

WINNER OF WOSA INTERNATIONAL SOMMELIER CUP ANNOUNCED

Marc Almert of Germany is the winner of the 2016 Wines of South Africa (WOSA) International Sommelier Cup, with Joe Yang of Macau and Nathan Morrell of Canada tying for second place!

The top three finalists were amongst the elite group of eight contestants flown to the Cape Winelands to compete in the prestigious event on Friday, September 23. The other participants were from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United States of America and Kenya.

Held every three years, the Sommelier Cup seeks to raise awareness of South Africa's wine excellence amongst international restaurant, hotel and style-bar influencers. As they are positioned at the vanguard of taste trends, they have a huge role in shaping the opinions and preferences of wine lovers around the world.

All eight contestants had previously won the preliminary round in their respective countries to qualify for the final leg of the competition in South Africa.

According to WOSA CEO Siobhan Thompson, the level of competition has become increasingly demanding over the years. "The growth of the industry and the flowering of new styles and new regions has meant the field has become more varied and complex, but also more interesting."

Higgo Jacobs, chairman of the South African Sommeliers' Association and one of the judges, said: "It has been tremendously exciting to see how international interest in South African wines has exploded. The prize of a trip to the Cape for the semi-finalists is a huge drawcard and really incentivises everyone who enters to get to know South African wines well. It's a brilliant way of raising awareness of the South African category. For the top performers who make the trip here, it's an opportunity to network with South Africa's leading winemakers and to meet local sommeliers and exchange views, news and ideas with them."

Will Predhomme, who won the Sommelier Cup in 2013, and was one of the judges this year said: "When I visited the Cape three years ago to take part in the finals, everything I experienced exceeded my expectations. What I encountered was history meeting innovation head on. It is such a dynamic, rapidly progressing and exciting industry. There are no legislative roadblocks to impede innovation. Back in 2013 it was a real privilege to have been exposed first hand to South African wines on the cusp of their discovery by a wider global audience. I have been back since and now even make wines in partnership with a South African winery, as a result of that initial visit."

This year's hosting of the cup comes as South Africa is earning higher prices for its wines in several key markets. While the year-on-year rand per litre price for bottled wines increased by 13% in the UK for the 12 months to August, it rose by 19% for the same period in Germany and Canada and 32% in the Netherlands. In the US, Nielsen data show that for the 52-week period ending July 16, 2016, the value of South African wines sold had also climbed by 25%.

Before the sommeliers' final exam, contestants met some of South Africa's foremost winemakers and visited a number of wine regions and wineries. Their whirlwind trip exposed them to the latest developments across the stylistic

spectrum amongst white, red and rosé blended and varietal wines, as well as to the country's top Méthode Cap Classique sparkling wines.

On the last day of their five-day visit, the eight contestants were tested on their tasting ability as well as their knowledge of specific local regions and wards, and on the diverse range of wines and wine styles produced at the Cape. The top three then appeared before an audience of invited guests with the judging panel posing as diners in a restaurant setting in which the three had to apply their knowledge and show their service skills.

Contestants

Marc Almert from Germany, who works in Hamburg and has already won several sommelier competitions in Germany

Cheron Cowan from the US, who is the general manager and beverage director of Harold's Meat + Three in New York

Erik Grödahl from Sweden, a wine consultant and educator

Geoffrey Kariuki from Kenya, who began his career as a waiter seven years ago and is currently involved in wine buying and training of sommeliers

Nathan Morrell from Canada, who started out as a cook and then began importing wine before becoming a sommelier

Eric Simonics from the UK, who works at London's Savoy Hotel and has been certified by the prestigious Court of Master Sommeliers

Marijn Smit from the Netherlands, a consultant sommelier who advises a range of restaurants

Joe Yang from Macau representing Asia who trumped regional competitors from Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Japan, Korea and Thailand.

Judges

The members of the judging panel were:

Ronan Sayburn MS, 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

James Tidwell MS, a Master Sommelier, wine educator and beverage manager at the Four Seasons Resort and Club Dallas

Will Predhomme, the 2013 winner of the WOSA International Sommelier Cup and a former title holder of the Best Sommelier in Ontario, Canada, who makes wine in South Africa, Canada and Oregon, US.

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

David Clarke, from Australia, who is certified with the Court of Master Sommeliers and has extensive experience in wine retail and restaurants in the UK, Australia and South Africa.

Joakim Hansi Blackadder, originally from Sweden, where he worked for several Michelin-starred restaurants. He has won an award for the Best Wine List in Africa and the Middle East from *The World of Fine Wine* magazine.





For more details on this competition, judges and candidates, visit www.wosa.co.za/sommelier/ or #CapeSomm