

For immediate release



THE MERIT

WINE & SPIRIT CHALLENGE

The Merit Wine & Spirit Challenge 2020

High-end products and value offerings galore

This was the 2nd year The Merit Wine and Spirit Challenge was held, and the increase in the number of entries is a definite acknowledgement that the unique features of this competition fills a need in the South African industry. Several high-end wines and spirits were entered, as well as several super-value offerings.



The event was held on the picturesque Neethlingshof Estate, and wine industry veteran Celia Gilloway and her team ensured that everything ran like clockwork. As convener of judges, Celia ensured the panel was

well represented by younger wine adjudicators to make the tasting panels more representative of consumers in general.

Millennials and younger consumers did not grow up in an era with limited choices dominated by a few major producers and developed different taste profiles than the previous generation. They are more experimental and are not dictated to by tradition and are on their way to becoming an influential fine-wine consuming generation.

Impact of COVID19

Producers are playing catch-up due to COVID19 regulations, and therefore now is the time to be creative and examine ways to make use of more innovative practices.

The marketing value of travel came into question this year as producers took advantage of the time and expense saved by making use of virtual tastings and meetings. Traditional trade shows were also questioned, as marketers discovered the importance of social media engagements and online sales. The need to adapt and be innovative become increasingly important. Consumers will rely on brand recognition and awards to find quality products, even more than they did in the past.



Consumers are driven by both quality and value

The Merit Wine and Spirit Challenge awarded Gold Awards to all the outstanding products and Value Awards to wines R175 and below on the shelf, and spirits that are R350 or below. Some products achieved both awards and can now proudly display a double award.



Best Sauvignon blanc and best Rosé on show:

There is a huge move by younger consumers towards a preference for Sauvignon blanc and Rosé, so it is something that ought to be highlighted. Every year fashion and tastes change, therefore The Merit Wine and Spirit Challenge will always stay up to date with new trends.

- The trophy for best Sauvignon blanc went to Spier for their 21 Gables Sauvignon blanc 2019.
- The trophy for best Rosé went to Lanzerac with their 2020 Lanzerac Pinotage Rosé.



The 2020 Merit Wine & Spirit Tasting Team

The wine judges were Jono Le Feuvre, Samarie Smith and Spencer Fondaumiere.
The spirit judges were Jean-Vincent Ridon, Malu Lambert and James Copeland.

Tasting comments

The categories that received the most entries were Sauvignon blanc and Rosé, followed by Shiraz and Bordeaux Style blends. Overall, there were more white wines entered, compared to red. The Spirit category was dominated by gin, as expected, followed by Grappa and Rum.

The Sauvignon blanc wines showed a diversity of styles from the slightly asparagus and vegetable side to the extremely tropical. All had vibrant acidity and showed extremely well. The fact that a 2019 wine won the Trophy for best Sauvignon blanc shows how well the cultivar can age.

The white blend class was extremely exciting and one of the favourites, showing a lot of character, finesse and depth.

Rosé was a class to be reckoned with, particularly the lighter lemony styles that were invitingly elegant. The wines were well balanced and there were some serious contenders that shook up this normally pedestrian class. There were some world class wines.

Some of the top scoring red wines were from the blended classes. The Bordeaux flight was extremely consistent, and the Cape blends really excited with some delicious examples. It showed that this class could put South Africa on the map.

The Merlot class excited and surprised, especially the older examples. The Shiraz class had some of the highest scoring red wines, showing that South African Shiraz wines are truly world class.

The brandies showed very well in their class, as did the Grappas that were very exciting. Gin as a class, showed that botanicals really added quality and the gins that were juniper-strong did better. The London Dry class outperformed the other styles of Gin.

Overall, the judges were pleased with the spectrum of quality wines and spirits entered. Details about The Merit Wine and Spirit Challenge 2021 will be announced in the last week of January 2021.



We are thankful to our partners who helped to make this event possible:



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