

ARBITERS OF TASTE

Judging the 2024 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year & Young Winemaker of the Year

The annual Diners Club Winemaker of the Year and Young Winemaker of the Year awards continue to be benchmarks of excellence in South African viticulture. These prestigious accolades honour innovation, skill, and the enduring passion that defines the country's wine industry. This year's awards, focusing on Chenin Blanc for the Winemaker category and "any red wine" for the Young Winemaker category, were judged by an accomplished panel of experts. Their insights reflect both the evolution of South African wines and the unique strengths of the respective categories.

CARRIE ADAMS

Panel Chair

Carrie Adams is an esteemed wine aficionado and broadcaster with decades of experience in wine evaluation. Known for her sharp palate and engaging discussions about wine, she has chaired numerous prestigious competitions.

"Chenin Blanc is a quintessential South African grape," says Adams. "Once relegated to brandy production, it has become a beacon of versatility and quality. This year, we judged 115 entries, each representing a unique interpretation of this workhorse varietal. From tropical fruit-driven styles to oaked, textured expressions, the diversity was extraordinary. The winning wine embodies the elegance and vibrancy that Chenin Blanc offers."

Adams revels in the boldness of young winemakers: "This year's red wine entries displayed fearless innovation. These are wines made by brave young Turks who challenge convention and reimagine what's possible. Judging this category is always a joy, as it showcases the dynamic creativity driving the future of South African wine."





YEGAS NAIDOO

Judge

Yegas Naidoo, a connoisseur with a hospitality and fine dining background, has been instrumental in promoting South African wines on the global stage. Her expertise lies in identifying wines with balance, quality, and potential.

“The Chenin Blanc category was exceptional this year,” Naidoo remarks. “Winemakers are delving deeper into terroir, creating wines that tell stories of place and time. This varietal’s capacity for freshness and complexity was on full display.”

Naidoo admires the risk-taking spirit of the entrants: “Young winemakers are embracing uncharted paths while maintaining quality and elegance. Their creations reflect a confident evolution of style that promises a bright future for South African wines.”



WINNIE BOWMAN

Judge

Winnie Bowman, a Cape Wine Master and experienced international wine judge, brings a wealth of knowledge from her years in the industry. Her passion lies in exploring how winemaking techniques elevate varietals to global prominence.

“Chenin Blanc is enjoying its time in the spotlight, and rightly so,” says Bowman. “This year’s entries showcased everything from accessible everyday

wines to premium, age-worthy icons. It’s clear that South African winemakers have honed their craft, producing expressions that capture the grape’s full potential.”

Bowman celebrates the entrants’ creativity in the Young Winemaker competition: “These young winemakers are crafting exciting blends and varietals, often with grapes new to South Africa. Their work reflects a fusion of tradition and innovation that’s energising the industry.”

DENZEL SWARTS

Judge

A rising star in the South African wine industry, Denzel Swarts champions sustainable winemaking and terroir-driven authenticity. His focus is on fostering respect for the earth in every bottle.

“This year’s Chenin Blanc entries displayed harmony between vibrant fruit expression and sophisticated structure,” Swarts explains. “The wines reflect a growing respect for terroir and the artistry of winemaking.”

Swarts was also inspired by the young winemakers’ entries’ bold experimentation: “These young winemakers are not just pushing boundaries; they’re redefining them. Their respect for the land and willingness to innovate will keep South Africa’s wine industry ahead of the curve.”





SHANE MUMBA

Judge

Shane Mumba, known for his expertise in marketing and branding in the wine sector, focuses on how wines express authenticity and tell compelling stories.

Mumba describes the Chenin Blanc entries as “the workhorse wine that became the race horse”, and adds “it was no easy job judging some of the best Chenins because the diversity in style made them very difficult to identify.”

Mumba finds the creativity of the young winemakers invigorating: “I am always excited to taste the young winemakers’ wines. We are fortunate to have talented young winemakers in South Africa that are passionate and ready to push boundaries. The red wines we tasted were vibrant, full of character but yet elegant.”

JOHANN FOURIE

Judge

Johann Fourie, a winemaker with years of experience crafting award-winning

wines, brings a technical perspective to the judging process. His focus is on craftsmanship and terroir expression.

“Chenin Blanc continues to be a flagbearer for South African wines,” says Fourie. “This year’s entries displayed exceptional quality across the board, making the judging process as challenging as it was rewarding.”

Fourie views the Young Winemaker category as a window into the future: “The creativity and technical skill of these young winemakers are extraordinary. Their ability to innovate while honouring tradition speaks volumes about the bright future of South African wine.”

The 2024 Diners Club awards underline South Africa’s winemaking prowess and the creativity that sets it apart globally. The judges’ insights reveal a thriving industry rooted in tradition but unafraid to embrace bold, forward-thinking approaches. With winners soon to be revealed, one thing is certain: South African wine is in the hands of extraordinary talent. 🍷

