



MEDIA RELEASE: OLD MUTUAL TROPHY WINE SHOW 2018

THE ULTIMATE WINE INDUSTRY BENCHMARKING EVENT

BENCHMARK 1 - 2018

The Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show has entered its 17th edition with 201 participating producers and 977 entries, both up on last year. Designed to enable the ultra-premium end of the Cape wine industry to benchmark performance to the highest international standards, the competition brought some of the world's leading wine judges to Grande Roche in Paarl for the judging from 30 April to 3 May.

Three-person tasting panels (with at least one of these judges an experienced overseas expert) have been a feature of the competition since its inception. This year's international judges were Isa Bal MS, (UK) Master Sommelier and the former Head Sommelier at Heston Blumenthal's 3 star Michelin Restaurant The Fat Duck; Charles Chevallier (France), ex-technical director, and now group ambassador and senior advisor to the Domaines Barons de Rothschild Lafite group; and Debra Meiburg MW (Hong Kong), an award-winning author, journalist, TV personality, international speaker, and widely considered the global authority on the Asian wine market.

The South African panel comprised Narina Cloete, winemaker, Blaauwklippen Agricultural Estate; Heidi Duminy CWM, National Trade Marketing Manager for Meridian Wine Merchants; Christian Eedes, co-owner and editor of winemag.co.za; Alexandra McFarlane, winemaker at Druk-My-Niet; Nkulu Mkhwanazi, Johannesburg-based wine educator; and James Pietersen, SA Portfolio manager for Wine Cellar. Michael Fridjhon was the Show Chairman.

The participation of a team of associate panellists, drawn from the pool of rising South African winemaking and wine-writing talent, ensures that the next generation of the country's wine judges gain experience in this most rigorous of environments. A different associate judge sat with each panel on each of the medal-judging days of the show.

They participated in the tasting and the post-judging discussion, though their scores were not necessarily taken into account in the final tally. Their involvement provides an essential training platform for the country's wine judges of the future. This year's associate judges were Murray Barlow (Rustenberg Wines); Ndaba Dube (The Vineyard Hotel); Eben February (Jordan Wines); Spencer Fondaumiere (Burrata group), Patson Mathonsi (Reciprocal Wine Company), and Debi van Flymen CWM.

As convenor and chairman since the inception of the competition, Fridjhon sees in the growing diversity of entries evidence of how the industry has evolved since the early years of the show. The so-called niche variety classes have grown, with an increasing number of wines which once were regarded as "exotic" now part of the mainstream. He is also encouraged by the confidence with which the industry has invested the show since its launch in 2002.

Times are tough – and wine producers have had a particularly difficult time in the past year as the effects of the drought together with the volatility of the Rand have taken their toll - yet entries remain at the same levels as ten years ago. It's clear that producers recognise that the sounding board provided by the competition is an essential rather than discretionary investment.

"I'm also particularly happy with the breadth and diversity of the skills sets represented in the 2018 judging panels: winemakers with a lifetime of fine wine production share the tasting environment with Master Sommeliers and Masters of Wine. Strong and experienced judges who have worked together in the past and who understand the dynamic on which a consensus-based competition operates are in a position to make an invaluable contribution – not only to the show, but also to the South African wine industry," he added.

Shiraz was the largest class with 106 submissions (110 in 2017), followed by Cabernet Sauvignon at 94 (93 last year). Pinotage was slightly down (50 compared with 2017's 53) but Chenin Blanc increased by 26% from 62 in 2017 to 79 this year. Sauvignon Blanc with 96 entries (2017: 92) and Chardonnay with 80 (2017: 89) lead the white wine charge, while Bordeaux Blends up by 10% on last year at 86 (2017: 79), Merlot at 45 entries (2017: 43), and Pinot Noir (5 up on last year's 23) with 28, account for the balance of the major red wine classes.

Old Mutual, headline sponsor of the competition since its inception, sees great value in a process which identifies the country's top wines and makes this information available to the South African wine drinking public. Discernment of future value is a key component of the investment side of Old Mutual's business, locally and internationally, so the process by which the show's judges approach the task of sifting through the roughly 1000 wines entered annually resonates with the leading financial services group. Celebrating and elevating South Africa's world-class wine also underscores Old Mutual's strong belief in the country's future as the company prepares for its primary listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange on 26 June.

