



ABSOLUTELY Cabulous

With a few impressive Merlots and a host of exciting Cabernet Sauvignons, *db's* Masters competition showed that while some countries are lagging behind, others, such as the US and Australia, are making classy expressions. By *Rupert Millar*

THE PURPLE grimace; the inescapable fact of tasting big, inky, tannic wines such as Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot. If the judges look a little tight-lipped in the photographs with this piece it's not because they weren't having a good time but rather they wished to spare you the sight of their blackened maws. Ugly as we may find it now, in Japan the practice of dyeing one's teeth black, known as 'ohaguro', was considered extremely attractive. So either we contemplate holding all future Cabernet Masters in a geisha house in Kyoto or (and no prizes for guessing which would be the preferred option by the management) we took our group photographs before the tasting started.

Instead of cherry blossoms and haunting chords of shamisen, though, the judges made good with the solidly oaken and comfortably British surroundings of

Bumpkin in South Kensington for what proved to be a solid line-up of wines.

Bar a few of the excesses to which Cabernet in particular is subject to, the judges found much to like in a great many of the wines.

MERLOT

Merlot formed the smallest part of the tasting, which, as Jonathan Pedley MW noted, was, "a shame", in no small part because Merlot is still a big seller in parts of the UK market. The sample size may have been small but there was a crop of Golds and Silvers, and a Master for Chateau Ste Michelle's 2013 Canoe Ridge Estate.

Patricia Stefanowicz MW in particular found much to like, which came as a surprise to her. She said: "What was really rather exciting were the Merlot wines. Merlot is not normally a variety I love, or

even like much. On the day, we had a tranche of delicious wines: Victoria plums and violet accents with exotic Indian spices in the oaked versions. It seems that Columbia Valley in Washington State produces some very serious examples, with prices to match. Friuli and Chile have some lovely succulent wines at more affordable prices."

Merlot is such an underrated grape, sneered at and dismissed for not producing 'proper' fine wines; capped off with that line from *Sideways*. It is in many people's eyes the "red Chardonnay," as Tobias Gorn suggested.

Merlot, of course, is the backbone and driver of some of the most expensive wines in the world, Petrus and Le Pin. We can, perhaps, merely dream to dare to hope that a wine of that calibre will one day slip into the line-up but the tasting hinted at two important things. First, that

cabernet sauvignon and merlot masters

About the competition

In a crowded wine-competition arena, *the drinks business* Global Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot Masters stands out for its assessment of wines purely by grape variety rather than by region.

Divided only by price bracket and, for ease of judging, style too, the blind-tasting format allowed wines to be assessed without prejudice about their country of origin.

The best wines were awarded medals that ranged from Bronze through to Gold, as well as Master, the ultimate accolade, given only to exceptional wines in the tasting.

The wines were judged by a cherry-picked group of Masters of Wine and one Master Sommeliers on 12 May at Bumpkin in London's South Kensington.

For more detail on the top-scoring wines, including tasting notes, see thedrinksbusiness.com

Merlot doesn't have to come from the clay of the Liborne to produce top-flight wine, and there are several great Merlot sites around the world that are not getting the recognition and attention they deserve. Patrick Schmitt MW, editor-in-chief of *the drinks business* was particularly taken by what turned out to be Lamaione by Frescobaldi, which he called "superb".

And second, as judge Tobias Gorn said: "It helped to prove that the prejudice should not exist." Fingers crossed there'll be more next time round.

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Unoaked – 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Under £10 Viña Carmen	Carmen Reserva Premier Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2016	Silver
£10-£15 Domaines Barons de Rothschild Lafite	Los Vascos Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2015	Bronze

