



SOMMELIERS AROUND THE WORLD ARE PREPPING FOR WOSA SOMMELIER CUP FINALS IN THE CAPE

After a full day's work, Swedish sommelier Eric Grödahl spends another two hours a day, every day tasting South African wines and cramming up on the category. He is preparing for next month's finals of the Wines of South Africa (WOSA) International Sommelier Cup. When he arrives in the Cape Winelands for the last stages of the triennial event, he will be pitched against other hard-training competitors from around the world.

Apart from Sweden, this year participants from the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, the US, Canada, Asia and, for the first time, Kenya, will be competing for the coveted cup. These are the eight regions that currently represent South Africa's most important wine markets, with each drawing a record number of entries.

The staging of the event aims to build South African wine knowledge amongst international sommeliers, who have become influential arbiters of taste for wine lovers. In the finals on September 23, contestants will have to demonstrate a thorough conversancy with local wines. They will be tested on their tasting ability as much as on what they know about specific regions and wards and on the diverse range of wines and wine styles produced. Their rigorous multi-part examination will feature tasting, theory, wine and food pairing, as well as a variety of other practical and service elements. They will be assessed by a six-member judging panel of South African and international specialists.

The eight competitors will spend a week in the Winelands immersing themselves in local wining and dining culture and meeting some of the shape-shifters in this country's wine industry, before the final exam on the Friday.

WOSA CEO Siobhan Thompson explains: "The intention is to give these leading tastemakers first-hand exposure to what is happening in our industry so they can go back to their countries armed with a comprehensive view of the huge developments and advances taking place, from the emergence of new styles to the opening up of new wine-growing areas.

"This is the third time the competition is being held and each successive event has attracted scores more entries. This is partly because the competition is now well established and more contestants know about it. Another reason is that South Africa has become known for a distinctive style that speaks to the independence, courage and confidence of our current winemakers. They are unafraid to take risks, break boundaries and create new styles, and the critics and wine consumers are delighted by what they are tasting. A generation of better wine-growing with better understanding of where to plant and how to maximise the potential of our sites, as well as better exposure to international best practice has given winemakers much greater scope in finding their own identity."

The eight finalists are: Erik Grödahl, Sweden; Marijn Smit, the Netherlands; Eric Simonics, UK; Marc Almert, Germany; Joe Yang, Macau and Cheron Cowan, US; Nathan Morrell, Canada; Geoffrey Kariuki, Kenya.

In 2013, the competition was won by Will Predhomme of Canada, who will now serve as one of the judges. He holds an advanced certificate from the Court of Master Sommeliers, runs his own wine consultancy and makes wine in Ontario and Oregon. He will be joined by Master Sommeliers James Tidwell from the US and Ronan Sayburn from the UK; as well as Australian-born David Clarke, now working in Cape Town; Joakim Hansi Blackadder, originally from Sweden but also working in the Cape; and Higgs Jacobs, who is chairman of the South African Sommeliers' Association (SASA).