

Ep 51 Cap Classique: Traditional Method sparkling wines of So...

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SPEAKERS

Janina Doyle



Janina Doyle 00:07

Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier. So stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you.



Janina Doyle 00:31

Hello to you all and welcome to another episode of Eat Sleep Wine Repeat. Now, this episode is another one of my Q&A episodes and we're going to focus on Cap Classique. So this is the traditionally made sparkling wine of South Africa. So I've been talking a lot about these wines recently on my Instagram and on my blog. I genuinely think these are the best value sparkling wines of the world. And then when I got a question from Kate Porter, who said, What's the difference between MCC and Cap Classique? I figured right, it's time to do a full on podcast. So we're going to go through this wine category and then at the end, I'm going to go through some of my favourite tips for you to enjoy your sparkling wine at its fullest.



Janina Doyle 01:21

Now MCC stands for Methode Cap Classique. The South African winemakers have dropped the M recently so you will still see MCC written down or people talking about these wines as MCC. But we now are going to know these wines simply as Cap Classique. So, grab yourself a glass, we're going to pop down to one of only six floral kingdoms in the world. South African wine lands are known to be some of the most breath takingly beautiful places in the world. And because of all this fauna and flora, it makes sense that they are a massively sustainable winegrowing country with 95% of the South African wine industry certified. You will also find in the South African wine lands, some of the oldest viticultural soils in the world, we're talking 1000 million years old. And with all this beauty, and with all this history, they also manage to produce delicious fizz starting from about £10 a bottle. So I think it's time that we get stuck in.



Janina Doyle 02:28

So this year, in fact, the South African wine makers are celebrating 50 years of making Cap Classique. So want to tell you a little bit about the story and the history behind this wine. And it goes back to 1971. And we can give thanks to the Simonsig winery. So back as far as 1968 in fact, it was Frans Malan who created the first wine under the Simonsig label. Now at this point, most wineries or winemakers were part of cooperatives. But Simonsig was actually one of just five private producers. So they've definitely come a long way since then. The fact that they were producing wine under their own label already set them apart. However, Frans decided that wasn't not enough. His Son, in fact, tells the story of how Frans had a real thirst for travel and learning about the wines from around the world. And in fact, when his friends asked him about his travel, he would say "I cannot afford not to go". And so with that inquisitive mind in 1969, he set out on what would be a very important trip and one which included a visit to the Champagne region. Now he knew he wanted to do something very similar in South Africa. And so returned home with a plan. Now as you may already know, the three main grape varieties of champagne are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Well, the problem in South Africa at the time was there was zero access to Chardonnay, and hardly any plantings of Pinot Noir. So, Chenin Blanc which is the white grape variety of South Africa became the grape of choice. It's a pretty good grape variety to go with. Both Chardonnay and Chenin Blanc have very high acidity when you want that in a sparkling wine. In fact, Crémant de Loire, which is the traditional sparkling method that is made in the Loire Valley, also primarily uses the Chenin Blanc grape variety. There certainly are some similarities to Chardonnay. And they do share similar flavours. I can personally tell you doing blind tastings. I have mucked them up many a time and I shall do so in the future. But let me pause for a second actually tell you a little bit more about Chenin Blanc.



Janina Doyle 04:55

This is an incredibly versatile grape variety and in fact, one that can be dry, It can be super sweet, so it can be a dessert wine. Of course, we're now talking about Chenin Blanc in the capacity of a sparkling wine. So if you haven't tried many Chenin Blancs, now was the time to do it. A fruit flavour to look out for with Chenin Blanc is a bit of a bruised apple character. And sometimes it can even have a slight waxy nature. So along with that kind of apple and pear notes, you get sometimes a little camomile or a little honey or hay note, and also a little quince as well. Now about 50% of all the Chenin Blanc planted in the world comes from South Africa now. Now it originated in the Loire Valley. But if we compare 2020 figures in the Loire Valley, there is nearly 10,000 hectares planted, whereas in South Africa, there is more than 17,000 hectares and Chenin Blanc certainly is the number one white grape variety of South Africa, you'll often find it called Steen, which is what it was originally called when it was imported back in the 1600s.



