation of Pinotage; a grape that comes with a lot of baggage. Of the descriptors that had been bestowed on it, coffee is definitely the least offensive. To the disdain of the association, Pinotage has had to deal with a range of non-flattering descriptors: 'rusty nails' was a favourite adjective applied by the international community in the 1990s, whereas 'burnt rubber' and 'baked banana' added further insult to injury.

Beyers explains: "Those (descriptors) are due to faulty winemaking practices, and not limited to Pinotage. Too cold fermentation and incorrect pH management caused a lot of less desirable aromas in Pinotage, but together with the association, a lot of education has gone into Pinotage-sensitive

cellar practices." There has also been a move away from wines with too much wood, tannin and alcohol.

To illustrate his point, and to showcase what he believes is a more authentic style of Pinotage, Beyers presented me with a vertical tasting of Pinotage dating back to Lanzerac's 1969 vintage. Also included in the line-up were Simonsig '78, Zonnebloem '88, Kanonkop '99 and Beyerskloof Diesel '07, a spectrum of wines that Truter believes illustrate the more desirable, genuine Pinotage characteristics: plums, red and black fruit with a sweet undertone and velvety tannins. The series also demonstrated that Pinotage has an inclination to mature beautifully, indicative of a varietal that has more potential than just instant, mass gratification. But these wines are hard to come by (the Lanzerac '69, says Beyers, is priceless, but if you do find a bottle, you will have to pay close to R2 000), while you'd have to fork out close to R400 for the Kanonkop and Beyerskloof Diesel. Is it fair to conclude that, with Pinotage, price equals quality? Beyers is adamant that there is good drinking to be had at a far lower price point, which is often where consumers encounter the coffee labels.

"At all times wine producers should chase classic balance," he says – if that is achieved then coffee-mocha aromas become secondary, but it is when it dominates all the finer nuances of a wine that it becomes a problem.

It is a personal thing, but in my opinion, there is more satisfaction to be had listening to Bach's Violin Concerto in A minor than another teenager in a mini-skirt... •



ON THE WEB

MORE ON PINOTAGE AT
www.winemag.co.za

Diemersfontein Pinotage has taken South Africa by storm. This is why –
by Joanne Gibson

How to make Pinotage and goji berry chutney – by Anna Trapido

Spencer Bay Wine Makers Reserve 2008 (Namaqua Wines)	R75
Stellenzicht	
Golden Triangle 2005 ARP	R76.99
Topiary 2007	R78
Tormentoso 2009* (MAN Vintners)	R79
Bergsig Limited Release 2008	R85
Groenland Premium 2007	R85
Manley 2008	R85
Klein Genot 2008	R90
Edgebaston 2008	R95
Buitenverwachting 2006	R100
Cederberg 2008	R120
Swartland Indalo 2007	R110
La Motte 2008	R113
Bosman Family Vineyards 2007	R120
Hartenberg 2006	R120
Pella 2008	R120
Grande Provence 2008*	R140
Cederberg Five Generations 2008	R280



Woolworths Longmarket 2009 (Bergsig Estate)	R30
Riebeek Cellars 2010*	R31
Ayama 2009	R35
Sonata 2007* (Waterstone Wines)	R40.50
Alexanderfontein 2008	R46
Cranefields 2006	R50
Niel Joubert Wines 2009*	R50
Jason's Hill 2008	R52
Ruitersvlei 2009*	R54.75
Les Coteaux 2009 (Mont du Toit)	R55
Lion Creek 2009* (Napier Winery)	R55
Windfall 2007	R55
Rietvallei 2008	R58
River Grandeur 2008 (Viljoensdrift)	R58
Ondine 2008 (Ormonde Private Cellars)	R61

WORTHY OF INVESTIGATION

NEIL ELLIS VINEYARD SELECTION 2006



Panellist Miguel Chan says:
"Leesy complexity on otherwise shy nose. The palate shows beautiful restraint. Elegant fruit, fine tannic grip."
MC's score: **17/20**

Neethlingshof 2004 ARP	R65.43
Allée Bleue 2008	R72
Durbanville Hills 2008	R72
Boplaas Family Reserve 2008	R75
Boland Cellar Reserve No1 2007	R77
Blaauwklippen	
Cultivar Selection 2007	R80
Dieu Donné 2008	R80
Mooiplaas 2003	R83
Uitkyk Carlonet 2007 ARP	R84.06
Welbedacht 2007	
(Schalk Burger & Sons)	R95
Benguela Cove	
Premium Selection 2009	R98
Amares 2007	R105
Le Bonheur 2007 ARP	R105.56
Le Bonheur 2008 ARP	R105.56
Marianne 2007	R106
Beau Joubert 2008	R110
Peter Falke PF 2007	R110
Hoopenburg Integer 10 Barrels 2006	R115
Joubert Tradauw R62 2008	R120

Alto 2008 ARP	R136.99
Devonair	
The Cab Family Reserve 2006	R200
Laibach The Widow's Block Single Vineyard 2007	R200
Lady May 2008 (Glenelly)	R235
The Bridge 2008 (Rickety Bridge)	R390



Boplaas 2007	R43
Abbotts Hill 2009	R50
Waverley Hills 2006	R50
Havana Hills 2008	R60
Neethlingshof 2005 ARP	R65.43
Hoopenburg Bush Vine 2006	R69
Upland 2008	R70
Stellenzicht	
Golden Triangle 2004 ARP	R76.99
Laibach 2006	R79
Brahms 2006 ARP	R80
Elgin Vintners Third Edition 2007	R80
Nitida 2009	R85
Onderkloof Schapenberg	
Single Vineyard 2006	R98
Bon Courage	
Inkara Limited Release 2008	R102
Webersburg 2005 ARP	R110
Lynx 2009	R130
Saxenburg Private Collection 2007	R180
Flagstone The Music Room 2004	R200

Two Cabernet Sauvignon wines tasted did not receive a star rating.

CORKED

(Both samples supplied displaying TCA.)

Groenland	
The Classic Collection 2005	R59.00
Jacobsdal 2007 ARP	R80.28

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

THIS MONTH'S TASTERS



Christian Eedes
Chair (CE)



Miguel Chan
Southern Sun Hotels (MC)



Carrie Adams
Norman Goodfellows (CA)



James Pietersen
Balthazar (JP)



Angela Lloyd
Wine writer (AL)