Oaked – 100% Cabernet Sauvignon

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Under £10 Trinchero Family Estates	Sutter Home Cabernet Sauvignon	California	USA	NV	Gold
Viña Cousiño Macul	Don Matias	Maipo	Chile	2015	Silver
Grupo Peñaflo	Trapiche Oak Cask Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2016	Silver
Trivento	Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2016	Silver
Canepa	Famiglia Cabernet Sauvignon	Central Valley	Chile	2015	Silver
Viña Santa Rita	120 Cabernet Sauvignon	Central Valley	Chile	2016	Silver
Sur Valles Wine Group	Santa Alba Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Curicó Valley	Chile	2016	Bronze
Château Vartely	Dealul Nucului Cabernet Sauvignon	Valul Lui Traian	Moldova	2014	Bronze
Château Ksara	Cabernet Sauvignon	Bekeaa Valley	Lebanon	2014	Bronze
Sur Valles Wine Group	Patagón Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Curicó Valley	Chile	2016	Bronze
Aresti Chile Wine	Bellavista Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Curico Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Vina Poletti	Cabernet Sauvignon	Hrvatska	Croatia	2011	Bronze
Codorniu Raventos	Raimat Molí Cabernet Sauvignon	Catalonia	Spain	2014	Bronze
Quinta de Maipo	Maipo Vitral Cabernet Sauvignon	Central Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
£10-£15 Viña Santa Rita	Medalla Real	Maipo	Chile	2013	Gold
Australian Vintage	Nepenthe Altitude Cabernet Sauvignon	Adelaide Hills	Australia	2015	Gold
Trinchero Family Estates	Joel Gott Cabernet Sauvignon	California	USA	2014	Gold
Mt. Vernon	Cabernet Sauvignon	Paarl	South Africa	2010	Gold
Sur Valles Wine Group	Toro de Piedra Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Rapel Valley	Chile	2015	Gold
Valentin Bianchi	Famiglia Bianchi Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2015	Gold
Viña Siegel	Special Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2015	Silver
Trinchero Family Estates	The Show Cabernet Sauvignon	California	USA	2014	Silver
Miguel Torres Chile	Cordillera Cabernet Sauvignon	Central Valley	Chile	2014	Silver
Langmeil Winery	Blacksmith Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2015	Silver
Grupo Peñaflo	Don David Cabernet Sauvignon	Salta	Argentina	2016	Silver
Wakefield/Taylor's Wines	Jaraman Cabernet Sauvignon	Clare Valley	Australia	2015	Silver
Viña Cousiño Macul	Antiguas Reservas	Maipo	Chile	2014	Silver
Distell	Fleur Du Cap Unfiltered Cabernet Sauvignon	Stellenbosch	South Africa	2014	Silver
Aresti Chile Wine	Trisquel Series Parras Fumadoras Cabernet Sauvignon	Curico Valley	Chile	2015	Silver
Viña Tabali	Talud Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo	Chile	2014	Bronze
Grupo Peñaflo	La Mascota Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2015	Bronze
Berton Vineyards	Reserve Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon	Coonawarra	Australia	2015	Bronze
Colvendrà	Cabernet Sauvignon	Veneto	Italy	NV	Bronze
Luis Felipe Edwards	Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2016	Bronze
Trivento	Golden Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Uco Valley	Argentina	2014	Bronze
Viña Undurraga	Sibaris Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo	Chile	2015	Bronze
Grupo Peñaflo	Gran Mascota Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Bronze
£15-£20 Bodega Volcanes de Chile	Tectonia Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo	Chile	2013	Gold
Viña Undurraga	T.H. Cabernet Sauvignon Alto Maipo	Maipo	Chile	2014	Gold
Viña Casa Silva	Gran Terroir de los Andes Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2015	Silver
Ernie Els Wines	Cabernet Sauvignon	Stellenbosch	South Africa	2015	Silver
Viña Concha y Toro	Casillero del Diablo Leyenda	Pirque	Chile	2014	Silver
Howard Park Wines	Miamup Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2014	Silver
Viña Undurraga	T.H. Cabernet Sauvignon Cauquenes	Cauquenes	Chile	2014	Silver
TerraMater	Altum Cabernet Sauvignon	Curico Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Grupo Peñaflo	Trapiche Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Bronze
Trinchero Family Estates	Folie a Deux Cabernet Sauvignon	Alexander Valley	USA	2013	Bronze
Grupo Peñaflo	Fincas Notables Cabernet Sauvignon	Salta	Argentina	2015	Bronze
Distell	Alto Cabernet	Stellenbosch	South Africa	2013	Bronze
Viña Siegel	Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2014	Bronze
Grupo Peñaflo	Gran Medalla Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Bronze
£20-£30 De Bortoli Wines	Melba Reserve	Yarra Valley	Australia	2013	Gold
Viña Perez Cruz	Pircas de Liguai Cabernet Sauvignon Single Collection	Maipo Valley	Chile	2013	Gold
Distell	Nederburg Cabernet Private Bin 2013	Paarl	South Africa	2013	Gold
Bird in Hand	Cabernet Sauvignon	Adelaide Hills	Australia	2015	Gold



CABERNET SAUVIGNON

If there were just a handful of Merlots there were a great many more 'Cabs'. But being such a popular and widely planted variety there were bound to be a few disappointments.

