

2009 Sadie Family Columella

The 2009 Columella is a blend of Syrah and Mourvedre that is basket pressed and matured over twelve months in 225-liter and a 45-hectoliter foudre. Having tasted this last year, I found the nose to be initially reticent, but it unfurls to reveal very fragrant strawberry, rose petal and orange blossom aromas that are very discrete. The palate is medium-bodied with very fine tannins and it is certainly a less concentrated, muscular style of Columella than Eben Sadie produced in the past. It is feminine and refined with wonderful focus on the caressing finish. Drink now-2019+

You gotta love the eminence gris, the “Gandalf” of Swartland winemakers, Eben Sadie. Curiously, when I sat down with him at the Cape Show it was the first time we had met. He assured me that his samples had been safely despatched for my attention – the only problem being that he had sent them to the wrong side of the Atlantic. C’est la vie. Eben told me that he is withdrawing from his venture in Priorat so that he can focus entirely upon South Africa and that can only be a good thing for the country’s wine industry. Eben is a man full of principles and ideals that he is unafraid to see carried out in his wines, which in my opinion are aligning closer to hi...

- Neal Martin (December, 2012)

2007 Epicurean Wine Proprietary Red

I wanted to include the 2007 Proprietary Red from Epicurean simply because it is so blooming fine. A bit of background: it is a venture between four friends with financial and political backgrounds, one of whom, Mutle Mogase, happened to be at a private dinner I attended in Switzerland. The wines that evening were the calibre of Petrus ‘70 and Romanee-Conti ‘97, so serving blind his South African was a risk?but one worth taking. A very limited Bordeaux blend raised in French oak barriques in the cellars of Rupert & Rothschild by winemaker Schalk-Willem Joubert, it has a sophisticated bouquet of blackberry, cedar and cassis that is very well defined and quite Old World in style. The palate is well balanced with crisp, very fine tannins and nicely judged acidity. It never explodes on the finish, but remains taut and linear with refreshing vitality and poise on the finish. I confess – I was as surprised as anyone when it was revealed as a South African red. Though not presently distributed in the United States, I hope a few cases will find their way over in the future.

No known US importer.

- Neal Martin (December, 2012)

2009 Mvemve Raats De Compostella

Raats told me that the 2009 MR de Compostella is made by the combination of 16 or 17 different batches from different terroirs that are all assessed completely blind. The Malbec, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Sauvignon all came with same score which is why they are equal components in the blend, which is: 25% Cabernet Franc, 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, 25% Malbec, 12.5% Petit Verdot and 12.5% Merlot and raised in new and used oak for 24 months. Is it a worthy follow-up to the 2008? You bet it is. Reticent at first, it unfurls like a burlesque dancer on a go-slow protest to reveal blackberry, fennel, warm gravel and a touch of mint that is beautifully defined. The palate is medium-bodied with fine, unimposing tannins that allow the crisp blackberry and wild strawberry fruit to really shine, while the finish has superb minerality and delineation. It is not quite as immediate as the 2008, but certainly it is one of South Africa’s finest wines and should repay considerable cellaring. Go seek and marvel. Drink 2014-2025.

I had never met Raats until I tapped him on the shoulder at the Cape Show and introduced myself with something along the lines of “I rather took a shine to your 2008 last year” (it received when one of my highest appraisal...

- Neal Martin (December, 2012)

2007 Vergelegen V

The 2007 "V" is a blend of 92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Merlot and 2% Cabernet Franc that is matured in oak for 24 months. It has a potent nose of tobacco, chestnut and dried herbs that need a little more fruit (or Merlot?) The palate is medium-bodied with a strong savoury, meaty entry that you might mistake for a Cabernet Franc with its bell pepper notes. It is well-defined on the dry, dusty finish, although once again I would have preferred a little more Merlot to render it less "aloof." Drink 2015-2025.

Vergelegen is one of South Africa's most reputed wineries and Andres van Rensburg one of its most opinionated and indeed, talented, winemaker. These are powerful South African wines packed full of flavor, but do not ignore some of the excellent whites that can get overlooked by the flagship labels.

Importer: 57 Main Street Imports, Garden City, NY; tel (516) 357-2070.

- Neal Martin (December, 2012)

2009 Vilafonte Series C

The 2009 Series C is a blend of 54% Cabernet Sauvignon, 27% Merlot, 11% Cabernet Franc and 8% Malbec aged in new oak for 23 months. It has a tighter bouquet than the Series M with blackberry, raspberry sauce and mint that refuses to unfurl in the glass, which is no problem as it maintains impressive clarity. The palate is medium-bodied with succulent tannins and wonderful harmony. It has a veneer of dark chocolate and vanilla, demonstrating great precision on the finish with a hint of cappuccino on the aftertaste. This is superb. Drink now-2020+

I have a lot of respect for the superlative Vilafonte wines, where Zelma Long is at the helm, and their pair of 2009s do not disappoint.

Importer: Broadbent Selections Inc; San Francisco, CA; Tel: (415) 931-1725.

- Neal Martin (December, 2012)

2009 Vilafonte Series M

The 2009 Series M, a blend of 46% Malbec, 32% Merlot, 21% Cabernet Sauvignon and 1% Cabernet Franc aged for 16 months in new and used oak, is taciturn at first and so leaving the glass to one side for ten minutes, I return to find a well defined bouquet with lovely scents of baked cherry, roasted chestnut, smoke and a touch of mint. The palate is medium-bodied with fine tannins and superb balance. It delivers intense black, dusky fruit without expending too much effort, coming across as refined and graceful. This is very well crafted. Drink 2013-2020+

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- Neal Martin (December, 2012)

2007 Waterford Estate The Jem

A total production of 30 barrels, the 2007 The Jem is a blend of 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Shiraz augmented by Malbec, Cabernet Franc and Mourvedre. It has a well-defined nose of blackberry, boysenberry, melted tar and tobacco: intense but broody. The palate is medium-bodied with fine but bold tannins that support layers of tobacco-infused black fruit. It has very fine focus with controlled acidity and an agreeable sense of aloofness towards the finish. This will age with style. Drink 2014-2024.

Importer: Wine & Food Associates Inc;
New York; NY; tel (917) 680-3500

- Neal Martin (December, 2012)

2009 Waterford Estate The Jem

The excellent 2009 The Jem is a very different blend of grape varieties compared to the 2007: just 36% Cabernet Sauvignon complemented by several varieties such as Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and even a dash of Barbera. It has offers an intense bouquet of raspberry, wild strawberry, Italian cured meat and thyme. The oak is well integrated and it shows a little more "punch" than the 2007. The palate is medium-bodied with lively tarry blackberry fruit and a ripe, undergrowth-tinged finish that nods to the Old World. This is very well crafted and perhaps a masterclass in blending, but it will needs bottle age. Drink 2015-2025.

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New York; NY; tel (917) 680-3500

- Neal Martin (December, 2012)