

SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL WINE & SPIRITS CHALLENGE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Bubbly & Port Wine-influenced Spirit Take Top Honors at 41st Annual Competition

San Diego, Calif. (Feb. 10, 2023) - The 2023 San Diego International Wine & Spirits Challenge's 41st meeting was once again a celebration of the best that the beverage world has to offer. Here is a look at this year's top performers.

Australia's Dandelion Vineyards took high score for imported wines with their sensational 2019 Red Queen of the Eden Valley Shiraz, wowing the judges with both near-term approachability and age-worthy structure. Chief Wine Judge Michael Franz called our Import Wine of the Year "wicked good wine now and likely better and better over the next two decades."

On the home front, two wines tied for Domestic Wine of the Year honors; the Le Vigne 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon "di Domenico" from Paso Robles and the Gloria Ferrer 2015 Royal Cuvee Sparkling Wine from Sonoma both achieved 96-point scores from our judges. Sonoma continued to bask in the spotlight with St. Francis Winery taking the Domestic Winery of the Year prize, achieving an impressive "slugging percentage" of Gold and Platinum awards. Heirloom Vineyard from Australia got the nod for Import Winery of the Year with their usual strong portfolio.

Two companies that focus on wide-ranging portfolios garnered top awards. Our Wine Company of the Year, Frexinet-Mionetto, focuses on high quality across a range of sparkling and still wines from California, Italy and Spain. Vineyard Brands showed off a small but impressive collection of wines from South Africa, Italy and Spain to take the Importer of the Year prize – their second consecutive win.

On the spirits front, Garrison Brothers of Texas grabbed Spirit of the Year accolades for their "Guadalupe" Port Cask Finished Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey – a mouthful in more ways than one! Weldon Mills Distillery of Weldon, North Carolina, captured their second straight Distillery of the Year award thanks to a strong (and stronger!) set of Bourbon Whiskeys.

Other top spirits performers: Redemption nabbed Best Rye and Best High-Proof Bourbon; Tiger Gin came out on top in its category with their Premium Gin No. 1; Earl Stevens Selections' E.

Cuarenta Tequila Blanco and The Bad Stuff's La Mala Reposado Tequila scored big; and Courvoisier Cognac wowed with the new "XO Royal" Cognac.

A recap of top awards follows. For a complete list of results, go to [SanDiegoWineChallenge](#).

DIRECTORS AWARDS - WINE

Wine of the Year, Domestic – 2-way tie

Gloria Ferrer 2015 Royal Cuvée

Carneros \$72.00 Platinum 96 points

&

Le Vigne 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate di Domenico

Paso Robles \$51.00 Platinum 96 points

Wine of the Year, Imported

Dandelion Vineyards 2020 Red Queen of the Eden Valley Shiraz

Eden Valley Australia \$250.00 Platinum 97 points

Winery of the Year, Domestic

St. Francis Winery

Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, California

Winery of the Year, Imported

Heirloom Vineyards

McLaren Vale, Australia

Wine Company of the Year

Freixinet-Mionetto

White Plains, New York

Importer of the Year

Vineyard Brands

Birmingham, Alabama

Best of Show Sparkling Wine

Gloria Ferrer 2015 Royal Cuvée

Carneros \$72.00 Platinum 96 points

Best of Show White Wine

Muse Vineyards 2021 Roussanne

Shenandoah Valley Virginia \$33.00 Platinum 95 points

Best of Show Rosé Wine

Eberle Winery 2022 Cotes-du-Robles Rosé

Paso Robles \$30.00 Gold 91 points

Best of Show Red Wine

Dandelion Vineyards 2020 Red Queen of the Eden Valley Shiraz
Eden Valley Australia \$250.00 Platinum 97 points

Best of Show Dessert Wine

S and J Cellars NV Caldeaux Dessert Wine
California \$36.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Albariño

StoneRiver Winery 2021 Albariño
Rogue Valley \$22.00 Gold 91 points

Best Barbera

Nevada City Winery NV Reserve Barbera
Sierra Foothills \$37.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Blanc de Blancs

Breathless NV Blanc de Blancs
Sonoma County \$39.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Blended Red

Windsor Vineyards 2020 Fusion Red
California \$12.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Bordeaux

Chateau Belair-Coubet 2019 Grand Vin de Bordeaux
Côtes de Bourg AOC France \$24.99 Gold 92 points

