

OLD MUTUAL TROPHY WINE SHOW 2011 JUDGES' FEEDBACK TRANSCRIPT

JUDGING PANEL

International: Debra Meiburg MW, Neal Martin, Thierry Desseauve

SA: Christian Eedes, Cathy van Zyl MW, Ginette de Fleuriot CWM, Miguel Chan, Gary Jordan, François Rautenbach

Chairman: Michael Fridjhon

MF: Good morning and welcome to the tenth feedback session for the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. Guests are still gathering. It always amazes me that at events such as this the media almost outnumber the producers, whereas you might have thought that it would be quite a useful opportunity for those who are in the business of making wine to listen to not only what the judges think, but the kind of criteria being applied.

The very high percentage of international judges does send a message about the expectations of international markets and because we go to a lot of trouble – not only in terms of selecting people who we think really will add value to the overall view of South African wine by giving their comments and by our judges absorbing those comments – but also because we are trying to get a reflection that is more global, so we don't try and choose three judges from the same market.

There's an opportunity here to listen to what a wide range of opinions brings and so it is interesting – and I do know that of course these comments land up on the website – it's a useful opportunity to interrogate the judges, which is in a sense why we are here today.

So welcome to you, welcome to the judges who are looking remarkably fresh considering that we've been through over 1 000 wines. I have a few stats here which are really interesting: this year the total entries were 1 083 compared with 1 014. There were some disqualifications and withdrawals before the judging actually took place – withdrawals because between the time that people enter the wine and the time that the judging takes place, suddenly they get an export order and discover that they don't have sufficient stock to meet the minimum stock criteria. Those sorts of things happen – there's nothing ominous or sinister about them, but we finally land up with 20 wines less than these numbers.

What we saw were some really interesting stats – I'm going to start with those.

Total Gold count was actually down, which means as I've said to these people many times over the last few days that they are mean-spirited, but actually that's what this show is about. We do want to apply fairly tough criteria thresholds, a gold at this show really is supposed to mean something and it's very easy to open the tap. It's very easy to say well it's quite a nice wine let's bump it to gold. If you do that across a number of classes, to go from 25 to 40 golds is the easiest thing in the world and it won't even appear to dilute the standard, but cumulatively it does.

What we've seen as a result of this parsimony, for which I'm really grateful, is an increase in the number silvers and that's a trend we've seen over the last couple of years where we're now up to 116 silvers. That's also very encouraging. The wine industry grows every year, 50-80 new producers come on board – people who have been making wine and have been surviving in very difficult times have to be making better wine - and what would have been a top bronze two years ago really does get through that threshold and land up with silver.

There was a discussion several years ago in which people said if South African wine is getting better, how come the medal counts aren't getting higher and I remember James Halliday saying "that's because you have to raise the bar. If you don't raise the bar, you're not actually improving the breed." The whole point about wine shows – as with traditional old agricultural shows – is that they exist to improve the breed. So you have to raise the bar and as you raise the bar so there is a degree of fallout, but there is a gratifying improvement in overall quality. The place where this has been most visible is not in the gold medals, because that bar gets raised higher and higher all the time. It happens in the silvers - the wines that in the past might have got gold. Halliday's comment as well is that the bronze of ten years ago is the silver or gold of today.

116 silvers against the 89 of last year. A big increase in bronzes from 329 to 427. Once again not surprising. It's a very tough industry out there. People are making very good wine and people are really being much more rigorous about what they're chucking out and we would expect a medal count increase there as well. So all round 25 compared with 32 golds from last year and from memory, five museum classes in those 25. So in fact there were only 20 gold medals outside of the museum classes.

Here is something for the handful of producers who come to this feedback session and that is museum classes are getting a higher percentage of gold medals and there's a message in that for South African consumers, that our wines do and should be allowed to age. Older wines do show better and I think most of the people on this panel were part of the old wine-tasting that we do on Sunday afternoon. It started as a bit of an exercise three or four years ago and has now become something of a tradition. We reel in really old wines – white wines 15 years and older; red wines 25 years and older. It has nothing to do with the show, but it's quite a nice way to start the week's judging and what we see is some extraordinary old wine. We forget that South African old wines do age and it's in the interests of everybody to get cash flow, so nobody mentions this secret, which is that they're so much better if you let them age for a few years and that was quite clear from the performance of the museum classes.

We have a line-up of judges – some of whom have done this for the first time, some of them as internationals are also here for the first time. Some of the panelists haven't been on this panel for several years, so there's a wide range of opinions and I'd really like to get people, one at a time from the panel, to talk about this and then to field questions, which you can do if it's specific to what that speaker has just said. Otherwise please bank up your questions and let's try and unpack all the

issues that are important to the wine industry – both to producers, to consumers and in fact to this body of people who love wine and want to know where it's going.

I'm going to Gary Jordan on my right who has judged this show for I think about five years now and is one of the only producers on the panel. Let's hear what you think Gary.

GJ Thanks Michael and welcome everyone. As you know it's been a heavy week, but a week that we've all really enjoyed and come out with some fantastic wines that we're going to be proud of. In particular, with panels that I've served on I think we've really done some good work and you're going to see some great results coming out of it.

