Kleine Zalze Chenins Blancs

22 Jan 2010 by Jancis Robinson

Quite a stir has been caused in the South Africa by wine writer Tim James's discovery that Kleine Zalze, Vineyard Selection Chenin Blanc 2008, winner of South African *WINE* magazine's important Chenin Challenge, comes in three separate versions. See here for the original article and the many responses to it, including a not especially convincing one from Kobus Basson, managing director of the well-regarded Kleine Zalze.

I think we all realise that there may be many different bottlings of basic commercial wines, dictated by space, demand and financial considerations. But this particular issue is rather different. The harvest in this case was interrupted by rain and Kleine Zalze made several different batches of quite different wines.

Instead of choosing to blend them, they made three different lots of wine, with different analyses (which is how this was discovered), but sold them all under the same label – their Vineyard Selection label, moreover, which really does suggest some careful and specific selection of grapes and wine was involved. The embarrassing thing is that the batch that is presumed to have won the Chenin Challenge constitutes just 14% of the amount in commercial circulation, and the Kleine Zalze, Vineyard Selection Chenin Blanc 2008 that was exported is most likely to have been the lightest batch made from grapes picked before the rain, as opposed to the richest version, which won the competition.

All of this brings to mind the Wither Hills Sauvignon Blanc 2006 debacle in New Zealand in which there were several different bottlings quite different from and inferior to the major award winner.

It surely behoves wine producers who submit wines for competitions to be sure that there could be no element of confusion if their wines were to win. And those organising wine-tasting competitions should do their utmost to enforce a rule that requires all entries to be represented by a single wine.