

MASTERS AND MAVERICKS

Celebrating the 2024 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year Finalists

The Diners Club Winemaker of the Year award has been synonymous with excellence, innovation, and passion in South African winemaking for 44 years. This year's finalists in the masters category embody these qualities, each bringing a unique approach and vision to their craft. From revitalising forgotten vineyards to pushing the boundaries of terroir expression, these winemakers tell stories not just through their words, but through the wines they create.

As 2024 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year finalists, Pierre Wahl, Louis van der Riet, Tertius Boshoff, Henri Swiegers, and Ben Snyman represent the pinnacle of South African winemaking. Each finalist has a unique story, a signature approach, and a commitment to crafting wines that resonate on a personal and cultural level.

PIERRE WAHL

Crafting Complexity in the Cape

Born in Port Elizabeth, Pierre Wahl's

path to winemaking began with a deep love for nature. Though initially drawn to nature conservation, it was his father's enthusiasm for agriculture that steered him toward viticulture. "I wanted to be creative, tour the world, and meet interesting people - winemaking ticked all the boxes," he reflects.

A graduate of Elsenburg Agricultural College, Pierre has spent decades refining his approach to Chenin Blanc, a varietal close to his heart. His proudest moment? Winning the Diners Club Winemaker of the Year award in 2016 with a Chenin Blanc

from Tulbagh.

Pierre's finalist wine, the Survivor Terroir Chenin Blanc 2023, exemplifies his innovative spirit. Teaming up with viticulturist DB Rust, Pierre experimented with leaf removal and sunlight exposure in the vineyards. The result? A complex, rich wine showcasing natural yeast fermentation. "It's rewarding to create something that puts a smile on consumers' faces," he says.

Looking ahead, Pierre dreams of making Survivor Wines a household name while consistently producing



wines of exceptional quality.

BEN SNYMAN

Fuelled by Creativity and Connection

A Stellenbosch native with a BSc in Viticulture and Oenology, Ben Snyman embodies a balance of adventure and artistry in winemaking. His diverse studies, including leadership programmes at Harvard Business School and advanced courses at the Cape Wine Academy, highlight his dedication to mastering his craft.

Ben's proudest moments come from the daily fulfilment of crafting wines that bring happiness to others.

His finalist wine, the 2021 Survivor Reserve Chenin Blanc, created with minimal intervention, allows the natural appeal of fruit and texture to shine through. "It's about examining what lies beneath the surface and creating something artistic," he explains. His attention to detail and commitment to authenticity ensure that every bottle tells a unique story of its own, making each sip a new experience for the drinker.

Looking forward, Ben hopes to draw on his life experiences to fuel his creativity in the cellar, always striving



ensuring that his wines remain authentic expressions of their origins.

TERTIUS BSHOFF

Old Vines, New Stories

Swellendam-born Tertius Boshoff describes winemaking as both a calling and an art form. His passion for creativity, combined with a meticulous nature, has made him a standout in the industry.

“Winemaking is art,” he says. “It’s about painting stories inside a bottle.”

Tertius achieved his proudest moment in 2023 when he won the Diners Club Winemaker of the Year award for his Blueberry Hill Shiraz 2020. His 2024 finalist wine, the Stellenrust Secrets & Lies Chenin Blanc, honours old-vine heritage, with grapes harvested from

a vineyard planted in 1982. The wine is crafted with minimal interference, allowing the unique character of the 43-year-old vines to shine.

For Tertius, the smiles of wine drinkers as they savour his creations are the ultimate reward. He’s equally passionate about mentoring younger winemakers, fostering a culture of



for superior quality and to continuously push the boundaries of winemaking.

LOUIS VAN DER RIET

A Chenin Blanc Revivalist

Hailing from Kimberley, Louis van der Riet’s journey into winemaking was somewhat serendipitous. Sunday lunches with his family often featured a sip of wine and lively discussions about its flavours, sparking a lifelong fascination with the transformation of grapes into art. “The idea that something as simple as a grape could become a work of art felt like magic,” he recalls.

After studying Viticulture and Oenology at Elsenburg Stellenbosch, Louis founded Le Sueur Wines. His finalist wine, the 2022 Le Sueur Kluisenaar, is a testament to his dedication. Crafted from Chenin Blanc grapes grown in Meiringspoort, a challenging yet rewarding terroir, this wine celebrates resilience. “The block was abandoned, but we revived it,” he says.

For Louis, the connection between the land, the vineyard, and the people who enjoy his wines is deeply rewarding. He balances innovation with tradition,





learning and innovation. “The only thing they need to do is ask questions,” he advises.

HENRI SWIEGERS

A Legacy of Passion

For Henri Swiegers, winemaking runs in the family. Raised in Robertson and educated at Augsburg Agricultural School, Henri spent his childhood immersed in cellar life alongside his father, a winemaker. “Wine was part of growing up, so I guess you could say it was passed down to me,” he notes.

Henri’s finalist wine, the 2023 Badsberg Chenin Blanc Barrel Ferment, exemplifies his dedication to balance and harmony. Sourced from 34-year-old bush vines, this wine marries fruit and wood seamlessly, delivering a complex yet approachable profile.

Throughout his career, Henri has earned numerous accolades, including four General Smuts trophies, but his greatest joy lies in seeing others enjoy his wine. He is committed to mentoring the next generation, ensuring that South Africa’s wine industry continues to thrive. 🍷