The panel judging system works well and for me as a producer I'd like to encourage people who don't really know much about this – with three senior judges and an associate judge as well, that associate judge coming out of the Judging Academy where they've passed and graduated with distinction. That whole system works particularly well because newer, younger people are brought into that industry as well.

Something that was interesting is that we're seeing less of that "Mocha-lypse now" style of wine. This is not the kind of show where you're going to find tons of oak chips and over-oaked wines in that non-wine style, first-time wine-lover type wines. It's not the place really to enter it, although there are producers who do put that in and it keep us on our toes as judges.

On the panels that I was chairing I did find that Viognier was disappointing this year. There were interesting individual wines, but on the whole a lot of alcohol, a lot of over-oaked styles and sometimes I actually just wanted to blend two glasses together to make a way better wine, because too much oak and too much alcohol really just didn't work particularly well.

For me the Shiraz, Bordeaux blends and Riesling all showed very well. Shiraz in particular I think we got a couple of stonkers (great wines) there – really some nice wines. The interesting thing – and I think we may have stats available later on which indicate how many bottles were closed with cork and how many were closed with screwcap – I think in our Bordeaux blend class we had something like 93% were cork closed and we ended up at just over 5% being corked. Some of them we joked amongst ourselves had "Cork of the Show". It's obviously still a problem, although not as bad. Over the last five years I've seen it improve.

A word on Merlot. Merlot for me, even as a Merlot producer – Merlot is coming in a place where Pinotage used to be. I say that with respect because while there are some individual standout wines, there's a lot of crap out there. Over-oaking and Merlot and this greenness don't really go together. So as an industry we've got to do something about that. It happened to be a class which for me as a judge stood out as having many more faults on it. Too much over-oaked wine – whether that's a question of people not being able to sell wine and therefore it's been in the barrel for much longer, or

whether they're just missing out on that style, but too long in oak, too much French oak, too much new wood – it's just not working on Merlot.

MF Gary, thank you. I have to say that Gary is the only producer judging as a full judge and for those people who are conspiracy theorists please bear the following in mind; if a producer sits on a panel in which the wine in which he has a direct or indirect commercial interest comes up, his score, even at the primary panel, is discounted and if, in the really unlikely possibility, the wine should land up at a trophy judging, it's absolutely discounted. SO it is quite an interesting thing and we do like to have on every panel at least somebody with technical expertise so that when there are questions around that – I'm hoping that your comments about Merlot, as a Merlot producer, is a message that gets back to the country's Merlot producers. I do know that there is a Merlot interest group and that it has been working very hard at addressing concerns about how Merlot has now become the disappointment of the Cape wine industry. I have to say that I thought the top end of the Merlot class this year was better than it has ever been and clearly there's just some rubbish way below, which is an inevitable clearing of the pipeline.

I'm now going to ask Debra Meiburg, who is a Master of Wine and who is here from Hong Kong, to add her comments.

DM I'm from Hong Kong. I know I don't look Chinese but I have spent half my life there so although I have a California accent and grew up in wine country, I'm coming in with a very Asian perspective.

I thought the Sauvignon Blanc class was just wonderful. I was pleased to see not too much green fruit, because I think there's a danger when regions chase that lively green methoxypyrazine flavours. I saw a nice array. The class was definitely split into two different styles. There's the ripe guava, tropical, vibrant style and then the herbal green. So I guess my word to the producers is don't go too far down that path. That was quite trendy about ten years ago, but much of the wine world that was producing those styles are moving away from that. Otherwise some lovely wines in there. I had the Cabernet Sauvignon class. Some lovely Cabernet, but we struggled to find a gold. There was lots of silver Cabernet Sauvignon and I would like to see a little more fruit purity. We saw quite a few that clearly had a Shiraz dollop blended into the wine, which tastes delicious, but if I were a consumer in Hong Kong and I bought a Cabernet which tasted like Shiraz, I'd be quite taken aback. So that would be my caveat to the winemakers. I'd probably make it clear on the label.

One thing I think is wonderful about the Cabernet Sauvignons for our market is that we're very French and European oriented in our tastes in Hong Kong, even though we have Australia pounding on our door and so we like restrained fruit and in this case I saw a lot of nice fruit restraint.

In terms of the Merlot, which I judged with Mr Jordan, my question was simply What is Merlot trying to Be? It's a difficult class because there are a range of styles. I felt there's not yet a voice on Merlot, even though we found some lovely Merlot. To be fair if you step back in the world there's not much

of a Merlot voice in the world other than maybe Bordeaux right bank. I saw some great fruit in there and some good winemaking so I think there's an opportunity with the Merlot class.

Those would be some of my key classes. I missed the Pinotage class, but in judging some of the trophy class today I saw some lovely Pinotage and some wonderful Shiraz. I suppose my general comment would be that I've been coming to South Africa for a while and I'm seeing a real improvement on fruit purity, grape varietal expression, freshness, vibrancy, clean winemaking. That's really super.

