

Bluffer's Guide to Wards, Districts, Regions and all that.

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South Africa has a clear and logical demarcation of land for wine growing. It is based, says the governing body, the Wine & Spirit Board and its relevant sub-committee, the Demarcation Committee, on 'nature and the human hand'. Of these, nature - soil, climate and location – is key. The Board wants any demarcation to reflect that the soil and climate varies in SA and that certain locations suit certain varieties and that nature's influence causes wines to vary in character.

As a wine educator, there are three questions which are favourite here; 'what exactly is a single varietal wine?' 'What is an Estate wine?' And 'How big is a Ward?'

The W&SB define a **single cultivar** – or varietal – wine as consisting of at least 85% of that one cultivar. So, yes 15% of another varietal could be added without mention, but I doubt this occurs often. Most SA winemakers are happy to declare a blend on the label. Maybe in poor vintages another varietal is added to 'beef up' the wine, but I suspect this would never near the 15% allowance and may be more of a European practice due to inclement weather. An alternative to this is to follow Oregon's lead and stipulate a 100% criteria on single varietals. Any single varietal (and the Board recognises 82 of these in SA) which has had sweetening Must or spirit fortification added should come from grapes of the same cultivar and place – but shall 'be deemed so' provided the total is less than 15% for fortified WO wines and 5% for table wines (including single cultivar, single vineyard and Estate wines). So a Cape Vintage made from Shiraz will have, or will be assumed to have, had fortifying spirit added also made from Shiraz.

The smallest wine growing unit recognised, is the **Single Vineyard**. This is one vineyard block not exceeding six hectares, and to qualify all the grapes, must or spirit (see above), must come from that single block and be of a single variety.

An **Estate Wine** can come from more than one vineyard or even farm, as long as they are adjoined and considered a single unit (there are some historical exceptions to this). All of the grapes and all of the winemaking, including bottling, must occur within the unit, and the same applies for must and spirit addition.

Single varietal wines, single vineyard wines and Estate wines must all be produced within a **Wine of Origin**. The 1973 WO scheme recognised the principle of climate, soil and location

and guarantees that the wine comes from where it says it comes from and reflects a character of that origin. All bottles so approved will have a seal over the capsule.

The smallest unit containing single vineyards, Estates or wine farms is the **Ward**. The Ward name has to reflect that it produces a typical character unique to place, the result of their terroir – and there has to be defining qualities to the wines from that Ward which distinguish it from another. A Ward could contain one farm, but usually applications are from several who see familiar characteristics which influence their wines. A Ward, thus, could be dozens of hectares, or it could be hundreds of hectares; it depends on the boundaries set by nature which separate them from the next ward. Consider, of the 67, the Wards of Elim, or Durbanville, with their increasingly recognisable characters. Slopes, wind, aspect and altitude obviously influence this but within the Ward there may generally be a similar micro-climate. ‘How big?’ well, the answer, I’m afraid, is, ‘it depends’. At least it may be easier to grasp than the equivalent US demarcation of an American Viticultural Area (AVA), where Cole Ranch AVA covers 60hectares and the Ohio River Valley AVA covers 6.7million hectares.

Most, but not all Wards, fall within **Districts**, currently numbering 26. The principle is the same for a Ward, but on a larger scale and maybe containing more variation of soil or climate. This could be a larger macro-climate, influenced by rivers, mountains, forests and settlements and may include several distinct Wards, but all bounded by a definable character, separating it from the next District. The District of Walker Bay contains Wards differentiated by aspect, soil and altitude; the Ridge being quite different to the Valley, yet all forming a cohesive macro-climate of the cool Walker Bay District. Bottelary excels with Pinotage – to me – whereas if in Jonkershoek then I head for Shiraz and Cabernet, yet both lie within the Stellenbosch District.

The fifth unit (SV, Estate, Ward, District) is the **Region**, recently amended (and the Board clearly states that nothing is fixed and that changes are a natural progression) to include six within the Western Cape. These reflect climatic and terroir distinctions, so that the Karoo WO is distinct from the Coastal WO. Consider that the average rainfall in the Karoo might well be less than 200mm a year, and that Constantia might receive 1300mm in the same year. Regional differences follow the coast, river and mountain influence. The only anomaly might be Boberg, created to allow fortified wine makers a larger area for grape production whilst maintaining a recognisable Region for their world-class product. Regions are necessarily quite large, and contain diverse soils and climates, yet who could argue that, say, the Breede River Valley WO does not make distinctively fascinating wines?

The largest unit is the **Geographical Unit**, following established socio-political Provincial demarcations. The Eastern Cape WO has one Ward so far and as more are granted, a District into which they fall, if they are homogenous, might be created, and then a Region distinguished. The Northern Cape WO already has four Wards, too separated to fall within a single District and two Districts lacking sufficient wine farms to create Ward divisions as yet.

Winemakers taking grapes from within a Ward can apply that Ward name to their WO on the label, taking grapes from two or more Wards means the District WO must be applied, and from two or more Districts means the Regional WO must be used. So a winemaker taking grapes from inside and outside the only Ward of St Francis Bay can only apply the WO Eastern Cape to their bottle, even if the vineyards were only metres apart because no District or Region exists and some came from outside the Ward.

These WO's matter, especially abroad. Consumers are alert to differences in origin and are learning preferences in climatic production. As my Dutch students always tell me, in their supermarkets back home, any label stating WO 'Stellenbosch' or 'Swartland' or 'Elgin' or similar, go first. Of course, it is not a guarantee of quality, but there is likely to be more expression of terroir from a District WO than a Regional WO, and even more from a Ward WO than a District WO.