Best Bordeaux Blend

Muse Vineyards 2019 Clio Red Wine Virginia
Shenandoah Valley \$35.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Boxed Wine

Black Box 2020 Vibrant & Velvety Red Blend
California \$19.99 Gold 91 points

Best Brut Sparkling Wine

Gloria Ferrer 2015 Royal Cuvée
Carneros \$72.00 Platinum 96 points

Best Cabernet Franc

Burtech Family Vineyard 2019 Cabernet Franc
Sonoma County \$63.00 Gold 92 points

Best Cabernet Sauvignon

Le Vigne 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon Estate di Domenico
Paso Robles \$51.00 Platinum 96 points

Best Canned Wine

Just Enough Wines 2021 Pinot Noir
Central Coast \$8.00 Gold 91 points

Best Canned Wine Cocktail – 2-way tie

Somerstate NV Premium Mimosa

\$8.00 Gold 90 points

&

Mimosa Royale Berry

\$4.99 Gold 90 points

Best Cava

Marqués de Cáceres NV Cava Brut

Cava DO Spain \$14.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Chardonnay

King Estate 2021 Chardonnay

Willamette Valley \$22.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Chenin Blanc

Ophidian 2021 Chenin Blanc

Swartland South Africa \$23.00 Gold 90 points

Best Fruit/Grape Blend

Yellow Tail NV Fresh Twist Strawberry & Lime

\$8.99 Gold 93 points

Best Grenache

Jeff Runquist 2021 Grenache Silvaspoons Vineyard

Alta Mesa \$29.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Grenache Blanc

Bolero at Europa Village 2021 Garnacha Blanca Duarte's Vineyard

Temecula Valley \$31.00 Gold 90 points

Best Gruner Veltliner

Reustle Prayer Rock Vineyards 2021 Gruner Veltliner Estate Selection; Hefeabzug

Umpqua Valley \$32.00 Gold 91 points

Best Red Hybrid

Hocking Hills Winery 2021 Leon Millot

Ohio \$28.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Malbec

Reustle Prayer Rock Vineyards 2021 Malbec Estate Selection

Umpqua Valley \$36.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Merlot

St. Francis 2019 Merlot Behler Vineyard
Sonoma Valley \$50.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Moscato – 2-way tie

Kevin O'Leary 2021 Moscato Reserve Series

California \$24.99 Platinum 94 points

&

Hocking Hills Winery NV Pink Moscato

\$14.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Petit Verdot

Oak Farm Vineyards 2019 Petit Verdot Estate Grown

Lodi \$40.00 Gold 90 points

Best Petite Sirah

Carruth Cellars 2019 Petite Sirah Branham Vineyard

Rockpile \$40.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Pinot Grigio

Seaglass 2021 Pinot Grigio

Central Coast \$12.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Pinot Gris

Brancott Estate 2022 Flight Pinot Gris

Marlborough New Zealand \$0.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Pinot Noir

Benziger Family Winery 2021 de Coelo Terra Neuma Pinot Noir

Sonoma Coast \$72.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Prosecco

Menage a Trois NV Prosecco

Prosecco DOC \$14.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Red Rhone Blend

Dandelion Vineyards 2021 Moonrise Kingdom

McLaren Vale Australia \$120.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Riesling – 2-way tie

Wakefield / Taylors Wines 2022 St Andrews Riesling

Clare Valley Australia \$40.00 Gold 91 points

&

Dandelion Vineyards 2022 Wonderland of the Eden Valley Riesling

Eden Valley Australia \$60.00 Gold 91 points

Best Rosé

Eberle Winery 2022 Cotes-du-Robles Rosé

Paso Robles \$30.00 Gold 91 points

Best Sangiovese

Le Vigne Winery 2019 Sangiovese

Paso Robles \$28.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Sauvignon Blanc – 2-way tie

Oak Creek Vineyards and Winery 2021 Sauvignon Blanc

Willcox \$35.00 Platinum 94 points

&

Dandelion Vineyards 2022 Wishing Clock of the Adelaide Hills Sauvignon Blanc

Adelaide Hills Australia \$28.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Shiraz

Dandelion Vineyards 2020 Red Queen of the Eden Valley Shiraz

Eden Valley Australia \$250.00 Platinum 97 points

Best Sparkling Rosé

McBride Sisters Collection NV Sparkling Brut Rosé

Hawkes Bay New Zealand \$22.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Spirits Barrel Aged Wine

