

CRAFTING THE PERFECT CABERNET

Celebrating the 2025 Diners Club Winemaker of the Year Finalists

Five remarkable storytellers of South African terroir, each shaping the future of local Cabernet Sauvignon.

South Africa's wine heritage has always been defined by resilience, craft, and the pursuit of excellence. Nowhere is that spirit more evident than in the Diners Club Winemaker of the Year title, the country's most prestigious winemaker accolade and a career milestone for any winemaker who earns a place among the finalists.

The 2025 cohort is a striking group. Five individuals who embody passion, technical mastery, and a deep respect for the vineyards that shape their wines. From Stellenbosch's revered slopes to the expressive valley floors that define our finest Cabernet Sauvignon, each finalist presents a unique interpretation of place, craft, and style. Their stories are as compelling as their wines, offering a rich tapestry of experience, heritage, and forward-thinking vision.

JOHNNIE CALITZ

Glen Carlou Wines

Gravel Quarry Cabernet Sauvignon 2022

Glen Carlou's Johnnie Calitz

brings a quiet confidence to his craft, shaped by childhood lessons on his family's farm in Calitzdorp. His professional journey has been one of continuous learning – from studying Viticulture and Oenology at Stellenbosch University to gaining international experience in France and beyond. The Gravel Quarry Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 draws its power from koffiekliip and weathered granite soils, producing tiny berries packed with concentration. Natural fermentation and 24 months in 100% new French oak give the wine its muscular yet surprisingly refined personality. Layers of cassis, bramble, mint, and dark chocolate unfold in a way that promises exceptional ageing. For Johnnie, the reward lies in the quiet moments – watching a thoughtful consumer savour the wine, or witnessing his team grow with each vintage. His ambition is clear: to keep Glen Carlou firmly on the map as a South African benchmark for world-class Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon.



Johnnie Calitz



JOSÉ CONDE

Stark-Condé Wines

Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon 2021

José Conde's route to winemaking is anything but conventional, beginning with a Fine Art degree in New York City and a successful career as a designer in New York and Tokyo. His fascination with wine eventually brought him to South Africa in 1997, where he embraced winemaking as a craft grounded in discipline and creative expression. The Stark-Condé Stellenbosch Cabernet Sauvignon 2021 is an ode to both resilience and community: when wildfires

threatened his Jonkershoek Valley vineyards during harvest, José relied on fruit from neighbours to craft a wine that still reflects the classic Stellenbosch identity. His proudest milestone remains the estate's 2022 certification for organic farming – the result of a decade-long journey to healthier soils and more expressive vineyards. The 2021 vintage captures purity, authenticity, and a stylistic signature defined by balance. For José, the future lies in exploring the untapped potential of organic viticulture and continuing to push the farm's biological health to new heights.



LOUIS STRYDOM

Ernie Els Wines

Major Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2022

Few winemakers have shaped modern South African Cabernet Sauvignon as profoundly as Louis Strydom. With 25 years at Ernie Els Wines, his philosophy is grounded in farming first – a belief honed through decades of travel, study, and hands-on experience in cellars across Europe and the United States. The Ernie Els Major Series Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 represents a symbolic milestone: the first single-varietal Cabernet to emerge from the brand's newly renovated cellar. Fermented in Nico Velo concrete tanks before ageing in a split of terracotta amphorae and French oak, it combines Helderberg purity with a mineral edge and depth of structure. Concentrated fruit, clarity, and ageability define the wine's core. Louis views Cabernet as a long game – a vine that demands patience and respect – and his future ambition is to refine his understanding of the Helderberg's intricacies even further. For him, consistency is not a metric but a lifelong pursuit, embedded in the soil itself.



SCHALK OPPERMAN

Quoin Rock Wines

Knorhoek Cabernet Sauvignon 2022

Schalk Opperman's journey began in Stellenbosch, shaped by a deep love of nature and a desire to build a career that blends farming, craftsmanship, and people. After studying at Stellenbosch University, he honed his skills under Coenie Snyman and Louis Strydom, gaining experience at both Rust en Vrede and Engelbrecht Els Wines. The Knorhoek Cabernet Sauvignon 2022 forms part of Quoin Rock's focused Heritage range – just two wines that celebrate the estate's exceptional Simonsberg terroir. True to style, the wine delivers red-berry intensity, firm yet smooth tannins, and classic notes of lead pencil and earthy spice. For Schalk, the reward is in creating something that lasts – a wine that will be opened years from now, sparking a moment of connection. While this nomination is among his proudest achievements, he also dreams of future recognition for Chenin Blanc or Chardonnay, built on unwavering consistency and a fierce commitment to excellence.





WERNER SCHRENK

Peter Falke Wines

Signature Kailani Cabernet Sauvignon 2020

Pretoria-born Werner Schrenk felt drawn to winemaking from the moment a single tasting revealed how powerfully a wine can express a place and its people. Although his studies at Elsenburg were cut short, he pursued the craft with determination, guided by a strong connection to the land and a desire to create wines with identity. At Peter Falke Wines, his finalist entry – the Signature Kailani Cabernet Sauvignon 2020 – reflects precision, balance, and a keen sense of terroir. With aromas of cassis, raspberry, and cedar, the wine opens into layers of dense tannins and lingering red fruit, telling a clear story of vintage and site. Werner thrives on the full arc of winemaking, from vineyard to bottle, and delights in seeing people form a connection with his work. His goal remains consistent: to stand proudly among South Africa's top Cabernet Sauvignon producers and to champion the timeless narrative that each vintage carries. ①