

# Some critics just can't see the wooded for the trees

AT MANY wine tastings, particularly those involving Chardonnay, you'll probably hear somebody claiming that a wine has been "over-wooded".

I was intrigued by a remark Philip Jonker made to me when I visited his cellar at Weltevrede in the Robertson area recently.

"There's no such thing as an over-wooded wine," he claimed. "But you often find under-wined wood."

His theory is that any wine that is to be matured in wood must be powerful and assertive enough to handle the addition of wood flavours.

What some winemakers try to do is add complexity to a thin and dull wine by putting it in barrels.

It can never work.

I was pleased to taste the Journey's End 2008 Chardonnay recently. Here's a wine that is clearly capable of handling the oak in which

it was fermented and matured.

The flavours that greet your palate are elegant citrus and tropical fruit, slightly nutty and just a gentle unobtrusive reminder of those months it spent in wood.

There aren't as many fiercely anti-chardonnay people around as there were a couple of years ago, but if you're still a member of that "ABC" brigade (anything but chardonnay), this wine could change your mind.

I've always been a shiraz fan. There are very few really bad shiraz wines around. And some, like the Journey's End Cape Doctor 2005, are sublime.

Shiraz is supposed to have wafts of spice on the palate and here they are – nutmeg, vanilla, black pepper – all wrapped up in delicious ripe fruit flavours, balanced on a very subtle toasty wood platform.

I wasn't surprised to find it had



scored four stars in the latest Platter wine guide.

Serious wine drinkers tend to shun the sweeter wines (or at least, never admit to enjoying them) but there's a place for a dash of sweetness in the world.

Van Loveren's Four Cousins Natural Sweet Rosé doesn't pretend to be anything but a simple, cheerful quaffing wine to be enjoyed with dishes like pickled fish or bobotie.

At a low 9 percent alcohol, it's suitable for lunchtime drinking if you plan to do some brain-work

afterwards. You could also serve it as a long summer drink, over crushed ice.

This is the sort of wine that could start young drinkers on the civilised path to being a serious wine lover.

Talking of sweet wines, I was charmed by Roodezandt's luscious Red Muscadel 2008 when I visited the cellar on my recent wine tour.

South Africa should do more to promote the sale of our fortified wines. We do them so well.

This one has all the honeyed grape flavours one expects from a muscadel – pure bottled sunshine.

Conservative wine drinkers will enjoy a small glass of this nectar after a good meal.

I have no such inhibitions. I like to pour a generous glass and have it at my side when I'm writing. There's nothing like a good muscadel to get the creative juices flowing.



Incidentally, red muscadel is also rather pleasant as the base of a cocktail, mixed in equal proportions with vodka, served on ice and enhanced with a squeeze of lemon zest.

Its inventor, Swepie le Roux of Domein Doornkraal, called it a Muscatini.