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TORONTO SOMM WINS CANADIAN ROUND OF WINES OF SOUTH AFRICA SOMMELIER CUP

Close to 50 of Canada's top sommeliers threw their hats in the ring for the first round of the Wines of South Africa (WOSA) Sommelier Cup. Unlike previous years, this competition had a number of stages to ensure these sommeliers learned as much as possible about South Africa's dynamic industry.

On May 1, entrants completed a timed, multiple choice, on-line exam. From that exam, we took the top ten finalists and sent them some wine....to taste and write about, for the second round. From this we had our three semi-finalists who would compete in the final, in-person round. Clearly not for the faint-hearted!!

Of the three semi-finalists, two are based in Montreal and 1 hails from Toronto. This meant the final would take place in Montreal. The 3 semi-finalists were:

- Nathan Morrell, Bar Isabel, Toronto
- Robert Herrera, Les Cavistes Restaurant, Montreal
- Louis-Jacques Bleau, Les Cavistes Restaurant, Montreal

After a friendly breaking of bread with the finalists and judges the evening before, candidates were put to work early on July 19th by judges Will Predhomme (MD, Predhomme Inc., and 2013's global winner of the WOSA Sommelier Cup) and Remy Charest, a Quebec based wine writer. The competition consisted of a verbal theory exam, followed by a session where contestants were given a wine list and charged with finding the errors in a 5 minute time frame. Finally after a short break all three were brought in to complete a blind tasting of 6 wines.

The pressure was intense and we contemplated making them wait until after lunch to divulge the winner but in the end we were too excited to extend the wait: Nathan Morrell was the victor! A mini celebration followed (did I mention it also happened to be Nathan's birthday?). Huge kudos also goes to the two runners up, as it was clear from social media they spent an incredible amount of time and energy on preparing for each stage of the competition.

Nathan will travel to South Africa next month to represent Canada in the global final which takes place on Friday 23rd September. He will compete against the winners from eight of South Africa's key markets. Prior to the final, contestants will enjoy a week of winery visits, tastings and meals with producers. It has been said in previous years that the trip provides a fantastic opportunity to not only learn more about South African wines, but too make new global friends as well.

Good luck to all of the finalists!

Laurel Keenan

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