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Single vs Blend Varietal Tasting

University of Toronto Faculty Club

Wednesday, October 28, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.

When we think about a grape variety, we tend to think about its individual character: the bright acidity of Chenin Blanc, the cassis and structure of Cabernet Sauvignon, the richness of Merlot, or the distinctive personality of Pinotage. But wine is not always about expressing a grape in isolation. Sometimes the winemaker's art lies in combining different varieties to create something that is more complex, balanced, or complete than any one grape could be on its own.

This tasting asks a deceptively simple question: **what happens when a grape variety stands on its own, and what happens when it becomes part of a blend?**

South Africa provides a particularly fascinating setting for exploring this question. Although the country produces plenty of single-varietal wines, blending has a long and important tradition. Chenin Blanc has historically been an important component of South African white blends, and today Chenin-led blends incorporating varieties such as Clairette Blanche, Viognier, Grenache Blanc and Verdelho have become one of the Cape's distinctive wine styles. Red blends range from classic Bordeaux-inspired combinations of Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot to the uniquely South African Cape Blend, built around Pinotage.

We will taste four pairs. For Chenin Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinotage, we will put a predominantly single-varietal wine beside a blend in which that same grape plays an important role. As we taste each pair, we can consider not only what the individual grape brings to the glass, but what the other varieties add—or change.

And because wine is rarely more interesting than when it is at the table, we have also asked the chef at the Faculty Club to be part of the experiment.

We begin with a seared scallop bowl with sweet corn purée, pickled Granny Smith apple and shaved fennel with lemon vinaigrette. The sweetness of the scallop and corn, the acidity of the apple and vinaigrette, and the freshness of the fennel should give us an opportunity to see how the Sauvignon Blanc and the two Chenins respond to food. Chenin Blanc's combination of acidity and body makes it particularly versatile with seafood, so this first course should provide an excellent setting for the white wines.

We then move to a braised beef cheek with celery root purée, glazed heirloom carrots, roasted king oyster mushrooms, Cabernet jus and crispy shallots. Here the richness and slow-cooked character of the beef, the earthiness of the mushrooms and the sweetness of the carrots provide a very different test. Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Pinotage and red blends all have established affinities with beef and other richly flavoured meats, but their tannin, fruit and structure can interact with the dish in quite different ways.

So this is really two tastings in one: single variety versus blend, and wine on its own versus wine at the table.

There is no need to decide in advance whether blending makes a wine better. Instead, taste the pairs, taste them again with the food, and see what changes.

The Wines

Reception Wine:

De Grendal Koetshuis Sauvignon Blanc 2022

Koetshuis is a cuvée of Sauvignon Blanc and 5% Semillon that uses separately fermented batches from Darling and Lutzville. Lightly wooded in style, it has appealing zip and minerality, a herbal undertone and a lightly salty, citrus and passion fruit palate..

Tasting Wines:

CHENIN BLANC

Chenin Blanc – Pearce Predhomme 2018

Sourced from old vines and naturally fermented, expect elegant notes of white peach, lemon, and tangerine with an underlying layer of crisp yellow apple. Bright and fresh on the palate, but with good depth and concentration; more vinous than fruity but balanced.

Chenin Blanc Blend – Mullineux Old Vines White 2021

62% Chenin Blanc, 10% Clairette Blanche, 9% Viognier, 7% Grenache Blanc, 6% Semillon Gris, 6% Verdelho.

The floral nose shows upfront aromas of white peach blossom, Forelle pear and hints of white pepper, whilst the palate bursts with vibrant acidity, sumptuous nectarines and yellow grapefruit. The 2021 harvest resulted in a slow and gradual ripening period which in turn contributed to the great texture and complexity of this wine.

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

Cabernet Sauvignon – Kloovenberg 2006

Dark fruited, capsicum and tobacco whiffs with soft vanilla support well contained alcohol within sumptuous texture.

