

SA wine praised at International Association of Sommeliers Cape Town session

The South African Sommelier Association (SASA) recently hosted some of the world's leading sommeliers in Cape Town, between 24 to 27 January 2019, under the flag of the International Association of Sommeliers (Association de la Sommellerie Internationale, or ASI). The visit formed part of this global industry body's strategic session ahead of the 2019 Best Sommelier of the World competition, which will be taking place in Belgium later this year.



From left to right: George Kassianos, Markus del Monego, Saiko Tamura-Soga, Michele Chantonne, Rakhshan Zhouleh and Olivier Poussier.

Key wine associations assisted in promoting the image of South African wines during networking events, these included the Chenin Blanc Association, the Old Vine Project, Stellenbosch Cabernet Collective, Constantia Wine Route and Hemel-en-Aarde winegrowers association.

The visiting group included the president of the ASI, Argentinian Andrés Rosberg, Belgian William Wouters, host of the upcoming acclaimed international wine competition, Concours Mondial de Bruxelles, Saiko Tamura Soga ASI vice-president of Asia and Oceania districts, Ricardo Grellet, ASI vice-president of the Americas, from Chile and George Kassianos, President of the Association of Sommeliers in Cyprus. The group also included previous winners of the Best Sommelier of the World competition, including Philippe Faure-Brac, Olivier Poussier and Serge Dubs (all from France,) Master of Wine Markus Del Monego (Germany), Andreas Larsson and Arvid Rosengren (both from Sweden).

Reflecting on the wines tasted during their visit, Grellet mentioned the quality of South Africa's Chenin Blancs: "I was really surprised, and found some of the best I've tasted, the quality across the bar in this group is incredible, and it showed lots of potential. South Africa certainly has a unique expression of Chenin Blanc."



From left to right: Arvid Rosengren, Ricardo Grellet and Andres Rosberg.

Rosberg echoed this sentiment and named Mullineux Old Vines White, Metzer Maritime Chenin Blanc and Ken Forrester's FMC as some wines he would recommend to patrons.

He added: "Sommeliers play such an important role in the wine sector as we work in the 'war zone' – we speak to customers at the very moment they are willing to talk about wine and make a purchasing decision."

Rosberg said that SASA plays an incredibly important role not just in South Africa, but in the rest of Africa. "They are leading something huge, and they have the ability to create a network of ambassadors of sommeliers and students in Africa, who will travel and go into the world with a connection to SA wine. This is the best marketing you can have for your wines. This is how France did it and look at them now."

According to outgoing SASA Chairman, Higgo Jacobs, this visit presented South Africa with a unique opportunity to rub shoulders with some of the world's most respected voices in wine:

"SASA was incredibly honoured to host such industry heavyweights ahead of the Best Sommelier of the World competition. This networking opportunity provided our network of sommeliers, and other wine industry influencers, the ability to exchange ideas with respected peers, to promote SA wines and to grow the image of the South African industry as a whole."

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