MF Deborah, thank you. Before I pass the microphone on just to answer a question raised by Gary about screwcap versus non-screwcap closure, the numbers are edging upwards and overall now represent about 25% of the show. Having said that, there are some classes where screwcap represents 40%-50% of all the submission – so you'd see it in Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Chenin – they're big classes. I may add that Rosé and Blanc de Noir which is not a class which leaves judges breathless was 80% closed with screwcap. In other words more and more producers are understanding that if you want true expression of fruit to be retained in the bottle, there's no harm in accepting that screwcap is the appropriate closure. When you get to the red wine classes it does thin out rather dramatically. But even there Shiraz is over 10% now closed with screwcap, Cabernet is 11%, Pinot Noir is 21%, Pinotage 16% - that's a real thought that for an industry that ten years ago was certainly going to win the dinosaur of the year award, we've seen much, much cleaner Pinotage, much more sensitivity about issues like brett and rustic winemaking and so in a sense it's not a surprise to see that they've also embraced the idea that closure has a role to play.

Q On the question of closures, is there an analysis on the Diam cork?

MF We can pull that stat for you and if you're that interested we'll get it to you, but I certainly saw down the closure lists when there were Diam noted – it's small. I would have thought certainly under 5% so it's not statistically that relevant, but we're noting it. What we still need to find out is the great question of whether there's a Diam taste and until people start to say so, we'll assume we haven't got there yet. To answer your question about Diam, it is being recorded – it's very small.

It's a week which either has high drama or no drama. Monday was generally a day of high drama and that's because the panels took a bit of time to gel, I think is one of those understatement of all time, so that at eight o'clock as Old Mutual's guests were arriving for dinner and the dinner itself has been scheduled 7.30 for 8.00, two of the three panels were still beavering away at what had to be done. And that's only because sometimes classes don't sift themselves as easily as they might.

One of the classes that took a bit of sifting was the Sauvignon Blanc class and to say that there's a dichotomy between a style of wine that Christian particularly likes and a style of wine that Debra particularly doesn't like is to understate things a wee bit. So the microphone is there for Christian, not just to talk about the class. This is the fourth or fifth show you've judged on as a judge and you have

done Sauvignon Blanc class in every one of those years (Christian – No, the last three and Shiraz for what seems like eight years). So there are two very important classes that you really have got some length and time of perspective. So without crossing swords with Debra yet again would you like to talk about them?

CE Debra and I got on very well. Our disagreements are very good-natured and very civil, but the disagreement with regards to Sauvignon Blanc was over the issue of greenness and methoxypyrazine and typically there were some styles that I expect come from maritime, cool climate areas – I'm speculating but probably Darling and Elim – and I had a lot of time for those wines, as I think many of us do and Debra didn't care for them particularly. It was a very productive discussion over the course of the day. Debra's point was that it's out of fashion in the Asian market and also that under certain circumstances that they're tiring or inappropriate to drink. Before we get hysterical about it and grub up hundreds of hectares of Sauvignon Blanc up the West Coast, I think it still has a place in the South African context and, as Debra and I discussed, if it's 35°C outside and you're sitting on the beach eating oysters, those wines definitely have a place. They might not be key to cracking the Asian market, but we need to be aware of different wines for different contexts.

There were four current release Sauvignon golds that we did agree on and I think they're wines that everybody will love. They are very difficult to fault. So we did eventually reach agreement after twelve hours of judging on Monday.

Regarding Shiraz, if five years ago the category was incredible work in the sense that the wines lacked any great distinction, the overall quality is really going in the right direction. I'm delighted to say it's a much, much more interesting class. I think we're still a little way off great wines – we got three golds there and I'd like to think that you'll be excited by them. Whereas five years ago it was really hard work to find anything interesting, there's a lot more fun to be had from the category. There's a lot more precise winemaking, a lot more understanding of which flavour profiles are going to work. Where I think we can still make some progress is there is a lot of wine with a 14.5 alcohol, a residual sugar of 3 – 3.5, quite heavily oaked, very ripe fruit and I'm afraid that's never going to get more than bronze. They're well made but not terribly interesting. The way forward for me is definitely spice and pepper and fruit purity and less oak.

MF While the microphone is so close to Thierry Deseauve who I think it could fairly be said bring a largely "old world" palate to the tasting but, that said, is very active in the Asian market and is a co-producer of the definitive guide to the wines of France and has been involved in journalism around wine for longer than the absence of grey hair on his head. Thierry would you like to summarise your impressions of the classes that you really liked and in fact of South African wine? It's your first visit?

TD Yes, my first visit. I used to taste wines for many years now and it was almost a professional fault to wait so long to come here. In Europe we have sometimes received ideas about New World wines, mainly in France. It was very interesting for me to taste all of these wines – I tasted maybe more

than 300 wines in three days – because a lot of them have a real personality and a real balance. I think balance is the more important word when you talk about wine, because you are going to drink it with food and it's very important to keep freshness in the mouth, to keep a real balance between alcohol, sugar, tannins and acidity. Most of them, not all but a good proportion, were very well-balanced wines and it was good and interesting for me to understand that.

If I go to the different categories I tasted, I was impressed, as Christian said, by the average quality of the Shiraz. Some were blockbuster wines with too much sugar, too much alcohol, but most of them were very strong but elegant wines, well-balanced and I think the three gold medals are very excellent Shiraz. I'm used to drinking Rhone Valley Syrah (we call that Syrah in French but it's Shiraz) and they are very different wines. But your best Shiraz get a real personality between Old World and New World, between Barossa style and Rhone Valley style.

