



Sommelier Cup Finalists over-awed with the Cape Winelands

“Diversity!” shouted each Sommelier Cup finalist in turn as they left Vergelegen and before they hopped on the bus for the next stop.

Each day the eight Sommelier finalists have to learn a new word to do with South Africa and its wine. So far they’ve had to say the Xhosa word for welcome: “Wamkelikile! – quite a tongue twister. And the Afrikaans word for bushvine: “bosstok” – quite harsh for the more genteel among them.

But today, they decided their word would be ‘diversity’. Quite a lot easier to pronounce, one would think, but it seems they chose this word because it sums up their experience of the Cape Winelands so far, and the group as a whole.



Sommelier finalists

Hailing from far across the planet, from Toronto to Macau, and from Stockholm to Nairobi, this group couldn’t be more diverse. Yet gather them around a table with a line-up of wines to taste, and they all agree: “South Africa and its wines are astoundingly diverse!”

“I think it’s the totality of the experience that makes it so special,” says Nathan Morrell from Toronto, Canada enthusing over the scenery, the mountains, the food and of course the wines.

“I knew we were going to see beautiful mountains,” says Marc Almert from Germany, “but I didn’t expect to see a beautiful mountain at every turn.”

Almert was particularly impressed with the overall quality of our MMC's tasted at Longridge, and the unique opportunity to taste older wines.

The UK's Erik Simonics also can't get enough of our diversity: "There are so many wines made in so many styles, which is very unusual compared to Europe. South Africa is not hampered by regulations so the winemakers have the freedom to express the terroir so uniquely."

Simonics admits to having not been a fan of Pinotage, but he's changed his mind since the tasting with the Pinotage Association on Monday. "Pinotage can compete with the best wines in the world, we have to get that story out there. Beyers Truter is a legend, and tasting wines from Kanonkop, Groot Constantia and several more, was incredible."

Cheron Cowan hails from New York and she is already sorry that she can't bottle this experience and take it back home: "This trip has totally eclipsed all my expectations. South Africa has cultivated a unique experience that you cannot recreate at home: its generous, its personable, and its true to itself, so I suppose to sum up: it's authentic."

By Thursday the group will have tasted over 300 wines and travelled over 750km across the length and breadth of the Winelands, from the Swartland to Hermanus with many cellars in between. Friday sees them installed at The Taj Hotel in Cape Town where they're up for a day of trials to find the ultimate winner.

There's no doubt that this group of intelligent young wine buffs will return to their own countries as enthusiastic ambassadors, ready to educate their clientele about the exciting diversity that is South Africa and its wines.



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-Julia Moore