

If in life timing is everything, the new owners of Warwick have every reason to feel satisfied. Just as they were putting the finishing touches to the deal (and adding the historic Uitkyk property to their shopping trolley), wines from the Warwick cellar were collecting enough trophies and gold medals to ensure that their new acquisition would win the “Best Producer” accolade at the 2018 Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. Warwick is a very good wine business - so Charle Marston and Kishore Bopardikar of Eileses Capital were never going to get it at a bargain price. However, they didn't have to pay a cent extra to acquire it with what is probably the most coveted award in the industry. This is a little like buying a ranch in Texas because you want a weekend home with a frontier feel, only to discover you're sitting on the largest oil deposit in the state.

This is the first time that Warwick has won the best producer trophy, which in itself is a little surprising. A significant percentage of past winners come from within a 10 kilometre radius of the farm - so it's safe to say that terroir played a role in the result. This, no doubt, is why Warwick was such an attractive prospect to the purchasers, and why they followed its acquisition with that of Uitkyk - roughly 600 hectares of prime Simonsberg real estate in the heart of the same zone.

Tuesday's Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show's awards function saw a number equally seeded players on the winners' podium. The results speak of an industry entering a new state of maturity, of winemakers increasingly on top of their craft, and of show judges whose skill at discerning quality sets their performance apart from the lottery which characterises so many of the high profile shows around the world. For the second successive year the Leeuwenkuil Heritage Syrah won the trophy for the show's best shiraz and for the best red wine overall. Last year the 2014 was the winner, now it was the turn of the 2015.

Successive vintages of the Stark-Conde Round Mountain Sauvignon Blanc (2016 and 2017) were also trophy winners, likewise Landzicht Muscadell (2016 and 2015) and Buitenverwachting's “1769” noble late harvest (2014 and 2015). The DeMorgenzon Chardonnay 2017 followed last year's trophy winner (the 2016) with a gold medal. The 2015 Rustenberg Peter Barlow won the Cabernet trophy this year, the 2009 in 2015. Vergelegen's GVB white blend won the museum class trophy in 2015 for the 2011 vintage, in 2016 for the 2012 vintage and this year took the award for the 2013 vintage. Tokara, last year's winner of the best producer trophy, was the source of the show's best Chardonnay this year. The Spier 21 Gables Chenin Blanc 2016 which was judged the best wine overall at Veritas late last year, won the Harold Eedes Trophy for the top Chenin Blanc as well as the Old Mutual Trophy for the show's best white wine.

Wine judging is as much an art as it is a science: even with the best judges the human factor is critically important. I have been show chairman for 17 editions of the event, and it would be disingenuous to suggest that simply by assembling the most skilled panels a perfect outcome is guaranteed. Engagement between the judges is vitally important, which means that without a good dynamic between the panellists, without discussion, without the opportunity to go back and review, the finest wines might get dismissed - or perhaps worse - inferior examples win on arithmetical averages. A colleague has just returned from judging the Mondiales in Beijing: 300 judges, 9000 wines, and a system where scores are logged into a computer and the stewards immediately remove the glass. When this set-up works, it's vastly more time-efficient. When it doesn't you get - in every sense of the word - an average result.

*Full show results at [trophywineshow.co.za](http://trophywineshow.co.za) or download the Trophy Wine Show app.*