I was impressed too by the Pinot Noir. We tasted maybe thirty different Pinot Noir and some of them were very elegant, very fine. I think the gold medal is a perfect example of this very fine style. It was frankly a discovery for me. I didn't think that you got such elegant Pinot Noir.

I was impressed too by some Muscat. I didn't know anything about Muscat wines of South Africa, but most of them were excellent. The new ones as well as the museum types.

Just to finish a word about Pinotage. It's of course a South African speciality. I think you have to be proud of that kind of wine. I found a lot of balanced Pinotage, good Pinotage. The only question for me – but it's an important question – how can I match this kind of wine with food. It's very difficult to find the answers. I think you have to think about that – matching Pinotage and food. But you can be proud of these wines and it's one part of the personality of South African wines.

MF Thanks very much indeed. As the microphone stops at Cathy and that's not just opportunistic. You chaired a couple of panels and you certainly chaired the panel which deals with South Africa's slightly unique Chenin Blanc. I'm not going to pre-empt what you have to say, but it was a class which contributed to the slightly late running of the Monday evening.

CvZ I had a really wonderful show this year. I got to taste most of the white categories. I think I only tasted Merlot with Debra and Gary and that came after an evening I spent telling people how, looking back over the number of years that I've judged – and I have judged for a number – the biggest impression I've taken away in recent years compared with early years, is that the quality of wine has definitely improved overall. In those early years I remember us throwing out perhaps one in five wines or one in seven wines because of faults and this year we struggled to find faults certainly on Monday and Tuesday of judging. As I said that was mainly whites and then unfortunately we hit the Merlot class and then struggled, but Debra and Gary have already spoken about that.

While we're on the point of faults – and you can tell I'm steering away from the Chenin question – I'd like to bring the discussion to something Michael mentioned about James Halliday. The first year that I judged here, I judged as an associate and it was baptism of fire under James Halliday and his eyebrows. I do really believe that South African standards of wine have increased tremendously and I know there are winemakers out there who sometimes feel that there should be more trophies awarded, more gold awarded, more five stars awarded, more of everything awarded. I really concur with what James said to you and that is you've got to keep raising the bar. You can't just expect everything to fall into your laps. If you don't keep raising the bar, you're just standing still. So thank you for reminding me about James' point there.

Chenin Blanc, one of my favourite categories. I love South African Chenin. I also love Loire Chenin. One thing I always have to point out about South African Chenin is that you're never going to find Loire Chenin in South Africa. As difficult as it is to get Pinot Noir or Burgundy to travel, you don't find Burgundy in New Zealand – you find a New Zealand style of Pinot Noir. You don't find Burgundy in California. A Burgundy-Pinot Noir is unique and similarly I believe that Chenin and the Loire is unique. You're not going to find Savennieres in South Africa and you're not going to find any of the other styles here. That said, I think South Africa is forging its own path in terms of Chenin. We have a wide variety of styles and the world should learn to appreciate them or we have to educate the world on what they're offering.

Thierry and I often disagreed with Miguel on the styles of Chenin and I think we reached common ground. I know he wasn't really fond of the tropical styles of Chenin. I too am looking for a lot more acidity. Talking about standards the time has also now come for South African Chenin to push the envelope, to stop relying on oak and to stop relying on sugar and try and up the fruit purity.

Is that enough on Chenin?

MF It's interesting. The word "prevarication" was mentioned by Fiona when you don't "kom nou na die punt toe". So since Miguel was on your panel, since Miguel said to me can he really tell it like it is, it's time to pass the microphone to Miguel, not just about Chenin although I think there is a concern. There wasn't a Chenin gold. We don't get Chenin golds very often on the show. I'm not sure that all the serious Chenin producers necessarily enter the show as much as they might enter say the Chenin challenge, because the entry is certainly smaller. But there was a sense at the end of the day that they'd been looking for something that wasn't there in the lineup they were dealing with.

Miguel would you like to talk about the Chenins as you saw them and your general comments about these and other wines.

MC Thank you Michael and good morning everyone. It was indeed a very interesting show where, compared to previous years, I have found it was much less arduous to go through the different wines, where there was a better integrity of fruit, there was better purity and certainly, as my

colleagues have said here, quality is rising and there is indeed a very good foundation to see some really great wines coming from this country.

Talking about Chenin Blanc itself, it was a very strong class indeed and yet we did struggle to find a gold. There was not the purity of fruit, there were wines of complexity. However that was the positive side. The bottle-aged version was also very exciting where one always tends to believe that Chenin Blanc, especially from this part of the world, doesn't age well. At five, six, seven years old they were absolutely beautiful.

On the negative side, talking about purity of fruit in Chenin Blanc and talking about sugar level and freshness, there were many Chenin Blanc where the acidity was not up to where we would expect it to be. There were quite a lot of them that were seriously dull and flabby. The other thing was where the purity was not there, there was the addition of aromatic varieties into it. Why? Is it a growing trend? I don't know. But it is noticeable that either Viognier or Muscat are being added. If you're selling a product like a Chenin Blanc, I believe a little more honesty is required on that side.

The second thing was the level of sugar. There you could see the level of sugar was seriously disjointed – you have low acidity, high sugar and it was not the natural sugar from the grape. You could see the sugar was added, So, it was disappointing to see some really great fruit, some good handling, but marred by this aspect. Also Muscat was very, very evident in the Chenin class.

