

A sauvignon well worth the wait

IT'S NOT going to be long before we'll be tasting the new whites of 2009, and strange to think that many of the sauvignon blancs of 2008 are already nearly a year old.

Of course, not all of them are released immediately after harvest. There is a trend towards keeping sauvignons back for a while, to let them rest on the lees and gather some more complexity and body (a very welcome trend). So you now find that the premium sauvignons are offered later in the year.

An example is the new Shannon Vineyards Sauvignon Blanc 2008, which was only brought to the market at the end of last year.

Vineyards is a new label from a

Veritassies



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farm in Elgin that's been selling its grapes to quality producers such as Newton Johnson, La Motte and Cathy Marshall Wines and has now

stepped out with the first of its own releases. And what a debut. The sauvignon blanc is one of the most complete sauvignons of the 2008 vintage, elegant and beautifully balanced – a far cry from hard, acidic sauvignons (of which there were many in 2008).

It contains five sauvignon blanc clones and there is a 15% addition of three-month barrel matured semillon to round out the palate. The result is a wine with good body and complexity, yet still very fresh.

Alongside the release of this fine white is the maiden Shannon Vineyards Pinot Noir 2007. The vineyard management at Shannon is very precise, and with 17 differ-

ent soil types the relationship between grape, soil and the Elgin mesoclimate is, as owner James Downes explains, a journey of discovery.

For this reason, five different pinot noir clones are planted on various soils and aspects, and then vinified separately.

The complexity is further enhanced through the use of barrels from five Burgundian coopers. If you are a pinot noir lover, this is a wine you have to try soon.

You can also look out for the release of the single vineyard merlot in 2009, the "Mount Bullet" Merlot.

Downes has a marine biology

background (he used to breed salmon in Scotland), and his scientific mind is put to good use in these dazzling permutations of soil, climate and grape.

It was also rigorously applied when the vines were established to isolate and eliminate virused vines, the bane of so many Cape wine farms.

Confident that virus will not interfere with the future development of the vines, Downes wryly looks forward to his 60th birthday (he's 35).

"That will be a highlight in my journey. The vines will then be 35 years old and I should have a much clearer idea of the vineyards!"