Overripe fruit, underripe fruit, leanness, bitterness, excessive tannins, alcohol and oak are all problems that can dog Cabernet Sauvignon, and in New World countries where the weather is so consistent and the winemaking know-how so good, this really shouldn't be an issue.

Pedley said: "Having just recently tried a slew of top Bordeaux from the 2015 and 2016 vintages, these benchmark wines show that it is possible to make great Cabernet wines that even in their youth are not too green, too oaky, too tannic nor too alcoholic."

It's when winemakers try too hard that such errors creep in. As Gorn said: "Playing the music louder does not make the melodies sound better, unfortunately."

It was disappointing too to see a number of South African Cabernets that were immediately recognisable by their burnt rubber, smoky and overly vegetal aromas. It's such a shame that for a country that is really kicking into gear and producing some thrilling examples of Chenin Blanc, Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah and

'Having just recently tried a slew of top Bordeaux from the 2015 and 2016 vintages, these benchmark wines show that it is possible to make great Cabernet wines that even in their youth are not too green or oaky'

Oaked –100% Cabernet Sauvignon

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Howard Park Wines	Leston Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2014	Silver
Langmeil Winery	Jackman's Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2014	Silver
Frederic Robinson	Casarena Owen's Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2011	Silver
Hancrafted Wines	RedHeads Whip-Hand Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2014	Silver
Drayton's Family Wines	Drayton's Vineyard Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Hunter Valley	Australia	2014	Silver
Barkan Winery	Altitude 624	Upper Galilee	Israel	2012	Silver
Barkan Winery	Altitude 585	Upper Galilee	Israel	2012	Bronze
Twinwoods Estate	Margaret River Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2014	Bronze
Distell	Nederburg 2 Centuries Cabernet	Paarl	South Africa	2012	Bronze
Bodega de Sarria	Señorio de Sarria Reserva Especial	Navarra	Spain	2010	Bronze
Grupo Peñaflor	Trapiche Terroir Series Limited Edition	Mendoza	Argentina	2013	Bronze
Grupo Peñaflor	Moscato Vineyards Big Bat Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2014	Bronze
St Hugo	Coonawarra Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2013	Bronze
£30-£50					
Cakebread Cellars	Bakestone Cellars North Coast California	North Coast	USA	2014	Master
Trinchero Family Estates	BRV Cabernet Sauvignon	Napa Valley	USA	2012	Gold
Viña Santa Rita	Casa Real Maipo Chile 2013				Gold
Gatt Wines	Gatt Cabernet Sauvignon	Eden Valley	Australia	2014	Silver
Gatt Wines	Gatt High Eden Cabernet Sauvignon	Eden Valley	Australia	2014	Silver
Wakefield/Taylor's Wines	St Andrews Cabernet Sauvignon	Clare Valley	Australia	2014	Silver
Jackson Family Wines	Stonestreet Estate Cabernet Sauvignon	Alexander Valley	USA	2014	Silver
Gatt Wines	Gatt Cabernet Sauvignon	Eden Valley	Australia	2013	Silver
Gatt Wines	Gatt Cabernet Sauvignon	Eden Valley	Australia	2009	Silver
Gatt Wines	Gatt High Eden Cabernet Sauvignon	Eden Valley	Australia	2013	Silver
Viña Carmen	Gold Reserve	Maipo	Chile	2013	Silver
Wingara Wine Group	Katnook Estate Odyssey Cabernet Sauvignon	Coonawarra	Australia	2012	Silver
Miguel Torres Chile	Manso de Velasco Central Valley Chile 2013				Bronze
Twinwoods Estate	OPTIVUS Reserve Margaret River	Margaret River	Australia	2013	Bronze
Howard Park Wines	Abercrombie Western Australia	Australia	Australia	2013	Bronze
£50+					
Bird in Hand	Marie Elizabeth Cabernet Sauvignon	Adelaide Hills	Australia	2013	Master
Abadia Retuerta	Pago Valdebellón	Catilla y Leon	Spain	2014	Master
Pahlmeyer	Cabernet Sauvignon	Napa Valley	USA	2014	Gold
Distell	Alto MPH Stellenbosch	South Africa	South Africa	2011	Gold
Wakefield/Taylor's Wines	The Visionary Cabernet Sauvignon	Clare Valley	Australia	2013	Gold
Bird in Hand	Nest Egg Cabernet Sauvignon	Adelaide Hills	Australia	2013	Silver
Frederic Robinson	Casarena DNA Cabernet Sauvignon	Mendoza	Argentina	2011	Bronze