Thobile Tshabalala, Head of Brand at Old Mutual, says: “We are proud of the role we have played in raising the profile of South Africa’s top wines as the sponsor of the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show over the past 17 years. This sponsorship is a natural fit for us as a company that has been sharing investment knowledge and experience for 173 years. Like investing for the long term, making world-class wine requires specialist care and expertise. Our sponsorship not only celebrates fine wines but also makes a valuable contribution to raising standards and developing skills in the wine industry. We are pleased to support the training of world-class wine judges through the Wine Judging Academy, run in association with the University of Cape Town’s Graduate School of Business.

Partners American Express, Grande Roche Hotel, Nestlé Pure Life, Miele, Riedel and nationwide retailer Makro each have naming rights to a trophy. Other named awards include the Chenin Blanc trophy - named after the late Harold Eedes, who, as publisher of Wine Magazine in the 1990s, played a key role in South Africa’s Chenin Blanc renaissance. In 2012 the Trophy for Best Cape Port was named after the late Tony Mossop CWM.

The 2018 Show results will be announced at the awards function to be held at the Mount Nelson Hotel on 29 May. The Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show app – which replaces the original Old Mutual app – will detail the results of the show by medal, category and producer, has links to buying the winning wines via makro.co.za and tickets to the public tastings. Previous results from 2016 and 2017 are already accessible. The 2018 updates will go live immediately after the final results have been announced at the function. This will enable all smartphone-users to access the key information they will need to optimise their wine-purchasing and ordering decisions for the year ahead.

A countrywide roadshow will follow immediately after the results are announced. The Cape Town Public Tasting takes place on Wednesday 13 June at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (17h00 – 21h00) and at a later stage in Johannesburg – details to follow. Trophy, gold and silver medal-winning wines will be presented for tasting and to order via Makro. Tickets are available via Computicket at www.computicket.com and cost R200. The Early Bird Price of R180 is valid for tickets bought by 1 June.

Visit the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show website www.trophywineshow.co.za for judges’ profiles, information and historical statistics. The 2018 results will be available on the website and the app from 16h00 on Tuesday 29 May.

More information on the judging process

Old Mutual's support of the competition makes it possible for the show's organisers to assemble the very best international judges to share their views and expertise with the local panellists, and to ensure that international aesthetic criteria form part of the message the competition shares with the industry – both through its results, but also in the feedback session which follows the judging. Meticulous attention to detail throughout the process is part of how the Trophy Wine Show maintains its reputation as one of the toughest and most rigorous events of its kind in the world.

The Show's rules and guidelines are detailed in the entry kit and cover certification requirements, the market-readiness of the wines and the composition of the blends. Producers are compelled to declare the actual volumes of the batches bottled for submission to the show and medal winners may only order medal stickers to the volume covered by this declaration and confirmed by SAWIS (South African Wine Industry Information & Systems). The judging process and the competition results are monitored and audited by chartered accountants BDO.

While technical issues are referred to Fridjhon, the entire management of the show logistics, from checking off submissions against the physical entries to co-ordinating the 'blind', i.e. unsighted tastings, compliance with the audit procedures and verification of the technical analyses of the winners, is the responsibility of Alex Mason-Gordon and Michael Crossley.

Submissions are kept in Miele wine storage units so that they can be brought to the judges at optimum temperature in Riedel tasting glasses. Judges never see the bottles or any aspect of the packaging, ensuring that their opinion is based on the wine's merits rather than its image or reputation. The three panels are directed to produce a consensus-driven result.

Museum class entries have become an important feature of the competition, one which suggests that producers and consumers now recognise the age-worthiness of the best new-generation South African wines. To qualify for the Museum classes white wines must be at least four years old and all other wines at least eight years old. This year they represented just under 4% of all submissions.

The 2017 show saw 24 trophies, awarded to 19 cellars, and 41 gold, 135 silver and 460 bronze medals.

Ends

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Date: 3 May 2018

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