Janina Doyle 06:08

Okay, well, that was a quick Chenin Blanc lesson, we should go back down memory lane and carry on talking about the history of Simonsig winery. So where were we? Right so, Frans set out making his traditional method sparkling wine with Chenin Blanc grapes, and he called it Kaapse Vonkel. This was his chosen name because he wasn't able to use the name Champagne. In Afrikaans Kaapse means Cape and Vonkel means sparkling. Now for 10 years, he was the only producer making this type of wine. And in fact, this was the most expensive wine being sold in the country. Every individual wine was sold in its own specific single box. Now in 1982, Frans' son Johan, who is still running the business today, with these renewed vigour to progress and develop this style of sparkling wine, he decided to create a base wine tasting, inviting some of the best and most talented winemakers to come along and share their enthusiasm, their knowledge, their techniques. So that included wine maker of Villiera, that's Jeff Grier, check him out. And also winemaker of Graham Beck. That's Pieter Ferreira. And there were many others. With this base wine tasting, it was the beginning of something very special. It now happens every single year, and is now known as the Cap Classique Producers Association. So this specific Association was formed officially in 1992. And by doing that, they eventually came to a decision as well that the official name of this wine should be Cap Classique. Now in that first year, they started with 14 members, and now they have 84 and are responsible for 90% of the delicious Cap Classique that we get to try every year. Now I already mentioned the winery Villiera do go and check them out. They actually were the first winery to really make Cap Classique on a more commercial scale. So they started in the early 1980s. And then the winery, Graham Beck, who quickly became leaders in this category after that first vintage in 1991. Do go and check out their cellarmaster Pieter Ferreira, also known as Mr. Bubbles. Now I normally do my winery of the week at the beginning of each episode, but you know, I'm mixing things up a little bit keeping you guys on your toes. So now let's go and see who my winery of the week is.



Janina Doyle 08:55

Okay, so no curveballs here. After telling you the story of Simonsig seeing as they started at all. They are my winery of the week and you already know a decent amount about their history. So Simonsig wine estate is named after the very beautiful Simonsberg mountain and that mountain and the winery is located in Stellenbosch, which is the most well known, most famous wine region of South Africa. Now, you already know what Frans Malan did in 1971, with the first Cap Classique wine. He was also one of the founding members of the first wine route in South Africa. So this is really an iconic winery, and they have history in fact, going back 300 years. Now the wine I'm going to try, I've tried already recently and spoken about it on my blog, but as I'm talking about the history of Cap Classique, it seems appropriate to crack open a bottle of the Kaapse Vonkel, the first

bottle of traditionally made sparkling wine in South Africa.



Janina Doyle 10:04

Right, I do love opening up as I record, you get the little pop. Whilst I'm doing that now, I'm taking off the cage. How is everybody with their health and safety for traditional method sparkling wines? Do you keep the cage on? Or do you take the cage completely off, and then do the cork? Now, if you said you kept the cage on, that is actually correct. For safety purposes, you should undo the cage. But keep your finger or your thumb on the top at all times. And then put your whole hand around that cork that has the cage on it, and then slowly turn the bottle, not the cork, and then it should come out all nicely and the whole idea is that the minute you take off that cage, all the pressure, five or six bars, typically with champagne, it will be six bars of pressure. And we sparkling wines in general, they have to be from three bars of pressure. But imagine all of that is built into the bottle. When you take off that cage. Sometimes the cork will literally just fly out and if you're looking down so also yeah, point away. Point it at someone you don't like. No, shh, I did not say that. So by keeping the cage on and having your finger on the top at all times, it means there is no opportunity for that cork to fly out. Okay, enough health and safety. Here we go. Twisting the bottom. Oh, beautiful and no spillages.



Janina Doyle 11:32

Now I'm drinking the Kaapse Vonkel, as I said, but the 2019 Brut. Now remember as well when you see Brut on the label that is referring to the amount of sugar within the wine. So that is anything from zero to 12 grams per litre of sugar. So this is a dry wine. Now the grapes that this sparkling wine are sourced from Elgin and Darling, both cool climate regions. So Darling is about seven miles from the ocean is also about 40 miles north from Cape Town. And so being close to that Atlantic Ocean, loads of breezes, loads of fog, it's ideal for cool climate varieties. There's lots of decomposed granitic soils that don't retain water, but that pushes the roots deeper, apparently up to about eight metres. There's lots of un-irrigated bush vines. Now it was actually considered part of Swartland until 2003, when it got its own WO, wine of origin. Elgin is also about 40 miles from Cape Town, but going east and 7.5 miles from the Atlantic Ocean. It's nestled between the Hottentots Holland Mountains. Actually this is what separates it from Stellenbosch. I'm not going to start talking about the soils of Elgin right now because there's a lot of them. However, the grapes sourced for this wine come from very limestone rich soils, and they are always picking when they're pretty rich. So that's the style they're going for. But this specific region Elgin is actually the coolest of all the cool climate regions. So of course, great for those cool climate varieties such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Now in this bottle, it's 50% Chardonnay, 49% Pinot Noir and 1% Pinot Meunier. Now there's no malolactic