Oaked –Blend Cabernet Sauvignon

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Under £10					
Château Tanunda	Grand Barossa Cabernet Sauvignon	Barossa	Australia	2015	Gold
Viña Concha y Toro	Casillero del Diablo Reserva Privada	Maipo	Chile	2016	Silver
De Bortoli Wines	Deen Vat 9 Cabernet Sauvignon	Victoria	Australia	2014	Bronze
De Bortoli Wines	DB Family Selection Cabernet Merlot	SE Australia	Australia	2015	Bronze
Luis Felipe Edwards	Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2016	Bronze
£10-£15					
Viña Perez Cruz	Cabernet Sauvignon Reserva	Maipo	Chile	2015	Gold
Viña Perez Cruz	Cabernet Sauvignon Limited Edition	Maipo	Chile	2015	Gold
TerraNoble	Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Maule	Chile	2014	Gold
Chilcas	Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua	Chile	2013	Silver
Frederic Robinson	West Cape Howe 'Hannah's Hill' Cabernet Merlot	Mount Barker	Australia	2014	Silver
Frederic Robinson	Ashbrook Cabernet Merlot	Margaret River	Australia	2012	Silver
Pernod Ricard Winemakers	Church Road McDonald Series	Hawkes Bay	New Zealand	2014	Silver
Mercer Estates Winery	Canyons Cabernet Sauvignon	Horse Heaven Hills	USA	2014	Silver
Viña Carmen	Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo	Chile	2014	Silver
Viña Concha y Toro	Marques de Casa Concha Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo	Chile	2015	Silver



Grenache that such a benchmark variety as Cabernet Sauvignon should still be plagued by such an issue.

It wasn't all gloom for South Africa, however; several wines picked up Silver and Gold medals and, if it's any consolation, as Pedley said, failure if it came knew no boundaries: "Geography was no indication of quality."

That said, looked at in a broad sweep it was notable how restrained a lot of the examples were, with alcohol kept in balance, oak in check and tannins supple and not too drying.

Indeed, some of the wines might have been a touch too restrained for some tastes. Sam Caporn MW thought: "A lot of the fruit was red and black cherry or raspberries; there was little obvious cassis and blackcurrant notes in many of them."

Not that this was too much of an issue and, as she said, it showed the range of

'The tasting showed the range of styles Cabernet was capable of, from tighter, restrained red fruits to more overt black fruits with mint and oak'

