

Sutherland Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Elgin

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I am a great fan of South African whites. South Africans seem to prefer their reds, perhaps partly because there used to be a national shortage of dark-skinned grapes but what I really appreciate is the freshness and natural crispness of South Africa's Sauvignons and Chardonnays. In fact I think, with the exception of Kistler and some experimental Aubert bottlings, South Africa is the only non-European source of such Chardonnays as I have bought for my own cellar.

South Africa has long been a source of old, established Chenin Blanc vines capable of producing seriously interesting wine but the exciting thing is that new, cooler wine regions are being developed specifically for even leaner, keener, more aromatic Sauvignon Blanc. Constantia south of Cape Town springs to mind of course but two of the most exciting and newest regions are Elim and Elgin, way east of here on the coast, also cooled by icy currents straight from the Antarctic.

Elgin is old apple growing country, which can often become good wine-growing territory. A notable pioneer was Iona which continues to make some of South Africa's most delicate, most mineral of Sauvignons. **Iona Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Elgin** (about £11 Booths, Wimbledon Wine Cellar, SWIG, SAwinesonline.com in the UK) smells of exotic green fruits and then has grass, minerals and a certainly chalkiness on the palate which finishes with admirable dryness.

Another very fine, dry wine in similar style is **Oak Valley Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Elgin** (about £10 Great Western Wines, Abbey Fine Wines of Melrose and Rankine Fine Wines of Putney) which has admirable complexity – perhaps because the vines are older than most here and have been supplying the likes of Bouchard Finlayson - and another suitably dry finish. The only thing I reproach this wine for is the exceedingly boring, and in this wine's case misleading, name of the winery.

But what I like particularly about the **Sutherland Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Elgin** (about £12 from www.SAwinesonline.com and Noel Young or just 10 euros from www.SAdirekt.de in Germany) is its story and its transparency. It's the first vintage from three year-old vines planted in this new cool region by the Webb family of Thelema in the warmer climes of Stellenbosch where Gyles Webb has been producing a stunning range of wines since the winery was founded in 1983, with the exception of their Stellenbosch Sauvignon Blanc which always seemed to lack a bit of finesse. Funnily enough, I see that I wrote 'chalky' about this wine too, and I believe the vineyard is very close to that of Iona's. See [Tokara wines released at last](#) for the story of how the Iona owner has basically supplied the land for the Sauvignon Blanc made by Gyles Webb for the new, fabulously-funded Tokara label. They have also planted some Syrah here which should be interesting to watch in so cool a setting.

I also liked the fact that the wine was presented at its launch in London earlier this year by Gyles and Barbara's son Thomas. As Terry Theise points out in his [great defence of the wine artisan](#), we are meeting next generations all over the wine world now – and what a great compliment to wine that is. Such is Webb's sure winemaking hand that I'm sure that future vintages of Sutherland will continue to gain in interest and complexity. So popular are Thelema that this, and most Thelema wines, are already sold out at the winery.

To try the particularly pungent, green, leafy style of Elim Sauvignon Blanc, seek out Flagstone's **The Berrio Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Elim** (£9.99 Oddbins, also Sweden). All of these wines are excellent value and, at the risk of inciting the ire of the legion of Marlborough fans, I would argue that they have much more individuality than many New Zealand Sauvignons.

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