Cabernet Sauvignon Blend – Glenelly Estate Reserve Red 2018

52% Cabernet Sauvignon, 14% Cabernet Franc, 14% Syrah, 11% Merlot, 9% Petit Verdot

Rich cassis and mulberry with cedar and tobacco reveal Cabernet as the backbone to this blend. On the mid palate red and black cherry accompanied by a hint of black pepper spice highlights the Syrah's contribution. Intense fruit flavours are layered with mocha, Christmas cake, sandalwood and leather, bringing complexity to the wine, balanced by fresh, fruity acidity, the wine's firm tannins lead to a clean, dry finish, promising excellent ageing potential.

MERLOT

Merlot – Franshoek 2004

Very ripe and sweet blueberry fruit with touch of wildness about the nose; ripe, balanced tannins giving a chunky profile.

Merlot Blend – Anthonij Rupert Optima 2019

37% Merlot, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 28% Cabernet Franc

Violet, blackberry, cherry, cocoa, spice, and fruitcake scents instantly seduce. In a single whiff, classic Black Forest gateau. The mouth is soft, rounded, velvety, and loving with a dry tail with the same ripe and rich flavors. It is supple, textured, and elegant, offering focus, structure, and a velvety appeal. layered, complex, cohesive, and satisfying.

PINOTAGE

Pinotage – Lammershoek 2005

Grippy tannins, assertively dry palate with dried peach and brooding dark fruit notes.

Pinotage Blend – Warwick Three Cape Ladies 2011

Pinotage, Cabernet Sauvignon & Shiraz

Dark berry and stewed fruit aromas fuse with spicy pepper flavors, which complement the full-bodied ripe tannins. This blend brings the best of Pinotage to the classic French varieties and will age well for the next 15 years.

Tasting Menu

First Plate:

- **Seared scallop bowl:** sweet corn puree, pickled Granny Smith apple, shaved fennel with lemon vinaigrette

Second Plate:

- **Braised beef cheek:** celery root puree, glazed heirloom carrots, roasted king oyster mushrooms, cabernet jus, crispy shallots

We will make every effort to accommodate your food allergies or special dietary needs if requested.

Save The Date

- Friday, December 11, 2026: Yuletide Dinner @ Faculty Club

When & Where

When: Wednesday, October 28 @ 6:30 p.m.

Where: University of Toronto Faculty Club, 41 Willcocks Street, Toronto, ON M5S 1C7
(The Spadina streetcar stops at the corner of Willcocks and Spadina.)

Price:

- Members. \$115
- Guests. \$130

Closing date: Your booking or cancellation **MUST** be received by **Wednesday, October 21**. Your E transfer confirmation from your bank will be your **only** confirmation. If we are unable to accommodate your registration due to our **capacity limit**, you will be notified and a full refund will be offered.

Your cheque payable to ***South African Wine Society*** or **Interac E-transfer-payment** payable to winessainfo@gmail.com will reserve your place at the event.

Note: If you will be paying by cheque, please advise us in advance by sending an email to SAWS (winessainfo@gmail.com) such that we can reserve your place(s).

As a courtesy to other members, please refrain from wearing any scented products, including perfumes, colognes, after shaves or hand lotions.

Event Registration if paying by cheque

Single vs Blend Varietal Tasting University of Toronto Faculty Club Wednesday, October 28, 2026 at 6:30 p.m.

When registering by mail, it is imperative that you email us at winessainfo@gmail.com to let us confirm your booking promptly.

Send cheque payable to:

South African Wine Society.
8 Paul Street
Thornhill, ON L3T 2H4

_____ member/s @ \$115

_____ guests/s @ \$130

Name(s) _____

Phone _____

WAIVER, RELEASE AND INDEMNITY

I am participating in South African Wine Society (SAWS) events voluntarily and at my own risk. In consideration of my participation, I, for myself, my heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, hereby waive, release and forever discharge and indemnify SAWS, its organizers, volunteers, members, and the Executive Committee from any and all damages, claims and actions for any loss, liability, claim, action, costs, expenses, physical or emotional injury or death to me arising out of my participation in SAWS functions or on society grounds, howsoever caused. I am aware that SAWS does not carry any liability insurance.

This waiver applies to all guests who I may bring and for whom I accept complete responsibility.

I also certify that I, and my guests are 19 years of age or older.

I also consent to the use of my/our name(s) and/or likeness through photographs or other images which SAWS may post on its website or other media.

We/I have read and understand and agree to this waiver.