

DINERS CLUB ANNOUNCES WINEMAKERS OF THE YEAR

The 2010 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year is Bartho Eksteen from the Hermanuspietersfontein winery near Hermanus. Taking home the trophy for the 2010 Diners Club Young Winemaker of the Year is RJ Botha from Nitida Cellars in Durbanville. Winemakers had to submit Sauvignon blanc wines while the young winemakers were judged on their unfortified dry red cultivar or blended wines.

Diners Club celebrated the 30th year of the Winemaker of the Year competition and the tenth for young winemaker award. Speaking at the gala dinner award ceremony in the Winelands on 27 November, Diners Club managing director Ebrahim Matthews said over the years these awards had become a benchmark for the industry and were regarded as one of South Africa's most prestigious wine competitions. "For three decades Diners Club has been selecting and rewarding the finest of South African winemakers, encouraging them to dig deeper and raise the standard of South African wines to a level where they would be recognised on an international stage. We believe that they have achieved this and more," Matthews said.

For Pieter Ferreira, the 2004 winner, it is the award winemakers covet. "It changes your life," he said. According to Carl Schultz of Hartenberg who won in 2005, "Turnover at Hartenberg increased significantly after I won."

Previous winners include some of the South Africa's foremost pioneering winemakers such as Günter Brözel, Sydney Back and Danie de Wet.

Judging panel chairman Dave Hughes said the Sauvignon blanc wines submitted for this year's competition were without exception of excellent quality. "There was not a single wine amongst them that was not deserving of praise. Where they differed was in style.

Three wines from the 2009 and three from the 2010 vintages made it to the final six. "Every one of them was expressive of their location and, taken together, represented virtually the entire taste spectrum that can be produced locally. We tasted the typical cool-area grassy nose and sweet gooseberry fruit; lemons and limes on the nose with a ripe tropical fruit palate and a citrus zing;

dusty hedges and zippy acidity; exotically oaked with opulent sweet fruit; a tropical fruit salad; and West Coast green peppers, grass and green figs.”

Eksteen’s wooded Sauvignon blanc, the 2009 Hermanuspietersfontein No. 5, was aged in an equal mix of new, second- and third-fill French oak barrels. Said Hughes: “No. 5 is a perfectly balanced wine with a 15% Sémillon component that adds a further layer to the combination of wood and fruit. It is a style proving increasingly popular with South African wine lovers.”

The 2009 vintage was the first in which Hermanuspietersfontein Vineyards produced all the grapes for its Sauvignon blanc.

Hughes said the red wines submitted for the Young Winemaker’s trophy were also of an exceptionally high standard. “Selecting a winner was no easy task, but RJ Botha’s 2009 Nitida Calligraphy stood out for its multi-faceted qualities. This vibrant, Bordeaux-style blend, comprising 47% Merlot, 28% Cabernet Franc and 25% Cabernet Sauvignon, was sourced from grapes from the winery’s own vineyards in the cool Durbanville area of the Western Cape “The Cabernet Franc adds spice and liveliness to the soft, rounded Merlot while the Cabernet Sauvignon delivers colour, depth and length. Each cultivar was harvested, fermented and aged separately before blending and bottling. All three spent 11 months in French first-, second- and third-fill barrels.”

Apart from the prestige associated with winning the competition, Eksteen received a South African Airways economy class return ticket to any wine-producing country in the world plus expenses. Botha walked away with a cash prize and a head start in the wine industry.

The judging panel was chaired by Dave Hughes; assisted by international wine consultant and chairperson of the Institute of Masters of Wine, Lynne Sheriff MW; wine judge and commentator Neil Pendock; Carrie Adams, wine judge and specialist liquor retailer; Nomonde Kubheka, KWV winemaker; Margaret Fry, Cape Wine Master; and technical wine consultant Margaret Fundira. Glenroy du Plessis, who was recently voted best wine steward at the 2010 Diners Club Winelist Awards, was this year’s apprentice judge.

To mark three decades of the competition, Diners Club has compiled a special “heritage pack” consisting of 12 wines made by previous winners still active in the industry. It contains wines of, *inter alia*, Rust en Vrede, Graham Beck, Allesverloren, Thelema and Bouchard Finlayson and is available to members through the Diners Club Wine Society.

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Bartho Eksteen

He graduated from Elsenburg Agricultural College in 1987 with a diploma in pomology, viticulture and cellar technology after which he started working for one of the wine cooperatives in the Cape. After a few years, he decided to specialise in Sauvignon blanc and moved to Wildekrans, a private producer near Bot River in the Walker Bay area. Here he honed his craft and received many prestigious awards such as the SA Champion Young Wine in 1996. He eventually set out on his own and produced his first Sauvignon blanc under his own trademark, Bartho Eksteen. In 2005 he became a partner in Hermanuspietersfontein Vineyards. The new cellar has since gathered a number of accolades among others, SAA, British Airways and Swiss International Airlines listings, and ratings of 4 and 4 1/2 stars in the *Platter's South African Wine Guide*

RJ Botha

RJ is a winemaker at Nitida Cellars in Durbanville where he has gained considerable experience of a wide range of cultivars. RJ has spent two harvests in France while employed at Nitida, the first harvest at Chateau Angelus in St Emilion and the second with the Despagne family in Entre Deux Mers.