fermentation, which is that process of turning the malic acids, the more higher, think like the type of acids you get in an apple, into dairy acids, the lactic acids which are creamier, that doesn't happen, so it keeps the acidity lovely and fresh. But the Chardonnay actually sees a little bit of time with seasoned French oak which can help with a bit of texture and obviously add a little to the aromas as well. Okay, so to the wine. It's very floral, as well as fruit driven. Lots of fresh green apples and a real lemon nature like a slight lemon merange edge, with lovely fresh white flowers. Maybe some honeysuckle in there as well. Really high intensity, it's aromatic, just really lively and vibrant. Soft on the palate, very biscuity, so not that kind of sweeter brioche notes you can get sometimes but more of like an actual digestive biscuit. The fruit again is very fresh. It's like a really sharp green apple. Very very crunchy fruit. Not too heavy, kind of medium medium minus body. Quite intense, zingy, like a lime zest bubbles, lovely mousse but it's quite mineral, almost there's a steeliness the softness or even quite a bit chalkiness on the palate. This is very zippy, very fresh, very lively, really approachable. And the nicest thing about it is £12.99. If you're in the UK, you can get it from Lea and Sandemans. It's such good value and of course something with beautiful history. Now, as you know, this is made in the traditional method, or as you could also say the Méthode champenoise. But let's talk a little bit more about that and their regulations a little bit further.



Janina Doyle 15:17

So as mentioned before, in other podcasts, the traditional method is having a second fermentation in bottle and the bubbles are created because the carbon dioxide which is a byproduct of fermentation becomes trapped in the bottle. Those yeasty biscuity flavours exist because the lees, the natural yeast that is within the wine remains within the bottle as well. And the longer the time on the lees, the more yeasty and the more bready the flavours can be. Now, those bubbles, the pressure, I already mentioned, needs to be at least three bars of pressure, although typically you're going to find five bars, or six bars, which is what they do in champagne. Now, just as a point of reference, a car tire tends to actually be around two and three bars of pressure. So there's a lot of bubbles trapped in your sparkling wine. Now the wine needs to be left on the lees for at least nine months. However, this specific month now June 2021, they are changing the legislation officially. And all wineries who are part of the Cap Classique Producers Association will need to be ageing their wines for a minimum of 12 months. So this is completely in line with the same requirements as champagne. Now the wineries can use any grape variety, there isn't a regulation however, recommended grape varieties are Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier. Although there's not much Pinot Meunier actually planted in South Africa. Now if you're wondering where the grapes are actually planted, the three most notable districts where they're coming out of would be Stellenbosch, Paarl, and Robertson. However, within the districts are much smaller, demarcated viticultural areas, and these are called Wards.

And there's well over 32 of these Wards which are all encompassed within the much larger Western Cape wine region. And this is the wine region that pretty much houses all of the wine regions that you've heard of. So districts such as Robertson and Stellenbosch and Wards such as Constanica which is right by Cape Town. Now I want to talk about vintages because typically if you were looking at champagne, a vintage on the bottle would probably suggest that it is a super premium wine. It's come from obviously only special selected years where the harvest was fantastic. It certainly is, in general a sign of quality. But actually with the Cap Classiques the vintages are very consistent in South Africa. So they don't necessarily have that requirement to look at blending vintages together to create that non vintage. Now winemaker of Simonsig, Johan Malan has said the vintage differences are actually rather subtle. So check out when you're buying a bottle of Cap Classique if it is vintage, because certainly South Africa is leading rather strongly with vintage based wines. Okay, so now you know a little bit more about these delicious sparkling wines coming out of South Africa. they genuinely are beautiful quality wines at such affordable prices. So grab yourself a bottle, I want to cover some of my favourite tips so you can enjoy your fizz to its fullest.



