

BUBBLES OF THE SEASON

“Raise a glass to the wines and champagnes ruling the wedding tables.”

As spring edges toward summer in the Cape Winelands, from September through December, certain wines rise in profile among enthusiasts, sommeliers, brides, and celebrators. In Franschhoek, Stellenbosch, Durbanville, and Bonnievale the trending bottles this period reflect terroir, climate, heritage and innovation. For a bride, these are more than drinks; they are statements, accents to mood, complements to décor, flavour threads in the memory of the day or honeymoon. Here's a guide to what's popular in each region and how to weave those wines and delicate sparklers into wedding moments.

In Franschhoek, the elegance of Méthode Cap Classique (“MCC”) is gaining even more popularity. Sparkling Chardonnay-Pinot Noir blends from estates like Haute Cabrière or Boschendal and similar producers are often chosen for pre-reception toasts, bridal showers, or as the first sip when the bride steps into the ceremony space. Among still wines, silky reds and restrained whites are trending: Chardonnay (especially those with subtle oak or lees contact), Sauvignon Blancs with grass and citrus freshness, Pinot Noir with cool-site provenance, Rhône-style blends that balance Syrah and Grenache, and robust red blends combining Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot or Cabernet Franc. These wines show off graceful texture, freshness, and pairing versatility.

In Stellenbosch, deep reds remain ever-attractive but their style is shifting. Cabernet Sauvignon, both single varietal and in Bordeaux-style blends, is firmly among the region's favourites. Syrah (also called Shiraz in local parlance) is showing spice, dark fruit and structure. Merlot plays alongside these in softer reds or blend components. On the white side, Chenin Blanc continues its resurgence: old vines, textured flesh, sometimes wood-aged, sometimes fermenting in concrete, showing fruit (stone fruit, quince, pear) and minerality. Chardonnay maintains appeal too, particularly barrel-fermented or those expressive of site. Rosés, lightly dry and with freshness, are also increasingly popular for receptions under the sun, for honeymoon dinners, and as aperitif choices.

Turning to Durbanville, its proximity to the cooling influences of Cape Town's oceanic climate gives its Sauvignon Blancs

a crispness and aromatic purity that many brides and wine lovers favour for warm-weather weddings. Durbanville Hills has recently earned distinction in international wine competitions, especially for their Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Bordeaux Red Blends, White Blends, also Shiraz and Chardonnay. ([StartUp Magazine South Africa][1]) The region's Pinotage and Merlot are strong too; reds here tend toward elegant ripeness rather than overwhelming oak. Whites are often fruit driven with citrus, green apple, floral notes, occasionally minerally. Sparkling wines and MCCs from Durbanville estates are also part of the list for toasts and bubbly moments.

In Bonnievale, which by comparison is less widely known than Franschhoek or Stellenbosch but quietly earning respect, a few wines are standing out. Their Cabernet Sauvignon (especially their Limited Release or higher tier bottlings) is winning consecutive awards. Their Sauvignon Blancs (River Collection) are increasingly praised for good balance, juicy fruit, crisp finish. Chenin Blanc from Bonnievale also earns praise, floral-fruity aromas with medium body and freshness. Chardonnay from Bonnievale, less dominant, is showing more attention in recent vintages. Rosés and lighter reds also appear, but the standout remains Cabernet Sauvignon and Sauvignon Blanc.

To draw together the top five wines or wine-types for each region as of September-December in recent seasons, here's how the favourites cluster:

In Franschhoek: MCC Blanc de Blancs or blended MCC; Chardonnay with oak/lees; Sauvignon Blanc/semillon blends; Pinot Noir (cool-site); Red blends with Cabernet Franc / Merlot / Syrah. In Stellenbosch: Cabernet Sauvignon (single, age-worthy); Syrah and Rhône-style blends; Chenin Blanc (old vine, textured); Chardonnay (barrel-fermented); Rosé (dry, perfumed). In Durbanville: Sauvignon Blanc (fresh and aromatic); Bordeaux Red Blends; Cabernet Sauvignon; Merlot; Whites and MCC for sparkling. In Bonnievale: Limited Release Cabernet Sauvignon; River Collection Sauvignon Blanc; Chenin Blanc; Chardonnay; perhaps lighter reds or rosés depending on vintage.





Each of these crowd favourites has its own “backstreet” or local character and tasting signature. Franschoek MCC is often creamy, fine bubbles, with brioche, citrus peel, sometimes stone fruit nuances; its whites show bright acid, subtle oak or lees, with warmth from sun-exposed hills. Pinot Noir from Franschoek will often carry red cherry, floral, sometimes earth or undergrowth, modest tannins. Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon tends toward dense black fruit, cedar or cigar box with oak, some graphite, structure enough to age. Syrah from Stellenbosch may bring pepper and dark plums, sometimes smoky or herbal edge. Chenin Blanc from Stellenbosch aged in older oak barrels or on lees shows honey, quince, some texture, yet cleansed by acidity.

