

South Africa's rare wines score again

The highlight of the 37th Nederburg Auction, held in Paarl on 16-17 September 2011, was the record R68 000 paid for a single case of 6 x 750 ml bottles of Monis Collectors Port 1948 (R11 333 per bottle), again scooped up by Nigerian businessman and importer of wine, Obi Josephat Ndibe.



According to auction organisers, there is a new appreciation for the old and scarce South African red and fortified wines, like the 1948 Monis Port. This has led to an overall increase in prices achieved for both these categories. In particular overseas buyers showed a renewed interest in South African wines and were responsible for 46% of overall wine sales, up from the 30% fetched last year.

Once again there has been a healthy increase in the average price paid for wines at the auction this year, with a 30% increase to R1 985 per nine-litre case (2010 - R1 506). Top buyers were Checkers, followed by Spar and Metro Cash & Carry from Germany.

For the first time in a number of years, five overseas buyers in the top ten category contributed 27% towards the purchase of wines. Top spots were taken by international buyers Metro Cash & Carry from Germany, Fleming International from India, Rayan Investments from Angola, and Hotel Pension Palmquell from Namibia.

From a local perspective, South African supermarket groups have once again dominated the local portfolio of buyers, taking 26% of the sales directly to the consumers. Checkers took the number one position this year, with 10% of total sales, equalling R611 000, followed by the combined purchases of the Spar group of R599 000. Makro and Pick 'n Pay, Woermann Brock from Namibia and Fana's Tavern from East London complete the top ten.

Apart from the top ten buyers accounting for 58% of the total sales, 24 foreign buyers were responsible for close to half of the total auction sales. Distell MD Jan Scannell, commented that the increase in foreign interest is the result of the company's footprint increasing globally and its aim to get South Africa's best wines into countries abroad. Carina Gous, Distell's business director of wines, commented that she was very pleased that there were no unsold lots at this year's auction, an indication of the high quality and keen interest in the wines on offer.

With the largest increase in prices this year amongst red wines, the average price shot up 43% to R2 166 per nine-litre case. The Private Collection item of Chateau Libertas 1961 (3 x 750ml - R6 666 per bottle) fetched the highest price of R20 000 per case. The high prices paid for very rare, old South African red wines highlighted the appreciation of these scarce, special wines, many of which are only available at the auction, in limited quantities. Other reds that fetched top prices included, Lanzerac Cabernet 1957, Chateau Libertas 1965, Lanzerac Pinotage 1961 and Zonnebloem Cabernet 1971.

The average price paid for a dry white wine was R1 200 per nine-litre case, with the top price paid for De Wetshof Finesse Chardonnay 2003 (R633 per bottle). Other top prices went to Uva Mira Single Vineyard Chardonnay 2004, De Wetshof Bateleur Chardonnay 2006 Magnums and Ataraxia Chardonnay 2007, a first-time participant.

Ports that fetched high prices were the KWV Ruby Port 1949, KWV White Port 1966 and Bredell's Vintage Port 1991. The average price paid for ports was R7 360.

The highest price paid for a Noble Late Harvest wine was R10 000 for 12 x 375ml of Nederburg Edelkeur 1979 (R833 per bottle). Other top prices went to Klein Constantia Vin de Constance 1998, De Wetshof Noble Late Harvest 1991 and Nederburg Edelkeur 1999. The average price for noble late harvest wine was R2 710 per nine-litre case.

The average price paid for Méthode Cap Classique was R2 417 per nine-litre case, with the top price paid for the Private Collection item of Graham Beck Brut MCC 1994 (R1 375 per magnum bottle). Other top prices went to J.C. Le Roux Pinot Noir MCC 1989 (magnums) and Pongrácz Desiderius 2001.

The average price for fortified wine was R2 018 per nine-litre case, with the highest price for a single bottle of KWV 1930 Muscadel, a whopping R6 500. Other fortifieds with high prices included the KWV Hanepoot Jerepigo 1969 and Monis Marsala 1983.

US-based wine blogger of the year, David White, guest speaker at this year's auction, highlighted the importance of social media in the marketing and promotion of wines in the future. He remarked, "The internet presents a remarkable opportunity to interact directly with the end-user. You can actually demonstrate a return on investment. If you engage online, you can point to a specific number of existing and potential consumers you identified and interacted with."

The charity sale on the day raised R183 100 for the beneficiaries, Goedgedacht Trust, the Pebbles Project Trust and the Anna Foundation. The highest price paid on the charity auction was for a single bottle of Échezeaux-H Du Villaine 1966, donated by Duimpie Bayly on behalf of the Distell Tabernacle Wine Collection and bought by Obi Ndibe of Nigeria for R31 000.

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