



TOP RESTAURANTS SHINE IN ANNUAL DINERS CLUB WINELIST COMPETITION

The winners of the 2011 Diners Club Winelist Awards for which restaurants from all parts of South Africa compete annually in growing numbers, were announced this week at ceremonies in the country's main centres.

The panel of judges bestowed the Diamond award for the best wine list nationally on the VIN MMX Restaurant in the Sandton Sun Hotel. A first time entrant in the awards, the restaurant also recently won an award from US magazine, *Wine Spectator* in its wine list category.

Diners Club's other category winners are Villa Bianca in Isando with Best Platinum, the Three Trees at Spioenkop restaurant in Ladysmith in KwaZulu-Natal with Best Gold, and Sage Restaurant in Stellenbosch with Best Silver, The restaurant 1800 Degrees in the Cape Royal Hotel in the Cape Town CBD was judged Best New Entry.

The Best Wine Steward competition, run concurrently with the Diners Club Winelist Awards, was won by Brilliant Mathelumusa of the Sun Square restaurant in Montecasino at Fourways in Gauteng. The runner-up was Solomon Ross of Marc's Restaurant in Paarl.

Dave Hughes, well-known wine personality and chairman of the panel of judges, said the standard of entries was increasing year on year. "I believe this is for a number of reasons. On the one hand diners who are exposed to a constantly growing array of excellent wines now expect to find their favourite wines on the wine list when they go out for a meal.

"At the same time there is a widespread awareness that some wines are better suited to a particular dish than others. This is the result, in my view of the strong accent on the relevance of food and wine pairing that is being promoted so extensively by the wine industry. Menus and wine lists are increasingly being compiled in concert to encourage more compatible matching."

Hughes said the tendency noticed last year of more and more restaurants offering quality wines by the glass was growing. Again a number of factors could play a role in this. “First, it allows the more adventurous diner to experiment with wines he doesn’t know without having to commit to a full bottle. This facility also reflects the trend towards drinking better rather than more.

“As a panel we were also delighted to notice the price spectrum covered in so many wine lists. By offering lower- and medium-priced wines in addition to those icon wines for special occasions, restaurants are better satisfying the needs of all their wine-loving patrons. And, of course, it also reflects a healthy dose of realism in the present tough economic times,” Hughes said.

Jane Ledger, Diners Club’s regional manager for the Western Cape, said the number of entries submitted for the competition had increased by more than 30% over the past two years while the geographic reach of the competition had also grown, with all the major hospitality areas of the country now well represented. “We see this growing support for the Awards as recognition of the ever-increasing status they enjoy in the industry.”

In addition to Hughes the judging panel for this year’s awards comprised former editor of *WINE* magazine and wine judge Fiona MacDonald; *garagiste* winemaker and wine educator Clive Torr; Gawie Marx, a well-known figure in the hospitality industry; Marc Friederich, owner of Marc’s Restaurant in Paarl, and Nikki Dumas, owner of *Winestyle.biz*

The complete list of the 2011 Diners Club Winelist Awards is available on the Diners Club website www.dinersclub.co.za

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