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NEXT GENERATION
AWARDS 2026

WINEMAG.CO.ZA

ABOUT THE iTOO NEXT GENERATION AWARDS 2026

The modern era of South African wine, now three decades in, has delivered remarkable gains in quality – but who will drive the next wave of progress?

The Next Generation Awards, proudly sponsored by special risks insurance brand iTOO, aim to spotlight the country's most promising young winemaking talent. A condition of entry was that entrants should be 35 or younger on the date of the awards ceremony, 19 May.

59 entries were received from 27 participants, with 50 (85%) scoring 90+ on the 100-point scale. The Top 10 are listed below. Banele Vakele wins R10,000 for best wine overall, with Richard Schroeder taking R2,500 as runner-up.

JUDGING PROCEDURES

The judging panel was chaired by me and further consisted of Ndaba Dube, director of operations, President Hotel, Cape Town], and Jolette Steyn-Prior of Brice & Burnett, Cape Town merchants and cellarers of fine wine.

We tasted blind, labels out of sight. Ratings were done according to the 100-point system, final scores awarded on the basis of discussion that involved retasting where necessary rather than relying solely on arithmetic averaging.

Christian Eedes

Editor, Winemag.co.za

MEET THE TOP 10



Banele Vakele

Age: 33 years, four months

Place of birth: Nqamakwe, Eastern Cape

Qualification: B.Agric, Oenology & Viticulture, Elsenburg, 2015

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

I would change the culture of alcohol abuse in this country. If we drank more responsibly, government would likely be far more supportive of the industry. Responsible consumption would also help ensure the industry's survival, even through its darkest moments.



Tembela Syrah 2025

Best Overall

Price: R285

Wine of Origin: Stellenbosch

Abv: 13.5%

From two Polkadraai Hills vineyards. 80% whole-bunch fermented. Matured for 10 months in old 500-litre barrels. On the nose, a floral top note precedes dark berries and pepper while the palate shows great structure – pure fruit, fresh acidity and impeccably managed tannins.



Richard Schroeder

Age: 33 years, three months

Place of birth: Durbanville, Western Cape

Qualification: BScAgric, Viticulture and Oenology, Stellenbosch University, 2015

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

South African wine is often underpriced relative to its international quality standing, yet many locals still experience decent wine as expensive or inaccessible. That creates a strange disconnect. Exporters and critics speak of SA wine as offering “astonishing value”, while many South Africans still see wine culture as something confined to wealthy suburbs, wine estates, fine restaurants and tourism spaces. Ultimately, I'd like to see a better alignment between quality, accessibility and fair pricing.



Groot Phesantekraal Anna de Koning Chenin Blanc 2024

Runner-Up

Price: R285

Wine of Origin: Durbanville

Abv: 13.12%

Matured for nine months in a combination of older 500-litre barrels together with amphorae and a concrete egg. Gorgeous aromatics of pear, peach and citrus with floral and herbal nuances while the palate is pure and vital – dense fruit and bright acidity before a dry finish. Displays both poise and precision.



Richard Schroeder



Groot Pheasantekraal
Anna de Koning
Chenin Blanc
2025

Price: R285

Wine of Origin: Durbanville

Abv: 13.01%

Matured for nine months in a combination of new 300- and older 500-litre barrels together with amphorae and a concrete egg. Citrus, peach, honeysuckle plus touches of vanilla and spice on the nose while the palate is flashy – clean fruit and bright acidity before a dry finish.



Leana Coetzee

Age: 24 years

Place of birth: Worcester, Western Cape

Qualification: BScAgric, Viticulture and Oenology, Stellenbosch University, 2023

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

I would like the younger generation to feel more comfortable engaging with the South African wine industry. Younger consumers value experiences, connections, and authenticity. I believe more social, story-driven wine experiences would make wine culture feel more approachable and show this audience that wine doesn't have to be intimidating.



Diemersdal Wild Horseshoe Sauvignon Blanc 2025

Price: R395

Wine of Origin: Durbanville

Abv: 14.17%

90% Sauvignon Blanc, 10% Semillon. 20% skin fermented. Matured for 11 months in a combination of old oak and amphorae. Citrus, peach, blackcurrant, some floral perfume, a touch of vanilla and some flinty reduction on the nose. The palate has weight and texture with fresh but well integrated acidity.



Mika Engelbrecht

Age: 29 years, five months

Place of birth: Hermanus, Western Cape

Qualification: BScAgric, Viticulture & Oenology,
Stellenbosch University, 2019

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

Learn to better appreciate what we have on our doorstep – a rich and diverse wineland that can be enjoyed and valued for what it is.