Talking of the other categories where I was involved, Cabernet Franc was very exciting. Looking at what's out there the purity, the whole extraction, very good handling of the oak. Secondly there is a future, yet I would perhaps like to see more of this grape Cabernet Franc that many of you are keeping perhaps for your top notch Bordeaux blend. So instead of using your Cabernet Franc to blend, I reckon it's a varietal on its own that should be promoted in such a way that it adds another layer of innovation to the whole landscape of choices. So Cabernet Franc yes – keep doing what you're doing. Reduce the oak, work on less extraction.

Then talking of Cabernet Franc, most of the Cabernet Sauvignon feedback was agreed by the panel. Having done the Cabernet Sauvignon last year what was interesting to see was there were one or two which were seriously interesting – there was lovely blackcurrant, there was an element of savouriness – but generally speaking it was a disappointing class. Last year I remember saying there was huge extraction. You're trying to extract from those young vines or those delicate grapes features they don't have. So the delicate fruit was either marred by over-oaking, or just the tannin was seriously coarse. It's not really ideal and I doubt it will soften with time. Cabernet itself I reckon could be a much more interesting category and many of the young wines did show early or pre-natural browning on the rim, which is also a questionable thing when looking at the 2009 or even the 2010 vintage.

Last but not least I got Cabernet Sauvignon. There were quite a few wines that were overwhelmed with Shiraz. Why? It could be made from any grapes. I get a feeling there was no varietal in it which was not very exciting or inspiring.

On the other panel I was involved in the white blends was also very exciting, the classic white blends, Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc. Certainly there is a future. You could see the effort and all the hard work behind it. Certainly the work is starting to pay off. The colour in the white wines was certainly much brighter. It was really good. Again in the Semillon/Sauvignon Blanc blend, there were quite a few wines that showed aromatic character and then Muscat was prevalent. Why does that need to be added when you make so much effort to produce a classic Semillon/Sauvignon blend and you have a Muscat character in it? It does actually stand out when you have two classic glasses and one in the middle that actually has an aromatic lift to it.

I think I've said what I had to say. Thank you.

MF Thank you Miguel. Cathy you wanted to cross swords?

CvZ No, I didn't want to cross swords but as per usual I've seen that I've missed something. I just wanted to say congratulations to Michael and Wine Magazine for a very worthwhile competition, now in its tenth year. I think you've done the industry proud and I did want to speak about Chardonnay, but I'm going to leave that to Neal.

MF Before we go to Neal I thought, after Miguel, the other panelist who is really in the on-consumption side of the industry is first-year judge, previously an associate, Francois Rautenbach. Francois would you pick up here. Firstly you come to this freshest of the local judges. Francois really added huge value to the panel so thank you very much indeed. But you see things from a slightly different perspective than say a writer. You're in the business of actually seeing wine in the presence of its consumption and your clientele is probably more international than local.

FR Thank you Michael. It's been a pleasure. It's in particular interesting because I had to see both sides as a judge and it's still overwhelmingly South African wines that we taste so the calibration opportunity is of huge advantage to everybody. I do however have the advantage of, pretty much six nights out of seven, hosting a wholly international group of people and showing and showcasing the best of South Africa. That as a learning opportunity is pretty unique and very special and something I treasure greatly, because it's an interplay and a combination of what we're proud of and noting and utilizing the information coming back.

This was an opportunity of seeing the very best of what the country has to offer and is particularly useful, because you can get that immediate overview. Some of the classes – for example Monday with Sauvignon Blanc – some of the time needed to get through the wines was because of that standard being much higher. One thing that came through to me in comparison with some of the

other classes is that Sauvignon can be unforgiving if you don't really pay attention in the vineyard and of course you need to spend the time in the cellar. But that's just the nurturing component.

There is, however, still a significant need to put that into place in some of the other wines, where there is perhaps a thought process that there's a little more forgiveness on which day you pick, what balling level you pick and how much or how little oak you use. Sauvignon Blanc's not going to allow that and if we keep moving the same goal into those wines, it can only be an opportunity to keep raising the game.

Thanks very much.

MF Thank you. Everyone has I'm sure got questions. I have two panelists I haven't asked. Ginette, will you take this and that does leave Neal having to think of all the things he was going to say that have been said by people before.

GdF There is a risk of repeating so I'll try and keep it brief. The first time I was asked to judge I felt really privileged to be asked. It's a competition that is arduous – like running a Triathlon or a decathlon in my opinion. It demands intense concentration and professionalism so I'm very pleased to have been serving on this competition for a number of years and I think one of the benefits of our industry for local judges is that we get to work with some of the top judges in the country which is always a learning experience and also with international judges. Sometimes it's a wake-up call working with Sam Harrop and his tough call on faults was very informative for me. Each year one gains a different perspective, which can only feed into the work we do locally and help the feedback we can give producers and members of the trade that can benefit all of us going forward.

