



VIEWS & TASTES

[Return to Views & tastes index](#)
 [Return to Grape home page](#)

Dornier's line of beauty 9 May 2008

The wines of this Stellenbosch estate reflect their environmental aesthetic (and the restaurant's not bad either), says a lyrical Melvyn Minnaar

When you say it, it sounds, well, shucks, a cliché... but it's true: the setting for Dornier wines must be one of the most beautiful in the vinous world. Sit on the open stoep of the winery's restaurant – the sensitively restored and reinvented old barn – at lunchtime and the dominating, bold mountains across seem to crash onto the tranquil autumnal scene. The winery itself – surely now one of the Cape's architectural landmarks – seems elegantly, undulatingly adrift above the outstretched cellar pond.



The timing, the setting is perfect to address the issue of Dornier's wine aesthetic, which is certainly not one in the Hollywood, blockbuster mould. If owner and original mover behind the continuing development (the Herbert Baker manor is in line for upgrade), Christoph Dornier, is an artist too, the style expressed everywhere is one of graceful seduction.

It's in the design of the winery – a classy execution by Malherbe and Rust architects from Dornier's simple line drawings – the logo, the carefully-tended Stellenbosch environment (Biodiversitt-driven, hyper-indigenous with the lavender-toned *plectranthus* in full bloom on this autumn day) and, naturally, the wines.

In tune with this quiet, catching-up-on-you aesthetic, there have not been too many wines since the first bottlings in 2002. Wines are sensibly kept back, and those under the full nomenclature (at the top-end, enigmatically-named Donatus) have proven to be sneakily smart. But these are no show-offs, despite a substantial number of accolades.

Not 'show wines', but with a purpose to please – maybe even in a cerebral way – they are styled for the table and hence a food pairing on a chirpy, sunny day was an obvious.

While bright-eyed, contemplative winemaker JC Steyn was gently steering a focused group through a menu of five dishes, it was clear that other casual visitors were taking full advantage of the setting too, ordering wine by the glass (an extensive range) and hearty delicacies from inventive chef Tullishe le Roux's Bodega kitchen.



To this table came, with the seared scallops on red onion marmalade, with lemon butter, the Dornier Donatus White 2006. It is a white blend widely admired despite, or perhaps because, its components (sauvignon, chenin and sémillon) vary from vintage to vintage. The 2006 is mostly chenin with about a fifth sémillon, and the latter provides a lushness for the chenin's fruit to shine in complexity. It's a great wine.

With confit lambshank springrolls and spicy pear chutney the Dornier Merlot 2004 with its cherry notes made sense, while the clean cassis notes of the cabernet sauvignon 2005 lifted a grilled fig, wrapped in black-forest ham, with balsamic glaze. The cheese in a roast field mushroom with gorgonzola crust worked very well with the pinotage 2006. This is, surprisingly maybe, one of the winery's really impressive wines, hinting Burgundy, but with controlled, bright Cape fruitiness.

When the Donatus Red 2004 arrived with a roast lamb chump, sweet potato mash and chickpeas, the wine reference shifted to Bordeaux: a 70 percent cabernet franc-driven blend with merlot. Yet again there was something very locally elegant about it.

As JC Steyn explained in his gentle way, the idea is always to catch something about the nature of the grapes that grow on the various slopes of the property here along the Blaauwklippen river in the wines. He trains them to speak softly about this beautiful place. It's a line of beauty that runs through everything here.

- [Link to the equally stylish Dornier website](#)

CLICK HERE TO SEND US YOUR COMMENT