

[Review: Taste the Helderberg 2015](#)

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Flying solo at a social event is something that people often hesitate to undertake – few things are as disconcerting as being alone in a crowd. I thought so too and ended up approaching Taste the Helderberg 2015 edition with some trepidation. After all, the best part of wine tasting is talking about the wine tasting. Wrong. The best part of wine tasting is meeting new people who also enjoy wine tasting and then talking to them about wine tasting, and eventually also about life, love and the universe.

There weren't any signs pointing you in the right direction from the car park (even the gate guard only said "follow the other cars"), but they weren't necessary. All you had to do was to follow the clusters of people all walking in the same direction – not towards the main entrance, but off to the side down what initially reminded me of the kind of dark, deserted alleys where people become victims. Luckily, this was not the case. The moment you step through the door, you're enveloped in a feeling of "we're all friends here," mostly because you sort of had to dodge between groups of old friends greeting each other just to get in the door.

The entire evening felt like one big reunion; not because I actually came across anyone I'd met before, but because the people I did meet were chatting like old friends from the first "hello." Wine tasting is indeed improved by comparing notes with new people. And of course, raving about good food also makes for a great conversation starter. But nothing quite gets a conversation going than complaining about load shedding. To be honest, I hadn't even consciously realised that there was a live music performance until the break in power and sudden silence brought it to my attention. After about three minutes the main lights (thank goodness for emergency lights) and music came back on and I took note of the talented musician, Newton – definitely a must have for your next event.

The real highlight of the evening was the number of excellent wines on offer:

Flagstone's Word of Mouth Viognier which spent 4 months in a combination of French and American oak barrels has a delightful light, wooded texture which perfectly complements the citrus notes on the palate.

Haskell vineyards' Haskell II 2010 is a blend of Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Mourvèdre and has certainly earned its four and half star rating by Platter.

Hidden Valley's Shiraz based Hidden Secret is an easy drinking wine with sweet cherries on the palate. This one is great for cosying up in front of the fire place.

Lourensford's 60% wooded Chardonnay is spritely with hints of pineapple on the palate. Their 50 month bottle fermented MCC, which consists of 93% Chardonnay and 7% Pinot Noir is a celebration in a bottle, definitely one to keep for a special occasion. While we're on the subject, they've introduced their new Pinot Noir Rosé which is best described as a "pink party girl" – light, fruity notes and only 9% alcohol.

Peter Falke's Blanc de Noir 2015 (Cabernet Sauvignon based) with strawberries on the palate is a surprisingly sophisticated summer wine.

Somerbosch stood out with its very recently bottled white 2015 vintages. The soft tropical Sauvignon Blanc, litchi Chenin Blanc, and grapefruit Chardonnay are ready to drink, but I'd prefer to stock up for summer.

Romond Vineyards are family owned and tasting is by appointment only and well worth the visit. The Rosé initially has strawberries on the palate, but it evolves into a more sophisticated taste not usually associated with Rosé. A blackboard next to their stall issues fair warning: "A Rosé that is not for sissies."

Longridge's Cabernet Sauvignon 2012 and the Asian style short rib dish by their executive chef, Bruce von Pressentin is a match made in palate heaven.

The food on offer was reasonably priced and of four star standard besides. Plated in a way that makes it easy to eat while standing or sitting at one of the tables strategically located among the wine booths, or at one of the tables in the adjacent venue where all the food was happening. For the sweet tooth, Marianne's Fine Chocolates from Somerset West, and the brownies from Lourensford's Millhouse Kitchen do the trick. The chicken samosas from Mistress of Spices give credence to the name; I will be keeping an eye out for them for sure. What really warmed my heart was Ken Forrester's lamb and lentil soup. Served in a paper cup with a dollop of yogurt and fresh coriander, it was the ideal meal to end the evening off before stepping out in the brisk night air and head home for some well-deserved sleep. It's hard work, wine tasting.

Reviewed by Freda Scheffler

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Taste The Helderberg took place 11 June 2015 at the NH Lord Charles Hotel in Somerset West.