I chaired the Cabernet Franc and Cabernet Sauvignon panel. A lot has been said. One of the things not mentioned was the concern - there are very few chancers in this competition. The industry takes it seriously and the best wines are put forward, but to have a 10.5gm/litre Cabernet Sauvignon entered was a surprise. I think it's out of place. If that's what going to get that wine some attention I feel rather sad. Cabernet Franc I judged two years ago. What was encouraging was to see the increase in the number of entries and their increase in standard. The same goes for Pinot Noir which is my personal love. What I would like to say there, particularly because there's an increase in interest amongst consumers in its production – an increased number of entries here – is that we need to keep that bar raised all the time. It is visible in the last two years, particularly for me as a pinophile is the intriguing ethereal quality rather than obvious fruit. I think that is something I would like to see us pursuing, rather than just relying again on very ripe fruit which might woo initially, but takes away the real class of Pinot.

What was disappointing for me was Port. I was very sad for Thierry as an international judge to have a small number of Ports with a standard which, on the whole, was not up to scratch for what I believe our country can produce. I'm surprised there weren't more entries. When you've got two in a

particular class of Port which are faulty it's soul-destroying because this is the opportunity for an international judge to see how well we can do. I felt sad for that class. I would encourage people to work hard in the quality and also submitting where possible top quality in the Port category where we've always praised ourselves, but it was a disappointment.

I've always loved Muscat and we were very proud to see a great response from international and local judges. I don't think there's much more to say. I personally don't like my Cabernet to taste like Shiraz either, or to detect Viognier in any red variety where I don't think it belongs. Mintiness in Pinotage crept in which is possible but not something I applaud. Although the quality of Pinotage has also improved and I found not too much coffee/mocha style, although that's a recognised style which has established itself, it wasn't increased over the last few years. Thanks Michael.

MF Ginette, thank you. And now the challenge, Neal, to which I'm hoping you're able to rise.

NM This is my first time to South Africa. Whenever I said to someone I was coming to South Africa the usual response was "I'm sorry to hear that" or "What did you do wrong?" I'm please to say that now I can say you have to start re-thinking about South African wine because I think there's a lot of undiscovered gems here which really need to get around the world, go to the important critics, get into the top restaurants and go to people that think about the wine and don't just go for the cheapest brand in the supermarket. I think there's a lot I've discovered here that I'd really like to see spread around the world. Hopefully I'll play my role in doing that.

Regarding some of the categories I covered, the Chardonnay – that was probably the most pleasing category for me. The two golds we found I felt were absolutely world class and they stood out a mile. I just had to smell it to know that's going to be a fantastic Chardonnay. It raised the bar and raised my expectations of what South African Chardonnay can achieve. The one thing I would say is don't forget Chardonnay tastes delicious. There's a tendency to go towards aromatic varieties and those have their place, but don't forget it tastes delicious and is easy to sell. Everybody loves it. That can be a real strong point for South Africa.

The Shiraz blend was a really interesting class for me with a wide variety of styles and made me think that maybe Grenache is a grape that could find a real home in South Africa and could be exploited more with the climate. That could be a really promising opportunity in the future.

With regard to the Bordeaux blends I come from a Bordeaux background so I wasn't comparing it to the first growths I was tasting a month ago in Bordeaux. Fortunately the South African wines don't cost as much as a Bordeaux First Growth. The one thing I would say is I was looking for a little more freshness on the finish, a little more precision. Always a big thing for me is wanting to take another sip – that's a crucial thing for me. Sometimes in a show environment, where you just have a small measure, you can be seduced and I always when I taste it ask myself if I could share a bottle of that wine with my wife and enjoy it from the first sip down to the end. I think that's a very

important. So some of those Bordeaux blends gave me the fruit but I just wanted a little less residual sugar, a little more dryness just on the finish just to make me want to keep drinking.

Corks – at the moment I get a lot of samples sent to my home from South Africa and I spend half my day trying to open corks on cheap South African white wine. Look at New Zealand – they've gone towards screwcaps. It's great. Don't be frightened of screwcaps. Consumers say at the beginning they want their wine with cork, but as soon as they start using screwcaps and the wines aren't corked and are reliable, I think it's a very good thing. Definitely for the white wines go screwcap.

Pinotage – I made this analogy last night. South Africans love Pinotage like English love fish and chips and we know that fish and chips is never going to be the top sashimi in Japan but we still love it and we're still proud of it and we'll always keep eating it. Just like Pinotage maybe it's never going to be a Chateau Latour, but certainly there is a definite improvement which is good to see and it's just a case of tackling the stigma that surrounds Pinotage and that is a case of going to the producer who aren't making good Pinotage, giving them a slap on the wrist and telling them to sort it out.

That's all I have to say. Thank you very much.

MF Neal, thanks very much. You see there's always something to be said when everyone thought they'd deprived Neal of comments for the panel line-up. We have a room full of people. I hope that at one level we've been thought-provoking rather than definitive in answers, so this is a really good time to field some questions and we'll taken questions, comments and interrogation from the floor.

Q There has been a school of thought in South Africa for some time that in a way we're kind of relieved that not enough attention has been focused on South African wine because it's given us time to sort ourselves out, but having listened to the comments my question is your perspective – I know you have tasted quite extensively Neal before you actually came out to South Africa – what is the role going forward for South African wine?

