

Ataraxia Sauvignon Blanc 2006 Western Cape

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The Kiwis are busy talking up their 2007 vintage so Sauvignon Blanc lovers should look out for Marlborough's best offerings from this year, which should start to arrive in the northern hemisphere just as summer starts to fade. To keep you going, however, think seriously about South African Sauvignon Blanc.

It's different from the NZ version – less strident and pungent, generally less sweet in overall impression and often with a bit more minerality and complexity. I shall be writing this Saturday about some of South Africa's best white wines and this recommendation is by way of an aperitif. It's from a very new but very promising outfit established only in 2004 by Kevin Grant, ex winemaker at Hamilton Russell. He is also based in the cool, marine climate of Walker Bay and put his first vines into the ground only in 2005. He does not expect to be self sufficient in fruit until 2010 or 2011 at the earliest so at the moment is making wine from carefully-scouted vines belonging to others. This **Ataraxia Sauvignon Blanc 2006 Western Cape**, only his second vintage, comes mainly from a neighbour in the Hemel- en- Aarde valley in the hinterland of Hermanus, with a bit of fruit from the upper Helderberg from a Stellenbosch grower who used to supply Rustenberg's Brampton label.



The result is a remarkably complex 13 per cent wine with a very fine, mineral nose with a really lovely, palate-caressing texture and completeness. It's rewarding on the nose – aromatic but with several keynotes rather than one, and also has notable persistence. It's far from the cheapest South African Sauvignon Blanc but perhaps the way out of Cape wine's woes is to make more of these arresting, obviously top quality whites and start charging a fair price for them. (Pause while I dismount from this particular hobby horse.)

I was also impressed by **Ataraxia Chardonnay 2005 Western Cape**, which apparently comes from the only ungrafted commercial vineyard in South Africa, 1,000m up in the Agter Witzenberg Valley's apple country well north of Paarl. This wine, a 14 per center, is still very tight, but shows every inclination to develop impressively. It is almost defiantly dry and concentrated. I'd love to see it in three years time – and there aren't many Chardonnays anywhere one can say that about.



As you can see, the bottles look pretty smart. The name, as you knew, is Greek for 'emotional tranquillity', and Kevin Grant (pictured here) is obviously doing a great job. I have only one beef. The labels say 'A Kevin Grant wine' just like some movies start with many a frame telling us 'A Jancis Robinson motion picture'. I think if you've come up with a thoroughly satisfactory name for your winery then perhaps you should just leave it at that. (It may of course be a Kevin thing; see Kevin Arnold Shiraz at the estimable Waterford Estate.)

The Sauvignon Blanc can be found for £12.95 at Jeroboams shops in London and at £13.99 from Wines of the World, 549 Garratt Lane, Earlsfield, London SW18 and also in Clapham Old Town. See www.winesoftheworld.co.uk. Also available from Planet of the Grapes in London WC1 and Winter Hill Wines, Cheshire. You can buy it for a fraction of this in South Africa of course (see winesearcher.com) or you can order it at 18.95 euros a bottle from www.ewine.co.za, a South African specialist in Germany who will deliver throughout Europe. Grant also exports to the US and Sweden. The wines are also imported by Leucadia Cellar of San Francisco (qvvermault@leucadia-sf.com) and Vinites of Holland (keesjan@vinites.com).

Both these wines have sufficient acidity and sufficient structure to be suitable for drinking both with and without food, though the former would be preferable I think. The Sauvignon reminds me very slightly of a racier version of [Dog Point](#).

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