

US importer defends SA wine

New York-based wine importer Cape Classics has defended South African wine in the face of a critical article published in *Time Magazine*, which claimed the country only exports “crud”.



In the 7 September 2009 issue of *Time Magazine*, journalist Alex Perry wrote: “And the answer to how South Africa can produce some of the world's best and most keenly priced wines but still catch flak internationally is obvious to anyone who has compared a thousand-bottle wine list in Cape Town to the tiny shelf of cheap table wine labeled South African in their local store.”

Perry then quoted an anonymous “leading Cape Winelands exporter” who said: “We export the crud.”

The article incensed Molly Choi, the senior Vice President of New York-based Cape Classics, which has imported the likes of Kanonkop, Mulderbosch, Thelema, De Toren and other top end South African wine brands into the US over the past 19 years.

While recognising that lesser quality South Africa wines have been exported to several international markets, Choi said to paint that as the entire picture was inaccurate. She said that Perry's notion that South Africa keeps the best wines for its local market customers was misguided.

“Our South African imports in the US are not ‘crud’, as our current vintages boast over 150 ratings of 87 points or higher from top US wine publications. The South African category as a whole has received widespread praise, both in the wine press and in respected publications such as the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*,” Choi said.

She also dismissed Perry's claim that South African wines have not yet been accepted worldwide because only “crud” gets exported, pointing out that Cape Classics' customers in the US include Marriott, Costco, The Walt Disney Company, Whole Foods and Darden Restaurants, which is the world's largest company-owned and operated restaurant company, with almost

US\$6.7 billion in annual sales.

Choi said South African wine had received widespread positive exposure in US media in 2009, and gave the following examples:

- *Wine Enthusiast* September 2009 published a feature which concludes: "Across the board, South African wines present world class quality at a reasonable price."
- Award winning wine columnist Edward Deitch saying there is no better source for good, inexpensive Chenin Blanc than South Africa. Deitch, writing in his column affiliated with the Today Show, said the well-priced South African Chenin Blancs "are crafted into appealing, food-friendly wines that are all but effortless to drink for just about any occasion".
- James Molesworth, of the *Wine Spectator*, penned an article which included a ringing endorsement of the country's ability to produce quality Cabernet Sauvignon wines. "Though it might be news to some, South Africa has been making world-class wines for more than a few years now," Molesworth wrote.
- Eric Asimov, of the influential *New York Times*, in a piece titled "South African Wines Step Onto The Stage" wrote that South Africa is one of the greatest sources for moderately priced Cabernet Sauvignon.

Cape Classics is ostensibly the largest importer of fine South African wine into the USA and represents 18 premium labels. The company supplies restaurants and retail outlets in 49 states across the USA.

For more information, see: www.capeclassics.com.

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