

Six South African chenin blancs that showcase the grape's dramatic range

CHRISTOPHER WATERS

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED 3 HOURS AGOUPDATED JUNE 9, 2021



Chenin vineyard of Ken Forrester wines. South Africa is home to the most plantings of chenin blanc in the world.

Back in 2013, winemakers in Oregon launched #DrinkChenin Day to raise awareness for a grape that's often overshadowed by the likes of chardonnay and sauvignon blanc. It didn't take long for producers in South Africa to join the party. After all, they consider chenin blanc to be one of their signature grapes.

South Africa is home to the most plantings of chenin blanc in the world. Historically the grape was a workhorse variety that was used to make the base wine for brandy distillation and add acidity into blended wines. It also made semisweet white wines for local consumption. Today's range of South African chenin offers everything from fresh and fruity to richer oaked styles, from enjoyable sparkling to lusciously sweet wines.

#DrinkChenin Day is set for June 18. For anyone who wants to join in the celebration, here are six examples that showcase the dramatic range on offer. Many provinces have a few value-priced chenin blancs available, such as the KWV Vincerfter and Bellingham's Old Orchard labels, with select premium products available in more limited releases. Some terrific examples are also available directly from wine agents, including two of this week's recommendations.



South African chenin offers everything from fresh and fruity to richer oaked styles.

Boschendal The Pavillion Chenin Blanc 2020 (South Africa), \$12

RATING OUT OF 100

87

A large production wine that blends chenin blanc grown in various regions through South Africa, The Pavillion is a dry and refreshing white that shows a greener expression of the variety. The flavours present a mix of tangy and tart fruit with some herbal notes that make for a different style compared to the honeyed and tropical chenin blancs on the market. To my taste, this is a solid house wine candidate to enjoy with or without a

meal. Available in Ontario at the above price, \$15.98 in British Columbia, \$10.65 in Quebec, \$15.99 in Prince Edward Island.

Bruce Jack Chenin Blanc 2020 (South Africa), \$13.95

RATING OUT OF 100

87

Winemaker Bruce Jack continues to produce a range of quality wines from South Africa across a number of labels and at a variety of price points. This affordable selection puts the emphasis on chenin's crowdpleasing nature, with attractive spiced apple and honey aromas and peaches and cream notes on the palate. The result is an easy-to-appreciate bottle with that style that's well suited to sunny evenings or summer barbecues. Drink now to 2023. Available in Ontario at the above price, \$16.99 in New Brunswick, \$15.99 in Nova Scotia, \$15.14 in Newfoundland.

Beaumont Family Wines Chenin Blanc 2020 (South Africa), \$20.95

RATING OUT OF 100

90

Beaumont is a family-run farm and winery located in Bot River, a region nestled between Elgin and Hemel-en-Aarde, which has been overseen by second-generation winemaker Sebastian Beaumont since 2004. Drought conditions in 2020 forced the winery to buy fruit from outside of Bot River for the first time, but this remains very much in line with the pure and precise house style. It's a fresh and flavourful expression of chenin blanc that offers attractive tangy fruit flavours as part of its easy drinking personality. Drink now to 2025. Available in Ontario sold as a 12-bottle case, direct from The Small Winemakers through smallwinemakers.ca.

Ken Forrester Old Vine Chenin Blanc Reserve 2019 (South Africa), \$17.95

RATING OUT OF 100

91

Made with grapes from a vineyard planted in 1974 in Stellenbosch, with half of the blend fermented in barrel for added weight and complexity, Ken Forrester's chenin blanc continues to rank as one South Africa's best-known labels. The flavours are richer, with honey, spice and dried fruit notes that are concentrated and complex. Drink now to 2026. Priced at \$21.99 in British Columbia, various prices in Alberta, \$18 in Quebec, \$17.95 in Ontario upon release as part of the June 26 Vintages release.

Mullineux Kloof Street Chenin Blanc 2020 (South Africa), \$21.55

RATING OUT OF 100

90

Kloof Street is the entry level label from winemakers Chris and Andrea Mullineux and is always a reference point for the rich and refreshing personality of chenin blanc from South Africa's Swartland region. Full of life and flavour, this offers honey and floral accents to the pleasing peach and pear notes. Vegan friendly. Drink now to 2023. Available in Quebec at the above price, \$22.95 in Ontario, sold as a 12-bottle case, direct from Nicholas Pearce through npwines.com.

Robertson Winery Chenin Blanc 2020 (South Africa), \$10

RATING OUT OF 100

87

Made with chenin blanc grapes grown in the Robertson Valley, some 160 kilometres east of Cape Town, this is a soft and fruity white wine with honey, apple and herbal notes. It's a consistently juicy and enjoyable white that is pleasing to both palate and pocketbook. Drink now to 2022. Available in Ontario at the above price, \$11.99 in British Columbia, \$9.95 in Quebec.