1924 Wines 2021 Double Black Bourbon Barrel Aged Cabernet Sauvignon

Lodi \$15.00 Gold 90 points

Best Syrah – 3-way tie

Ragtag Wine Co. 2018 Syrah Spanish Springs Vineyard

San Luis Obispo County \$48.00 Platinum 94 points

&

Lake Chelan Winery 2019 Syrah LCW

Columbia Valley \$55.00 Platinum 94 points

&

Heirloom Vineyards 2021 Syrah

Adelaide Hills Australia \$40.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Tempranillo – 2-way tie

Monte De Oro 2018 Tempranillo Estate Grown Monte De Oro Vineyard

Temecula Valley \$32.00 Gold 91 points

&

Jeff Runquist 2021 Tempranillo Liberty Oaks Vineyard

Jahant \$30.00 Gold 91 points

Best Viognier

Jeff Runquist 2021 Viognier

River Junction \$25.00 Gold 91 points

Best White Blend

Upshot Wines 2019 White Wine Blend

California \$19.00 Platinum 94 points

Best White Hybrid

St. James Winery 2021 Vignoles Estate Grown Explorer Collection
Ozark Highlands \$16.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Wine Cocktail

LIQS NV Mojito Wine Cocktail
\$13.99 Gold 93 points

Best Zinfandel

St. Francis 2019 Zinfandel Montecillo Vineyard
Moon Mountain District \$50.00 Platinum 95 points

DIRECTORS AWARDS - SPIRITS

Spirit of the Year

Garrison Brothers
Guadalupe Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey "Port Cask Finish, 2022
Release" USA \$129.99 Platinum 96 points

Distillery of the Year

Weldon Mills
North Carolina, USA

Best Vodka

OVO
Vodka USA \$26.99 Gold 91 points

Best Flavored Vodka

Cutwater Spirits
Fugu Horchata Vodka USA \$21.99 Gold 92 points

Best Gin

Tiger Gin
Premium Gin No. 1 England \$45.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Tequila - Blanco

Earl Stevens Selections
E. Cuarenta Tequila Blanco Mexico \$50.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Tequila - Reposado

The Bad Stuff Tequila
La Mala Reposado Mexico \$65.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Tequila - Añejo

Cutwater Spirits
Tequila Añejo Mexico \$49.99 Gold 93 points

Best Tequila - Extra Añejo

Cierto Tequila

"Reserve Collection, Extra Añejo" Mexico \$289.00 Gold 91 points

Best Mezcal

Catedral De Mi Padre

Mezcal Artesanal Joven Tobalá Mexico \$89.99 Gold 90 points

Best Rum

Golden Age Spirits

Marque Reserve Exxtra Añejo Rum Caribbean Blend Aged 8 years \$48.00 Gold 92 points

Best Rye Whiskey

Redemption

Barrel Proof Rye USA \$99.99 Platinum 95 points

Best Bourbon Whiskey under 50% ABV

Weldon Mills

Select Bourbon Whiskey USA \$54.95 Platinum 95 points

Best Bourbon Whiskey over 50% ABV

Redemption

Barrel Proof Bourbon USA \$99.99 Platinum 95 points

Best Multi-Barrel Whiskey

Garrison Brothers

Guadalupe Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey "Port Cask Finish, 2022 Release" USA \$129.99 Platinum 96 points

Best Cognac

Courvoisier

Cognac XO Royal France \$350.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Liqueur

Black Irish

Irish Cream Ireland \$29.00 Gold 91 points

Best Seltzer

High Noon

Grapefruit Hard Seltzer - Canned USA \$2.50 Gold 91 points

Best Ready to Drink Cocktail

Bottega Spirits

Negroni Italy \$4.99 Gold 90 points

The San Diego International Wine & Spirits Challenge (founded in 1982 as the San Diego Wine Competition) combines the talents of winemakers, sommeliers, wine & spirits journalists, retail buyers, and other industry professionals. All entries are judged blind, and judges are encouraged to bestow awards based on merit rather than a preferred style. It is the open-

mindedness and diversity of perspectives that make the San Diego International one of the world's most respected competitions. The San Diego International is part of the Challenge Series of international wine and spirits competitions founded by noted wine critic and wine-and-spirits writer Robert Whitley that includes Winemaker Challenge, Distillers Challenge, Critics Challenge, and Sommelier Challenge.

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