NM I think it's probably a really good time to do a really good report on South Africa – and it has to be done now I think, because everything's changing, its very dynamic and there's nothing that gives me more pleasure than finding great wines in places where I think South Africa doesn't get the credit it deserves internationally. The great thing about this competition is the strictness. It has to be a great wine. There's enough good wines here for me to have a really strict criteria and say e.g. if Bordeaux become too expensive for you, consider a lot of really great South African Bordeaux blends. Having said that one thing I will say is just be careful price – it's an international market, it's extremely competitive, so just because you have a great flagship wine, look at what's happening around the world. They are your competitors and somebody going in can choose a great Bordeaux blend from Hawkes Bay or go Chilean, so just bear that in mind. I think it's a great time for a report.

MF More questions?

- Q** What was the panel's feeling as regards to the coffee Pinotage.
- CE** Ginette mentioned that she thought there wasn't too much of it in evidence. I certainly encountered a few examples that I thought had exaggerated coffee/ chocolate flavours and quite frankly we chucked them right out. It's spooky wine and has no place in a competition like this.
- MF** Maybe it's worth a quick review of how the scoring works: 60-69 is good commercial wine. So when Christian says they were chucked out, it means they landed up in that category.
- CE** They're not faulty so they're not going to be reflected as faulty, but they're certainly not going to win a medal. What I would say, having done Shiraz as well, this coffee/mocha thing is not confined to Pinotage. If you think that's the way to gain market share at the top end you're deluding yourselves. I concede you have every right to make that style at a commercial end of the market but it ain't going to cut it at the top end. It's exaggerated, it's contrived. It really doesn't have a place at the top end of the market.
- NM** I just wanted to say I agree with Christian. If I want to go out and say South Africa is making world-class wines and there's the coffee thing going on at the same time, it tarnishes the image of what's happening here. I agree people have to make money and if people want to drink that style that's great, but you need to think from the marketing perspective of differentiating that style with the pure South African wines.
- COMMENT FROM FLOOR:** I think it's a question of where the focus is because in some of the big retailers there's definitely a place in the South African market for the coffee/chocolate style. We have a huge emerging market which is not been that exposed to wine and this has been a very good vehicle for bringing that part of the market into an introduction to wine.
- NM** Just remember what happened in Germany with Liebfraumilch.
- Q** I ask a question for Debra on how valuable social media will be in Asia to help promote South African wine and if anyone would like to answer as far as the UK and France goes as well, but with Asia having a very different culture from ours is this an important part of it.
- DEBRA** I think it's a wonderful question as I happen to love social media. It's a great way of connecting people around the world and I think it can have unexpected consequences. It's surprising the reach already with linked in Twitter, Facebook etc. I think the challenge in Asian with digital and social media is that China has a fairly restrictive policy so we are not allowed to use Twitter in China – we can in Hong Kong, we're not allowed to use Facebook and we're not allowed to use YouTube with some limitations. You can get them in the hotels in some of the international spaces, but the average

person does not have access. But they have their own systems and I think the advantage of that if you on one of the top social media spaces you will be quite unique. I don't think the rest of the world has tackled it yet. Your challenge is it's all in Chinese. One of my concerns about that is that it's somewhat limiting for China because it's difficult to engage in international discussion. In Hong Kong Facebook has taken off, in fact we're less active on Twitter than we are on Facebook. I also think there's an opportunity there to get the labels out into our market place. But if you don't mind may I speak a little bit about Asia in general.

I have of course been thinking about where is South Africa's place in Asia and in fact there isn't much of South Africa in Asia yet. I actually think that's a good thing because I think the quality of the wine has improved such that there's a real place for you in Asia. It's definitely not Nirvana, it's not an easy market. I presume you've heard we're the largest wine auction market in the world, but we're not an easy market yet. Some of my advice would be to carve out a name. I was thinking about the contradiction of Asia being a Red Wine World, so this is probably conflicting for us, but no-one has really carried out the Chenin space in the world and you're the closest thing – other than the Loire – to making that happen. Although we don't actually drink much white wine, it actually goes with our food so we should be.

So I would suggest that the region put out some hooks, some real ways to identify and I think make an impression. What's always interesting to me is that the UK has always viewed on the whole South Africa as a supplier of inexpensive wine. We don't have that impression in Asia – we don't really know. I think there's a real opportunity to go in and make a high impression of South African wine. You have some team mates out there – me, Simon Tam, Greg De'eb who's a former Consul General of South Africa who moved into the largest storage business in Asia, so he's a real fan as well. What I'd love to see is a real road show of top class producers.

I think one of the issues I'm seeing judging around the world is a lot of the winemakers entering the wine shows are entering your low-end wines. I just judged in London for two weeks and I said "Come on South Africa - where are your wines?", because what I was tasting is not what I've tasted this week. So I would say be careful not to let your low-end producers create an impression for you around the world. Push your high-end people to get out – they're your rock stars – give them a lot of support and encouragement. I know sometimes there's some tension in wine industries. For the health of the industry get those ten people together and get them on a roadshow.

Lastly I just want to say if you are considering the Asian markets – I notice you're all calling it the Far East – we call it Asia. It's a very interesting, exciting market but for people intending to go in, go in with your eyes wide open. Look for people who will really support your brand, support the quality of South Africa. Please do not make the mistake California did which was to go in with some low-end global brands and they lost it, because they have such a nice domestic market they never thought to export their top goods. So please get your top goods into our markets now.

