

CANADIAN, WILL PREDHOMME WINS WOSA'S SOMMELIER CUP

Will Predhomme of Canada has won the 2013 Wines of South Africa (WOSA) Sommelier Cup. He achieved the top score in a closely fought challenge involving 12 international contestants who were rigorously tested to assess their knowledge of South African wine in a detailed multi-part theoretical, practical and service exam.

Although not yet widely employed in South Africa, professionally trained sommeliers in Europe and North America are in some cases accorded celebrity status. They are considered an influential gateway to the high end of the wine market. Their opinions carry great weight and they are assiduously courted by winemakers.

They serve as wine stewards, who procure wines for their fine-dining establishments, compile restaurant wine lists and recommend wines to pair with foods. Some even make their own boutique-label wines that are highly sought after by wine connoisseurs.

The 12 Sommelier Cup contestants were flown to South Africa after scoring the highest results in their home countries, when they were tested on their service capabilities and knowledge of South African wine. All full-time professional specialists in wine service, they arrived at the Cape earlier this week for first-hand exposure to the best of local wine and dining culture and to meet some of the country's top winemakers.

The first runner up is Morgan Harris from the US and second runner-up was Anna Sviridenko from Russia.

Predhomme is a top Canadian sommelier and a former title holder of the Best Sommelier in Ontario.

Other competing countries were the UK, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Norway, China and Hong Kong.

The finalists were examined by a six-member panel that included two international Master Sommeliers and a group of South African certified sommeliers. They were tested on their theoretical knowledge of South African wines and also had to taste wines blind and identify them correctly by variety and vintage. The top three scorers then had to appear in front of an audience, to be tested in a mock restaurant situation and asked to correctly decant wines, make wine and food pairing recommendations and also correctly identify wines tasted blind.

Fascination for the role of sommeliers has grown to such an extent that last year's documentary movie *Somm*, about four sommeliers who attempt to pass the prestigious Master Sommelier exam, a test with one of the lowest pass rates in the world, has been screened worldwide. It is scheduled to come to South Africa later this year.

WOSA CEO Su Birch said the competition had followed the highly successful inaugural event, held in 2010, the year of the FIFA World Cup, when the global focus was on South Africa as the host country.

"At that time, we wanted to highlight our country's great and very food-friendly wines to benefit from the worldwide attention South Africa was enjoying. The response to the first

Sommelier Cup was very enthusiastic and helped to raise the profile of our wines in an upmarket restaurant environment. We decided to hold another contest this year, as currently South African wines are earning many favourable reviews from some of the world's leading critics. They are calling ours one of the most exciting and original wine-producing nations of the time and we wanted to take advantage of the prevailing positive interest."

She said once here, the contestants met winemakers and tasted the country's most celebrated wines.

For more details on this competition, judges and candidates, go to: www.wosasommelierecup.co.za or follow via #WOSASomm.

Note to the editor

The members of the judging panel were:

Ronan Sayburn, a Master Sommelier and former winner of the UK Sommelier of the Year title, who is currently the head of wines for the prestigious Dorchester Collection UK.

Christopher Bates, the inaugural winner of the 2010 WOSA Sommelier Cup, as well as the titles of 2012 Best Young Sommelier (worldwide) and 2013 TopSomm. He is a Master Sommelier, the general manager and executive chef of Hotel Fauchère, Relais & Chateaux and together with this wife, runs Element Winery in Finger Lakes, New York State.

Neil Grant, certified with the Court of Master Sommeliers and chairman of the South African Sommelier Association, who worked in the hospitality industry in the US for seven years. He was formerly the sommelier at Rust en Vrede Restaurant and now owns the acclaimed Burrata Restaurant at the Old Biscuit Mill, Cape Town.

Gareth Ferreira, certified with the Court of Master Sommeliers, a former winner of the Chaîne des Rotisseurs Young Winemaker of the Year (South Africa), who is head sommelier and beverage manager of The Saxon, Johannesburg. He previously worked in the hospitality industry in the UK, US and Middle East.

Higgo Jacobs, a former winemaker and wine marketer, certified with the Court of Master Sommeliers, a member of the South African Sommelier Association and a senior judge at the International Wine Challenge

Jörg Pfützner, who worked as a sommelier in his native Germany before coming to South Africa, was the sommelier of the Aubergine Restaurant, consistently awarded by Diners Club for the excellence of its wine lists. He is consulting wine editor to *G&W* magazine (formerly *Golf und Wein*) and is a taster for the *Platter South African Wine Guide*.

Contestants

Joachim Bauwens (Belgium)

Beatrice Becher (Sweden)

Jordi Chan (Hong Kong)

Heidi Irene Hansen (Norway)

Morgan Harris (US)

Terry Kandylis (UK)

Christina Krenn (Germany)

Will Predhomme (Canada)
Anna Sviridenko (Russia)
Antti Uusitalo (Finland)
Jasper van den Hoogen (The Netherlands)
Christian Zhang (China)

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