Neethlingshof Short Story Collection Maria Noble Late Harvest 2025

Price: R395

Wine of Origin: Stellenbosch

Abv: 10.26%

Grapes from a Riesling vineyard planted in 1986, with a portion fermented in second-fill 300-litre barrels. Compelling aromatics of marmalade, dried apricot, caramel and mushroom precede a palate that is pure with vibrant acidity. Sweetness is kept firmly in check, the finish savoury and persistent. Taut, focused and beautifully balanced.



Christiaan Nigrini

Age: 31 years, 10 months

Place of birth: Beaufort West, Western Cape

Qualification: B.Agric, Viticulture and Oenology, Elsenburg, 2016

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

I'd foster greater fellowship among producers and neighbours. I'd like to see a culture where everyone respects each other's space and opinions, creating an environment of mutual support rather than unhealthy competition. That kind of unity would strengthen the South African wine industry, not only locally but on a global stage.



Welbedacht Skoolblok Steen 2025

Price: R165

Wine of Origin: Groenberg

Abv: 12.88%

From a block planted in 1979. Fermented and matured for six months in stainless steel. Peach, citrus and some leesy complexity on the nose. Lovely fruit expression – plenty of concentration matched by big acidity, the finish long and dry.



Angus Paul

Age: 32 years, three months

Place of birth: Pretoria, Gauteng

Qualification: BSc Hon Viticulture & Oenology,
Stellenbosch University, 2016

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

Some might say the answer is money. I'd choose time travel – push the whole thing 20 or 30 years into the future and spare it some of the growing pains. Broaden the frame of reference and loosen the grip of the dominant brands and narratives on consumers. The quality being produced is far more diverse than the prevailing conversation allows for. The important thing is not to narrow the field prematurely.



Staanspoor Syrah 2023

Price: R370

Wine of Origin: Polkadraai Hills, Stellenbosch

Abv: 13%

From Polkadraai Hills. 75% whole-bunch fermentation. Matured for 15 months in oak, 25% new. Red and black berries, cured meat and white pepper on the nose. Light-bodied with fresh acidity and fine tannins, the finish savoury and persistent. Understated yet very much on point.



Kiara Scott Farmer

Age: 34 years

Place of birth: Mitchells Plain, Cape Town, Western Cape

Qualification: B.Agric, Viticulture and Oenology, Elsenburg, 2014

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

I'd change our perception of and drinking culture around Sherry and Port. South Africa produces some excellent examples, and we should be enjoying these styles far more often. More broadly, I'd encourage greater domestic wine consumption in general — we should be drinking more wine locally, not beer.



Hazendal Syrah 2025

Price: R139

Wine of Origin: Bottelary

Abv: 13.5%

22% whole-bunch fermentation. Matured for nine months, 60% in older 500-litre barrels and 40% in concrete tanks. Extremely aromatic with notes of red berries, flowers and fynbos. The palate is intensely flavoured but not weighty – pure fruit, bright acidity and powdery tannins.



Megan van der Merwe

Age: 34 years

Place of birth: Paarl, Western Cape

Qualification: BScAgric in Viticulture and Oenology, Stellenbosch University, 2014; class medal, PGDip in The Business of Wine, UCT Graduate School of Business, 2019

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

I would remove the culture of gatekeeping around wine. South African wine should feel inclusive and emotionally accessible – not intimidating or elitist. If we want to remain globally relevant, we need to build a wine culture that reflects the diversity, creativity, and lived experiences of South Africans, while also making younger generations feel that wine belongs to them.



Beau Constantia Lucca 2022

Price: R465

Wine of Origin: Constantia

Abv: 14.54%

52% Merlot, 48% Cabernet Franc. Matured for 18 months in 225-litre barrels, 52% new. Red and black berries, some leafiness plus hints of vanilla, milk chocolate and spice on the nose. The palate is medium bodied and polished in the best sense – nice fruit weight and smooth tannins.



Handré Visagie

Age: 33 years, 4 months

Place of birth: Durbanville, Western Cape

Qualification: Diploma in Agriculture specialising in Cellar Technology, Elsenburg, 2016

If you could change one thing about South African wine culture overnight, what would it be?

I would challenge the stigma in South African wine culture that larger production automatically means lower quality. Great wine is not defined only by small batches or exclusivity, but by consistency, skill, and care in the winemaking process. Larger producers can make exceptional wines that are accessible, reliable, and enjoyed by a wider audience without compromising quality.



Stellenbosch

1679

The Legacy

2020 (Koelenhof)

Price: R625

Wine of Origin: Stellenbosch

Abv: 14.66%

50% Cabernet Sauvignon, 12.5% Cabernet Franc, 12.5% Merlot, 12.5% Petit Verdot. Matured for 24 months in barrel, 100% new. The nose shows red and black berries, violets, herbs and pencil shavings. Excellent fruit purity, bright acidity and tannins that are just starting to mellow, the finish long and savoury.