Janina Doyle 18:42

Now, some of you may be saying, well what is leftover sparkling wine, but should you not be able to consume a full bottle in one go. Getting yourself a champagne stopper is a super important piece of kit that will allow your sparkling wine to stay fizzy for at least three days and in many cases up to five whole days. Now they typically come with like the silicon seal that will go in the bottle when it clips on. So therefore it's nice and tight. None of the bubbles are going to pop and force that stopper out. Now you can get some pretty good ones for about £10. However, if you're looking for something a little fancier with a tighter seal, in fact, what they call a WAF patented seal, which is an Italian design, they run around the price point of £20, so still not too much of an outlay. Now in terms of storing your wine, you want to store your sparkling wine just like you would a normal bottle of wine, as in lying down. And that's because if you have that bottle of sparkling wine for long enough, if the liquid is not in contact with the cork, the cork will start drying out and at that point, oxygen can get in and the wine can be damaged. The same goes for storing the wine in the fridge for too long. So it can handle a certain amount of time, but there's no humidity in that fridge and that can dry out your cork as well. Now we talk about the fridge. Definitely in terms of temperature, you want your sparkling wine to be cold, however, not too cold, everyone will have their own preference point. But I like to have my sparkling wines around 8 to 10 degrees Celsius. And if you're having a vintage wine that's been aged for four or five years, and maybe you're drinking it much later on, and it's a richer style, you may find it's even better at 12 degrees, at 13 degrees, so don't be scared to leave it out of the fridge for a decent amount of time. Now I've mentioned in

other episodes, the wine glass. Now I know that we love the traditional flute glass that makes us feel like we're celebrating more, however, because it is so long and thin, you don't get the most of the aromas. So if you're willing, the best thing you can do is find a white wine glass, a wider glass is better for smelling more and getting more out of your sparkling wine. Now the last tip is actually about getting the most bubbles out of your glass. Now would you believe a squeaky clean glass is actually not so good for it. So interestingly enough particles of dust on your glass will in fact, add to the effervescence of your sparkling wine. Basically, the simple science of it is that the bubbles need somewhere to kick off from. Now obviously, I don't think any of us really want to be drinking out of dirty glasses. But on the other side, first of all, make sure that you do not have any washing up liquid left in the glass. And actually the best thing to do to make sure your glass is not as I said squeaky clean, is to give it a little bit of a rinse with either your sparkling wine or if you have another wine lying around, give it a little bit of seasoning, pour it out and then pour your proper glass of sparkling wine and you will have beautiful bubbles running from the bottom of the glass upwards, rather than you taking a sip and then feeling that explosion in your mouth. So there you go.



Janina Doyle 22:27

So for my wine quote of the day, sadly, I was not able to find any specifically for Cap Classique. But of course we know there are many for champagne. So I thought I would mention one of the most famous champagne quotes, but also take the opportunity to debunk the myth, if you don't already know. So, the famous quote by Dom Perignon is:



Janina Doyle 22:50

"Come quickly. I'm tasting the stars."



Janina Doyle 22:53

Now, interestingly enough, that quote specifically was used in the advertisements for champagne going back to the 1880s. But before that, there's absolutely no information where this quote came from. Now in theory Dom Pierre Perignon, who was a French monk, who did turn into a very capable cellar master in the Champagne region, and he supposedly created champagne in 1693. Now the truth is quite amusing, because he did not like the bubbles. In fact, his task was to try and find ways to get rid of the bubbles because so many of the wines were exploding because at this point the glass wasn't tough enough. However, it is documented directly after his death, certain viticultural and winemaking methods that he pioneered, things that we would think quite normal today such as pruning, specifically to reduce yield so you get far more concentration in the

grapes. And also the very careful handling of the grapes making sure you don't break the skins so they don't oxygenize, and finding ways to press the grapes very gently, so they have much less skin contact. And that was a big change in Champagne because before him, all the wines tended to be red. So he was able to take red grapes and produce clear liquid, so a white wine and without the tannins, something that we are doing now with our Pinot Noir and our Pinot Meunier. He was also responsible for importing the much stronger glass bottles that were invented in England, invented by Christopher Merret, and he brought them across to Champagne, which of course has contributed massively to the development of Champagne. And of course, then the other traditional method sparkling wines around the world, just like Cap Classique.



Janina Doyle 24:46

Okay, well I hope if you're not a Cap Classique fan already, you certainly are now. They're so affordable and so delicious so go and grab yourself a bottle. Thank you as always for listening. If you have not subscribed on whichever app you're listening to please do that now. Especially if you're listening through apple, leave me a comment. That is the best way to make the podcast more discoverable. And I will be really grateful if you're able to leave just a little simple comment and possibly a few stars. Share the podcast everywhere, do like it if you can. And if you want to get in touch with me directly, don't forget you can send me an email: janina@eatsleepwinerepeat.co.uk or direct message me on instagram which is [@eatsleep_winerepeat](https://www.instagram.com/eatsleep_winerepeat). And until another episode. Cheers to you