

## Warwick Estate, The First Lady 2007 Western Cape

29 Sep 2009 by Jancis Robinson

From 55.56 Rand, £6.95, €7.47, \$15.98 and 15.75 Swiss francs.

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This week's wine is available in the UK, the US, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, Belgium and South Africa, so it must be made in a fair old quantity. But if you're in Britain and can get your hands on **Warwick Estate, The First Lady 2007 Western Cape** before this Saturday 3 Oct, you will have yourself one of the great red wine bargains of all time. To celebrate the famous (and pictured) Norma Ratcliffe's 25 years as winemaker at the renowned Warwick Estate in South Africa, this wine is being offered by both Waitrose and The Wine Society in the UK at £6.99 and £6.95 respectively. After that it reverts to its regular full price of £9.99 and £7.95 respectively (an intriguing disparity there).

I tasted this latest vintage last week as part of these [Wine Society lasting notes](#), without knowing about this special offer, and couldn't get over the value offered even at the full price of £7.95. It's based on Cabernet Sauvignon that is delightfully ripe, without any hint of the greenness that can dog some South African Cabernets, and is so much subtler than most of its peers. It sees no new oak, which may be an advantage for a wine deliberately made to be drunk at two to three years old. The wine was aged for 15 months in second- and third-fill barrels, and racked three times during this barrel ageing. I loved the resulting gentle texture and complete wash over the palate. Its certainly soft but not sickly sweet, and the 13.9% alcohol is well hidden.

So this is a great way to toast someone who has done a great deal for modern Cape wine, on a beautiful farm with lovely garden where I remember her entertaining me for a (two) ladies lunch many years ago. Her son Mike is now running the commercial side of the business, so perhaps this bottling was his idea. If so, *chapeau*. It would be great to see a few more South African wine producers making this easy style of red instead of trying to emulate a first growth with every attempt.

Half of the fruit for this wine was grown on Warwick Estate apparently and half bought in, mainly also from Stellenbosch but because there is a tiny proportion from outside Stellenbosch, it has to carry the not-very-informative Wine of Origin Western Cape. (I would love to see this 100% rule relaxed for South Africa as I think it would be much more useful for consumers to know where, say, 90 or 85% of the fruit came from and in practice a tiresomely high proportion of all South African wines have to be labelled either Western Cape or Coastal.)

The Wine Society is offering all its members who buy this wine (or any of the other three Warwick Estate wines in the current offer) a chance to enter a draw to win a six-bottle case of Norma Ratcliffe's 'milestone' wines – older vintages which are no longer commercially available – with a total estimated value of £400.

Go ye and enjoy it. It's one of those (relatively rare, good) red wines that could happily be sipped without food yet would be fine with a bowl of pasta or chicken.

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