ROLL OF HONOUR: WINES RATING 90+

CAP CLASSIQUE		
Wine	Winemaker	Score
Groot Phesantekraal Blanc de Blanc 2023	Richard Schroeder	93
Waterford Blanc de Blancs 2019	Jamie Papenfus	91
WHITE		
Alpen Glow White Blend 2025	Daniella Finlayson	91
Beau Constantia Cecily Viognier 2025	Megan van der Merwe	90
Beau Constantia Pierre Sauvignon Blanc Semillon 2025	Megan van der Merwe	90
Beaumont Hope Marguerite Chenin Blanc 2025	Sarah Shamley	90
Chamonix Reserve Chardonnay 2023	Neil Bruwer	90
Constantia Uitsig Sauvignon Blanc Winemaker Reserve by EDW 2025	Estian de Wet	91
Constantia Uitsig Semillon 2025	Estian de Wet	92
Diemersdal Chardonnay Reserve 2025	Leana Coetzee	91
Diemersdal The Journal Sauvignon Blanc 2025	Leana Coetzee	91
Diemersdal Wild Horseshoe Sauvignon Blanc 2025	Leana Coetzee	93
Ernie Els Proprietor's Old Vine Chenin Blanc 2025	Shannon Burger	92
Groot Constantia Sauvignon Blanc 2025	Shannon Jacobs	90
Groot Phesantekraal Anna de Koning Chenin Blanc 2024	Richard Schroeder	94
Groot Phesantekraal Anna de Koning Chenin Blanc 2025	Richard Schroeder	93
Groot Phesantekraal Marizanne Reserve Sauvignon Blanc 2024	Richard Schroeder	91
Hazendal Sauvignon Blanc 2025	Kiara Scott Farmer	90
Hazendal White Blend 2025	Kiara Scott Farmer	92
Kleine Zalze Project Z Chenin Blanc 2023	Hanri Ferreira	91
The Pledge Our Orange Wine Viognier 2025 (Le Grand Domaine)	Mosima Mabelebele	92
Loïc The White Bait Chardonnay 2025	Loïc Du Toit	90
Morgenster The Reserve White 2024	Matthew Andersen	90
Off The Record Chenin Blanc 2025	Bobby Wallace	91
Paul Wallace Reflection Chardonnay 2025	Bobby Wallace	91
Tembela Chenin Blanc 2025	Banele Vakele	92
Vrede en Lust Artisan Range Blanc Fumé 2021	Karlin Nel	91
Welbedacht Skoolblok Steen 2025	Christiaan Nigrini	93
RED		
Beau Constantia Lucca Merlot Cabernet Franc 2022	Megan van der Merwe	93
Beau Constantia Stella Syrah 2022	Megan van der Merwe	93
Chamonix Reserve Pinot Noir 2024	Neil Bruwer	90
Ernie Els Proprietor's Grenache Noir 2025	Shannon Burger	91

Groot Phesantekraal Cabernet Sauvignon 2023	Richard Schroeder	91
Hazendal Syrah 2025	Kiara Scott Farmer	93
Koelenbosch Director's Reserve Pinotage 2022 (Koelenhof)	Handré Visagie	91
Koelenbosch Nineteenfortyone 2023 (Koelenhof)	Handré Visagie	90
Koelenbosch Sangiovese 2023 (Koelenhof)	Handré Visagie	90
The Pledge Our 1060m Pinot Noir 2025 (Le Grand Domaine)	Yolande Laubscher	92
Off The Record Syrah 2023	Bobby Wallace	91
Paul Wallace Brave Heart Pinot Noir 2022	Bobby Wallace	90
Raats Proxima Centauri Red Blend 2023	Samuel Raats	90
Staanspoor Syrah 2023	Angus Paul	93
Staanspoor Syrah 2024	Angus Paul	91
Stellenbosch 1679 Cabernet Sauvignon 2020 (Koelenhof)	Handré Visagie	90
Stellenbosch 1679 The Legacy 2020 (Koelenhof)	Handré Visagie	93
Tembela Syrah 2025	Banele Vakele	94
Welbedacht Die Afrikaanse Patriot Kaapse Versnit 2024	Christiaan Nigrini	91
Welbedacht Old Bush Vine Pinotage 2023	Christiaan Nigrini	91
NOBLE LATE HARVEST		
Groot Phesantekraal 2025	Richard Schroeder	90
Neethlingshof Short Story Collection Maria 2025	Mika Engelbrecht	93

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