

South African wine industry pays tribute to its flag bearers for the future

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The South African wine industry has formally honoured four outstanding individuals at the annual Wine Harvest Commemorative Event, hosted on South Africa's oldest wine-producing farm, Groot Constantia in Cape Town, on Thursday 2 February 2023.



The Wine Harvest Commemorative Event is a strong tradition in the South African wine industry, inspiring new levels of excellence in an inclusive way. This year's event, held to celebrate the birth of South Africa's wine industry 364 years ago, included the blessing of the new harvest and tributes to four individuals who have shown the way for future generations, unlocking their talents to ultimately leave a unique and proud legacy for South Africa. They were honoured in four categories: Visionary Leadership, Growing Inclusivity, Wine Advancement, and Viti- and Viniculture.

According to Dr Ernest Messina, chairperson of Groot Constantia, it is heartening to witness the growth in reach and scope of this annual occasion. "Year on year more wine people from diverse backgrounds are nominated to be recognised for their work," says Messina. "This is in line with our objective of honouring all who are contributing to our proud wine industry. I trust that by recognising the four 2023 honourees, others will be inspired to take the industry to even greater heights."

The 1659 Award for Visionary Leadership: Ken Forrester

This year the recipient of the prestigious 1659 Award for Visionary Leadership is Ken Forrester, widely known as 'Mr Chenin'. His contribution to the development and international fame of the chenin blanc cultivar has profoundly enhanced the reputation of South African chenin, making him a worthy recipient of one of the highest accolades in South Africa's wine industry.

Forrester was born in Zambia. His family moved to South Africa, where he went to school in Krugersdorp, followed by a three-year course in hotel management at the Johannesburg Hotel School and a career in hospitality at Southern Sun. After this, he entered the restaurant trade, where his unfaltering commitment culminated in his election as chairman of the Federated Hospitality Association of South Africa (FEDHASA). A trip to the Cape in the early 1990s presented him with the



Ken Forrester

opportunity to buy the historic Soltzenhof Farm in Stellenbosch – his first foray into the wine industry. It was here that his love affair with the chenin blanc cultivar started, and, despite setbacks and many challenges, Forrester soon put South African chenin on the global map.

The Chenin Blanc Association of South Africa was established in 1998, with Forrester as a founding member. Thanks to the work of the association, South Africa has more chenin growing than the rest of the world combined, and it is universally regarded as South Africa's de facto national white wine. Since its founding, the association's international standing has risen dramatically, through research and other projects in collaboration with international bodies and academic institutions. Milestones include:

- **Global status:** The Association has established chenin blanc as the most studied and researched cultivar in the world, including the development of the world's first multi-language aroma wheel.
- **Exponential financial growth:** The net value of chenin blanc produced has increased from R290.6bn in 1998 to R888.7bn in 2020.
- **Ploughing back:** Contributions to the upliftment of wine worker communities amount to R2.1m as part of the Standard Bank Chenin Blanc Top 10 Challenge Awards.

Forrester's unique vision has put him at the forefront of promoting South African wine and made him the flag bearer for the chenin blanc cultivar. Over the years, his inspired work has not only resulted in sales growth locally, but has also brought global renown to South African wine, chenin blanc in particular. Forrester's leadership demonstrates how vision and determination can conquer new territories for South African wine in a highly competitive global landscape. His work sets a worthy example for future generations.

Growing Inclusivity category: Rydal Jefftha



Rydal Jefftha

The 2023 honouree in this category is Rydal Jefftha, CEO and managing director of the Koopmanskloof Vineyards for the past 16 years. The winner here, a person or institution, must set an inspirational example, pave the way for others by eliminating barriers, contribute to knowledge that others can use, and have a generally positive impact on the image of the South African wine industry.

Jefftha has led the field for many years through his wealth of experience and true leadership. He has spearheaded important initiatives, including:

- **Driving empowerment:** Thandi Wines is South Africa's first truly broad-based BEE wine company and also the biggest black-owned exporting wine company. Under Jefftha's leadership, Thandi's sales grew from 500 cases to 42,000 cases in

just two years.