Durbanville Sauvignon Blanc often has sea breezes in the scent, crisp green apple, citrus, sometimes a whisper of herb or green fig, fresh finish. Cabernet or Bordeaux blends from Durbanville combine fruit ripeness with mild tannin, oak management leaning toward balance rather than over-powering wood.

Bonnievale’s Cabernet Sauvignon Limited Release offers ripe dark berries, blackcurrant or cassis tones, some oak influence, perhaps cedar or vanilla in higher tier wines. Their Sauvignon Blancs tend toward tropical fruit, a floral lift, sometimes grapefruit or passionfruit, crisp yet not too sharp. Their Chenin Blancs bring floral aromatics, fruit such as peach or stone fruit, a gentle texture, and clean acidity.

Champagne itself proper (i.e. from the Champagne region of France) remains a prestigious choice for wedding receptions, especially if the bride wishes international sparkle, heritage, or classic prestige. But in the Cape Winelands, Cap Classique offers locally-made sparkling wines using the

traditional méthode champenoise, delivering excellent quality, often at more accessible prices, and increasingly preferred for both toasts and aperitifs. These MCCs are being chosen not just for price but for terroir-expressed character, and their bubbles are becoming more delicate and refined. ([Food & Wine][4])

How might a bride weave these wines into her wedding reception, honeymoon or celebration before or after? First imagine the reception drinks table or welcome cocktail hour. An MCC from Franschoek or Stellenbosch or Durbanville would shine for welcome flutes or aperitifs. It sets a tone of celebration, *fizz*, elegance. As guests arrive, a well-chilled Sauvignon Blanc from Durbanville or Bonnievale accompanies canapés: shellfish, light hors d’œuvre, summer salads, ceviche. As the meal progresses, a Chenin Blanc from Stellenbosch or Bonnievale works beautifully with chicken, creamy sauces or lighter fish. For red wine lovers at dinner, a Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon or Bordeaux Blend, or a Franschoek red blend offers depth and richness matching beef, lamb, or hearty mushroom dishes.

For brides planning honeymoons, these wines make for perfect souvenirs or travel treats. Imagine staying in Franschoek, Stellenbosch or a wine-lodges nearby: selecting one or two bottles of the non-sparkling reds to enjoy by a fireplace or terrace, or a bottle of MCC paired with local oysters or cheese. Also, many estate restaurants offer wine flights; tasting these during honeymoon dinners allows couples to explore new varietals side-by-side, deepen their palate and share moments of discovery.

Celebrations before the wedding, such as engagement dinners, bridal showers, rehearsal dinners, are excellent times to feature whites, roses, lighter reds, and sparkling. They are more

casual, timed perhaps earlier in the day, so the lighter, more refreshing wines suit mood and weather. After the wedding, a casual gathering or brunch might benefit from leftover MCCs, Sauvignons, and Rosés, to prolong the memory without heavy heaviness; reds may be opened again in smaller gatherings or paired with lighter fare.

For weddings taking place September to December, weather is warming, days grow longer, outdoor receptions, terraces or vineyards are possible venues. Wines that reflect freshness and balance tend to fare better: whites and sparkling for daytime, reds for when the sun dips. Brides should consider service temperature, chilling whites and MCC well, ensuring reds have time to breathe or are served in decanters if needed. Also think about how many varietals to include: too many can confuse both palate and pairing; choosing one or two whites, one sparkling, and one or two reds often strikes the right balance.

Some practical considerations for selecting region and wine: budget, availability, guest preferences. Wines from Franschoek MCC or top Stellenbosch estates often cost more, especially for premium reds or older vintages. Bonnievale and Durbanville may offer excellent value while retaining prestige, making them smart choices if the bride wants quality without overextending. Also consider shipping, if guests may wish to take bottles home, storage, venue corkage fees. If the wedding is destination-style in or around wine country, tie the wine choices into setting: vineyard surroundings, views, local food, pairing with menu.



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Also take into account timing. A September wedding might still catch spring’s cooler evenings, so having both whites and reds ready, perhaps even a sparkling as backup (in case guests want something lighter or brighter), is prudent. As summer reaches December heat, early afternoon pre-drinks with chilled whites or MCC will be well received, while evening dinners can move into red territory.

For the bride who wishes to celebrate in the Cape Winelands or to bring its character into her wedding, certain wines are particularly “of the moment” from September through December. Franschoek MCC and elegant whites and red blends; Stellenbosch Cabernet, Syrah, Chardonnay and Chenin; Durbanville Sauvignon Blancs and Bordeaux blends; Bonnievale’s Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon and Chenin Blanc. These wines reflect freshness, heritage, terroir and increasing excellence. Thoughtful pairing with time of day, meal, guest preferences and style of wedding (intimate, grand, day-to-evening) allows them to become more than simply wine bottles. They become expressions of place, love and memory

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