Oaked –Blend Cabernet Sauvignon

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Viña Morandé	Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon/Syrah	Valle Central	Chile	2014	Silver
Quinta da Bacalhôa	Cabernet Sauvignon Peninsula de Setúbal	Portugal	2013	Bronze	
Pernod Ricard Winemakers	Jacob's Creek Reserve Coonawarra	Barossa	Australia	2014	Bronze
La Motte Wine Estate	La Motte Cabernet Sauvignon	Western Cape	South Africa	2014	Bronze
Trincher Family Estates	Charles & Charles Cabernet Sauvignon	Washington State	USA	2015	Bronze
Viña Concha y Toro	Gran Reserva Serie Riberas Cabernet Sauvignon	Colchagua Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Viña Morandé	Morandé Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Valley	Chile	2013	Bronze
£15-£20					
Kenwood Vineyards - Pernod Ricard	K Sonoma County Cabernet Sauvignon	Sonoma County	USA	2013	Silver
Cono Sur	20 Barrels	Maipo Valley	Chile	2014	Silver
Distell	Neethlingshof The Caracal	Stellenbosch	South Africa	2015	Silver
Domaines Barons de Rothschild Lafite	Los Vascos Grande Reserve	Colchagua	Chile	2014	Bronze
Cavit	Quatro Vicariati Rosso Trentino Superiore DOC	Trentino	Italy	2013	Bronze
Mazzei	Tirreno - Maremma Toscana Rosso DOC	Tuscany	Italy	2015	Bronze
Viña Concha y Toro	Terrunyo Cabernet Sauvignon	Maipo Valley	Chile	2014	Bronze
Canepa	Canepa Finisimo Cabernet Sauvignon	Central Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Mercer Estates Winery	Cabernet Sauvignon	Horse Heaven Hills	USA	2014	Bronze
£20-£30					
Chamilija Wines	Sui Generis	Thrace/Strandja Mountains	Turkey	2014	Gold
Viña Siegel	Unique Selection	Colchagua	Chile	2013	Silver
Waterford Estate	Cabernet Sauvignon	Stellenbosch	South Africa	2014	Silver
Marchesi Mazzei Spa Agricola	Tenuta Belguardo Maremma Toscana Rosso DOC	Tuscany	Italy	2013	Silver
Viña Cousiño Macul	Finis Terrae	Valle del Maipo	Chile	2012	Bronze
Terre à Terre	Crayeres Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon	Wrattenbury	Australia	2015	Bronze
Kenwood Vineyards	Pernod Ricard Jack London Vineyards Cabernet Sauvignon	Sonoma Mountain	USA	2013	Bronze
£30-£50					
Jackson Family Wines	Kendall-Jackson Grand Reserve	Sonoma County	USA	2013	Gold
Domaines Barons de Rothschild Lafite	Le Dix de Los Vascos	Colchagua	Chile	2013	Gold
Pernod Ricard Winemakers	Jacob's Creek Bungalow Lane Cabernet	Barossa	Australia	2013	Gold
Tapanappa Wines	Whalebone Vineyard Cabernet Shiraz	Wrattenbury	Australia	2013	Gold
Mira Winery	Cabernet Sauvignon Napa Valley	USA	2012	Silver	
Tapanappa Wines	Whalebone Vineyard Cabernet Shiraz	Wrattenbury	Australia	2014	Silver
Distell	Durbanville Hills The Tangram Bordeaux	Durbanville	South Africa	2012	Bronze
Barkan Winery	Superiore Cabernet Sauvignon	Upper Galilee	Israel	2012	Bronze
Thompson Estate	Thompson Estate Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2013	Bronze
Vina Ventisquero	Enclave Maipo Alto	Chile	2012	Bronze	
£50+					
Jackson Family Wines	Freemark Abbey Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon	Napa Valley	USA	2013	Master
Pahlmeyer	Proprietary Red	Napa Valley	USA	2014	Gold
Jeroboams Group	Moss Wood Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2014	Gold
Thompson Estate	The Specialist Cabernet Sauvignon	Margaret River	Australia	2013	Gold
Blue Pyrenees Estate	Richardson Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon	Pyrenees	Australia	2012	Gold
Trincher Family Estates	Taken Red Wine	Napa Valley	USA	2014	Gold
Viña Errazuriz	Don Maximiano Founder's Reserve	Aconcagua	Chile	2010	Gold
Viña Cousiño Macul	LOTAMaipo	Chile	2010	Silver	
Viña Errazuriz	Don Maximiano Founder's Reserve	Aconcagua	Chile	2011	Bronze

Unoaked 100% Merlot

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Under £10					
Ronco Margherita	Ronco Margherita Merlot	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2015	Bronze
Lanchester Wines	Altaria Merlot	Valle Central	Chile	2015	Bronze
Casas del Toqui	Single Estate Merlot	Central Valley	Chile	2016	Bronze
£10-£15					
Vigneti le Monde	Merlot DOC Friuli Grave	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2015	Silver

Unoaked Blend

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
£10-£15					
Viña Maipo	Maipo Vitral Merlot	Central Valley	Chile	2015	Silver

cabernet sauvignon and merlotmasters

styles Cabernet was capable of, “from tighter, restrained red fruits to more overt black fruits with mint and oak”.

Another noticeable quality of many wines was how easy it was to pin them down to a country. South Africa’s more unfortunate qualities aside, there was the (usually) pleasant, cool-climate leafiness from Chile, the peppermint of Australia, and the US stood out with its “cocoa, red fruit and graphite”, said Gorn.

The US and Australia in particular were lauded as stand-out countries, the latter producing “varietally distinct, excellently made wines”, as Caporn noted.

SURPRISE COUNTRY

Both countries won a clutch of Masters, the only ones to do so, bar one surprise entry. It is clear that the majority of the wines tasted were from the New World, where producers have always exhibited a keenness for competitions that verges on mania.

Clement Robert MS from 28-50 said: “I was surprised by the relatively low entry of Bordeaux wines. We know that outside the cru classé categories, Bordeaux wines struggle to sell, despite some really high-quality examples at fair prices. I do think that sales would improve if they were to prove their worth in competitions.”