MF I'm just going to add one thing. I've spent quite a lot of time in Asia and my own experience is that South African wines are often priced above what we think are the international icons. You'll see South African Sauvignon Blanc is more expensive than Cloudy Bay in Hong Kong, which means that the market hasn't yet been driven to the trap that we now find ourselves in in the UK. I think that's very important advice for producers. Inaccessibility can be dealt with. We talk about having to communicate in Chinese. I think I am a wine writer in Chinese, because I correspond regularly for one of the Chinese publications. It comes under my byline but I have no idea what it actually says. The point is it can be done. In other words instead of saying this is very difficult and what are people really saying about me, go out there, contract with the people who can do it, because it's a market that really does offer opportunity, without the stratification that has already been imposed in many of the markets that appeared to us to be more accessible.

Fiona you have another question.

FMD Michael, this question's for you. You started off by saying how well the museum class has done. Is there not a risk - looking back at the last ten to fifteen years – and seeing the change that South African wine has undergone that we are now looking back at South African wines and saying look how nice these are, look at how well they age and we have gone through that. Have we not changed the message?

MF You can ask Neal to answer that for the reason. He was part of that tasting on Sunday and put up a suggestion that I think is one that the industry has decided to take on. We had some museum class wines we were judging, but you saw the really older wines on Sunday.

NM When I got here I arrived, watched the football and went to this tasting of very old South African wines that were unique because they're so rare. I have to say when we had the '61 Pinotage it completely blew me away. It was as exciting as any extremely expensive wine I've had because it completely changed my perception and opened my mind. The month before I'd tasted half a dozen '61 Bordeaux and it was just as enjoyable, if not more so than those. We had a half bottle of '59 Zonnebloem. One of the things that was interesting was that a couple of people said where did we lose our way. If we can make that in '61 why are we getting such bad press now, which I thought was really interesting. The winemakers were asking themselves how does that Pinotage age for 50 years and still taste so fresh. It was delicious. I think it's important for South Africa to be considered to be a real world-class producing country, to have wines that do age is important. In the minds of the connoisseurs they're not looking for wine that tastes nice for two years and then just falls apart.

TD I think tasting old wines it's very important to understand the ability of a wine region to produce great wines. I was impressed too by the tasting of Sunday and this '59 was absolutely wonderful. So I think you have to present a lot of old wines in these kinds of events or in a roadshow and it's important.

MF Thank you Thierry. I've got an eye on the clock.

- Q** The question is if that is the history what do we do now about that perspective.
- GJ** What is interesting is that wines that are entered now in the museum class clearly have been given much more rigorous attention before being submitted and it's nothing to say we didn't make very good wine, but it was a very small percentage. What we've done is raised the overall game and from a property where we specialize in maturing wines, the key is you must trust your taste and keep that rigor. So just because it's old it doesn't make it good.
- MF** I have to say without trying to give the game away on results which I've only just had a chance to see because as the Chairman I have a casting vote at the trophy judging, so I'm kept in the dark until after the trophy judging. At least one of the museum class wines of today's museum class won a trophy and was a gold medal winner three, four or five years ago on this show, which shows that that wine was well judged at the time and came back with what it takes to get a museum class score.

With the clock running, I firstly wanted to say thank you to everybody. Thank you to the producers who not only are here today, but the producers who see fit to participate in the show because it does bring together what we are doing in South Africa and puts it under a spotlight that is both local and international.

Thank you to Old Mutual without whose support this show could never take place. To the event partners and these are extensive but include American Express, Wine Magazine, Grand Roche, British Airways – all these people really do contribute not simply their brand to one of the many logos that appear somewhere in the document, but to how the show comes together.

To Celia Gillaway, Kate and the team who manage to make sure that the logistics run smoothly, to Janice and Alex from OutSorceress and Michael Crossley – all of whom in a sense manage not just the communication with you, but more importantly, manage me.

To the judges and to the Associate Judges who come along and put themselves through an exhausting and demanding process in the interests, not of gratifying their egos, but of producing a result that we're all willing to stand behind. Thank you very much.

One important thought about results – there is more than just gold medals to a show. In other words it's worth mining into the silvers and even into the bronzes to see who's doing what in the industry and what they're doing well at. Secondly, a thought that is equally important is that in a sense a show is a talent-scouting expedition. You would expect to find a couple of new names there because it's a dynamic industry. There are 50-80 new producers coming into the industry every year and over time that changes the top ranking of an industry and a show should reflect the newcomers who are getting it right and who produce a result. By the same token, because it's not a fashion industry in the end what produces good wine is place, rigor and method and the people who have been able to

produce those wines should be there with the museum class winners and should be there pretty much year in and year out – and if there are sufficient of them they contribute credibility to the overall result. But if there are only the familiar names then we are not dynamic enough, we are not ringing the changes that are taking place. Having seen those results it was a really nice balance between the dynamism of the newcomers and the certainties that have come with the established names.

So that's something to look forward to when the results are announced on 1 June. They'll be up on the website mid-afternoon of that day.

Thank you all very much for joining us and we look forward to seeing the tweets including the snakes and the spiders that inevitably emerge in the course of a judging in deepest darkest Africa.

ENDS.