- **Embracing fairtrade:** As an empowered company, Koopmanskloof is one of the world's largest fairtrade exporters. Jefftha has transformed it from a 100% bulk wine producer for the local market to an international bulk and packaged wine exporter.
- **Emerging agriculture:** Jefftha was a finalist for both Toyota Emerging Farmer of the Year and Cape Chamber of Commerce Exporter of the Year.

Jefftha has 42 years' experience in agriculture, including 20 years in the wine industry, with stints at Lourensford, Capespan, and Vinfruco. He is a board member of Vinpro and Wines of South Africa (WoSA). With his passion for emerging generations of farmers and winemakers, Jefftha is a mentor and inspirational leader to multitudes of young people, creating a sense of hope and future focus for those who may face barriers to enter the industry.

Wine Advancement category: Wendy Jonker

The 2023 honouree in this category is Wendy Jonker, appointed by the Minister of Agriculture as Administering Officer of the Liquor Products Act. The recipient in this category should have made notable contributions to the image and responsible use of wine and to developing the image of the South African wine industry through the breadth of their reach.



Wendy Jonker

In her role as administering officer, Jonker represents the South African government in bilateral and multilateral discussions and negotiations as a technical wine expert in the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) and the World Wine Trade Group (WWTG). She is a registered professional natural scientist, and an author and reviewer of scientific publications as vice-president of the OIV scientific committee. Her achievements in creating an optimal governance environment for the wine industry include:

- **Facilitating the export process:** Involvement in developing an online export platform to streamline and shorten the export process.
- **Enhancing international trade:** Representing South Africa's wine interest in the Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Southern African Customs Union.
- **Establishing good corporate governance:** Maintaining constructive relations between the South African wine industry and importing countries, and addressing non-tariff barrier issues.

Jonker's behind-the-scenes work has significantly contributed to opening doors for the South African wine industry internationally. Without the dedication and expertise of role players like her, the industry would find it difficult to advance consistently and sustainably.

Viti- and Viniculture category: Dr Erna Blancquaert



Dr Erna Blancquaert

The 2023 honouree in this category is Dr Erna Blancquaert, lecturer and researcher in viticulture. The recipient of this accolade should have developed new ideas, technologies, and methods within the winemaking industry, and also implemented and transferred these ideas and methodologies, changing mindsets and benefiting the South African wine industry as a whole.

Blancquaert is a lecturer in Grapevine and Wine Sciences at Stellenbosch University, where she also acts as postgraduate supervisor of master's and PhD students in Viticulture and Oenology, Sustainable Agriculture, and Biotechnology. Blancquaert was the first black South African to receive a PhD in Viticulture, in 2015. Her tireless devotion to excellence and empowerment has established her as a major force in her field. Here are just a few of her distinctions and achievements:

- **Academia:** Recipient of multiple awards, ranging from the South African Wine Industry Trust scholarship in 2003 to the Fulbright African Research Scholar Award in 2018, and most recently the Taylor's Port Golden Vines Diversity Scholarship in 2021, as one of only two recipients out of 42 entries from 23 countries, allowing her to do her Master of Wine studies.
- **Industry:** Serves on various scientific journal review panels, as well as member of various industry bodies, including representing the national Minister of Agriculture on the Deciduous Fruit Industry Development Trust.
- **International:** Mentor for the New York Academy of Sciences '1000 Girls, 1000 Futures' programme and South African leader of the international consortium VitaGlobal, which focused on sharpening university contributions to local development, which included Stellenbosch University as one of 17 partners.

Blancquaert continues her academic career at Stellenbosch University, with a strong focus on building and supporting a new generation of black researchers. As a role model, she loves working with students from all walks of life, transferring ideas, and changing mindsets. Particularly close to her heart is her life-long commitment to constructively addressing lingering prejudice in the wine industry and academia.

Share in the celebrations of the 2023 Wine Harvest Commemorative Event

Anyone anywhere in the world can join the celebration virtually. Go to www.sawineharvest.co.za to learn more about the Wine Harvest Commemorative Event, the honourees, and the South African wine industry in general.

The Wine Harvest Commemorative Event is made possible with the financial support and partnerships of Groot Constantia, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture, Standard Bank, Vinpro, and Die Burger. Raise a glass to toast 364 years of award-winning South African Wine with #HappyBirthdaySAWine #ToUs #SAWineSince1659 and #DiscoverCTWC.

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