Another noticeable quality of many wines was how easy it was to pin them down to a country. Cool-climate leafiness from Chile, the peppermint of Australia, and the US stood out with its ‘cocoa, red fruit and graphite’

Oaked 100% Merlot

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Under 10					
Trinchero Family Estates	Sutter Home Merlot	California	USA	NV	Silver
Château Vartely	Dealu Nucului Merlot	Valul Lui Traian	Moldova	2014	Bronze
£10-£15					
Ornella Molon	Traverso Merlot	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2011	Silver
Veramonte	Ritual Merlot	Casablanca	Chile	2015	Silver
Wakefield/Taylor's Wines	Wakefield/Taylor's Merlot	Clare Valley	Australia	2016	Silver
Masut da Rive	Semidis	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Italy	2013	Bronze
£15-£20					
Giesen Wines	The Brothers Hawkes Bay Merlot	Hawkes Bay	New Zealand	2014	Silver
Trinchero Family Estates	Napa Cellars Merlot	Napa Valley	USA	2014	Bronze
Aresti Chile Wine	Trisquel Series Merlot, Altitud 1245	Curicó Valley	Chile	2015	Bronze
Montelio	Provincia di Pavia IGT Merlot Comprino Mirosa	Lombardy	Italy	2013	Bronze
£20-£30					
Veramonte	Ritual Arroyo Block Casablanca	Chile	2015	Gold	
Wakefield/Taylor's Wines	Taylor's Winemakers Project Merlot	Clare Valley/Coonawarra	Australia	2013	Gold
Masciarelli	Merlot IGT Terre Aquilane Marina Cvetic	Abruzzo	Italy	2013	Gold
Ornella Molon	Traverso Sottocastello Rosso	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2012	Bronze
£30-£50					
Groot Constantia	Merlot Constantia	South Africa	2014	Gold	
Castel Sallegg	Nussleiten DOC Alto Adige	Alto Adige	Italy	2013	Silver
Fantinel	La Roncaia Fusco	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2013	Silver
Cantina Andriano	Gant Alto Adige Merlot Riserva	Alto Adige	Italy	2013	Bronze
£50+					
Frescobaldi	Lamaione	Tuscany	Italy	2012	Gold
Fasoli Gino	Organo Rosso Veronese I.G.T Merlot	Veneto	Italy	2009	Silver



cabernet sauvignon and merlot masters



On the other hand, much like Frescobaldi's Lamaione in the Merlot category, there was a European contender that came bursting through – from Spain of all places.

Pago Valdebellón from Abadia Retuerta in Castile y León – as it turned out to be – had judges rather scratching their heads as to where it might be from.

Spain and Cabernet are two entities in the wine world that seem so inherently disparate that it might otherwise be making world headlines.

Yet where there might otherwise have been complete astonishment, it was recalled that two years ago another Spanish Cabernet, that time Mas La Plana from Miguel Torres, had also scooped a Masters out from under more famous Cabernet-growing places.

And Navarra in the north of the country also has a long tradition of Cabernet production, so perhaps Spain is a country that has been hiding its Cabernet laurels under a bushel.

Oaked Blend Merlot

Company	Wine Name	Region	Country	Vintage	Medal
Under £10					
MAN Vintners	MAN Jan Fiskaal Merlot	Coastal Region	South Africa	2015	Bronze
McPherson Wines	McPherson Family Vineyards - The Angus Merlot	Victoria	Australia	2015	Bronze
£10-£15					
Viña Concha y Toro	Marques de Casa Concha Merlot	Maule Valley	Chile	2014	Silver
Château de Colombe	Château de Colombe	Bordeaux	France	2015	Bronze
£15-£20					
Trinchero Family Estates	Merlot	Alexander Valley	USA	2013	Silver
Rod McDonald Wines	Merlot Cabernet France	Hawkes Bay	New Zealand	2013	Bronze
£20-£30					
Jackson Family Wines	Kendall-Jackson Vintners Reserve Merlot	Sonoma County	USA	2013	Silver
Viña Concha y Toro	Marques de Casa Concha Merlot	Maule Valley	Chile	2015	Silver
£30-£50					
Ste. Michelle Wine Estates	Chateau Ste. Michelle Canoe Ridge Estate Merlot	Columbia Valley	USA	2013	Master
Jackson Family Wines	Kendall-Jackson Grand Reserve Merlot	Sonoma County	USA	2013	Gold
Ste. Michelle Wine Estates	Northstar Columbia Valley Merlot	Columbia Valley	USA	2012	Gold
Chamlija Wines	Chamlija Merlot	Strandja Mountains	Turkey	2013	Silver
Jackson Family Wines	Mantanzas Creek Sonoma County Merlot	Sonoma County	USA	2013	Silver
Vignalta	Colli Euganei DOC Rosso Arqua	Veneto	Italy	2011	Silver
Scubla	Rosso "Scuro" DOC FCO	Friuli Venezia Giulia	Italy	2013	Bronze

What did the judges think?



TOBIAS D. GORN, BOISDALE

"I was expecting a lot more over-extraction and a bit less class this time from over the pond and I'm so happy that I was proven wrong. Some of the Californian wines were singing, and were amazingly balanced with complexity, and were worthy of long ageing.

"I loved the cooling mint and eucalyptus aromas and flavours from Australia, the harmony of cocoa, red fruit and graphite from the US, and the overall sweet-and-savoury cassis. Clean, balanced and not overdone expressions were showing some fine qualities.

"Sometimes over-extraction resulted in a hollow mid-palate and shorter finish, strangely. Less is often more. I'd also highlight some borderline faulty brettanomyces levels. It just kills the fruit, and that's self defeating.

"No drama, King Cabernet is still ruling but lighter varieties are always up for a duel depending on the current fashion trends. I reckon high-quality Cabernets will always be in demand, and it was not really a surprise but a great triumph to see a couple of well-known larger producers creating some very well made expressions."

Navarra in the north of the country also has a long tradition of Cabernet production, so perhaps Spain has been hiding its Cabernet laurels under a bushel

KING CAB

And, finally, what about that ever-contentious issue, 'value'? Again, much as Cabernet is grown all over the world and can be made in a number of styles, so it can also span the price points.

The tasting included wines from under £10 a bottle to examples that cost more than £50, and there was some split opinion from the judges as to whether all of them were worth it.

cabernet sauvignon and merlot masters

Judges

Seated left to right:
Sam Caporn MW
Patricia Stefanowicz MW
Dalila Katia
Clement Robert MS

Standing left to right
Nicola Thomson
Keith Isaac MW
Rupert Millar
Tobias D. Gorn
David Round MW
Patrick Schmitt MW
Jonathan Pedley MW
Annette Scarfe MW



Pedley in particular stated that there was “a pretty disastrous lack of value for money among the premium wines”.

It is true that in the £20-£30 bracket there were perhaps rather more bronzes than one might hope for in wines of that level. Of course, part of this might be the tendency to judge higher-quality wines more stringently. One can be more forgiving and indulgent of a wine under £10 showing anything less than utter perfection but which is at least ‘correct’ and ‘delivers’.

Looking at the results, it’s clear that there are a good number of gold and silver medals in the £10-£15 category – certainly ‘premium’ price points by that standard of today’s marketeers. In all of the 100% Cabernet flights the results were

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What did the judges think?



PATRICIA STEFANOWICZ MW -WINE CONSULTANT

“What I found, as expected, is that Cabernet needs oak, or a blending variety to fill the mid-palate.

“That said, we did find a couple of un-oaked Cabernets that had enough flavour to hold together. Quite a few of the Chilean wines were rather herbaceous, not always in a pleasant way. Some of the South African wines were overly burnt and meaty, yet with a green note.

“Price doesn’t matter very much when it comes to quality or value for money: there were excellent wines at price-points over £10-£15. It is true that Masters come at prices higher than £30, and these are truly serious examples of the type, with many years still in hand. They were sensuous, with great intensity and structure, balanced, however, even in their adolescence.

“The Global Masters was a fascinating snapshot of what is happening in the world of Cabernet and Merlot. Generally, the wines were a delight to taste; we found some exceptional samples.”

fairly even, it was in the Cabernet blends that lower levels can be detected, especially in the £20-£30 bracket, where Silver was the highest award.

Then again, despite taking a harder line with higher-priced wines, in the £50+ category there were only two Bronzes and two Silvers, the rest being Golds and

Masters. They’re certainly not wines at prices most people would call ‘everyday’ but there’s no denying that at the top it’s hard to beat ‘King Cab’. db