

SAN DIEGO INTERNATIONAL
WINE & SPIRITS
CHALLENGE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**San Diego Producer Named Winery of the Year;
Baijiu Spirit from China Takes Top Honor**

San Diego, Calif. (February 24, 2025) - The 43rd Annual San Diego International Wine & Spirits Challenge, held January 25-26 at The Westgate Hotel, was once again a celebration of the best the beverage world has to offer. Chief Wine Judge Michael Franz, editor of WineReviewOnline.com, and Chief Spirits Judge Maurice diMarino, beverage director of the Cohn Restaurant Group, led 18 judges through the two-day blind tasting to award 680 medals.

Making history this year was the **Domestic Winery of the Year** prize going to a San Diego County producer – the first time in the 43-year history of the competition. **Monserate Vineyards & Winery**, based in Fallbrook, wowed the judges with its lineup of wines focused on Italian varieties.

“While several wineries in the county have an Italian variety focus,” says Competition Director Rich Cook, “the wines from Monserate clearly strive to mimic their European counterparts in a way that I’ve not seen before in the region.”

Wine of the Year (domestic) went to Sonoma Valley’s **Ledson** for their **2021 Cepage Estate Vineyard** (97 points, \$110) red blend. **Wine of the Year** (import) award was taken by **Wakefield’s 2022 St. Andrews Shiraz** (96 points, \$80) from Clare Valley, Australia, scoring big atop a list of remarkable Wakefield entries.

Wine Company of the Year honors went to **Trincherro Family Wines**, showing off their value-driven lineup. **Pernod-Ricard Winemakers** landed the **Import Company of the Year** accolade with their worldwide portfolio.

On the spirits front, **Garrison Brothers** of Texas took **Brown Spirit of the Year** award for their latest release of “**Guadalupe**” **Bourbon Whiskey** (97 points, \$129.99)– a bold high-proof affair finished in port casks. And score one for one of the world’s most consumed alcoholic beverages – Baijiu - with the **Tashi Baijiu** (95 points, \$65) winning the **White Spirit of the Year** award.

The **Distillery of the Year** honor was nabbed by **Larado Whiskey** (formerly Lasso) for a fine set of Colorado Rye and Wheat whiskies. Other top performers include a fine high-proof Blanco Tequila from **Alto Canto** and a spot-on Rye from Nevada's **Minden Mill**.

Alta Canto was also recognized in the package design category, winning **Best of Show: Package Design** for its Tequila Blanco.

San Diego International Wine & Spirits Challenge (founded in 1982 as the San Diego National Wine Competition) is one of the most respected wine and spirits competitions in the U.S. The competition enlists the talents of winemakers, sommeliers, wine and spirits buyers, and other industry professionals on its judging panels and attracts entries from across the globe. The competition joins the Challenge Series of international wine and spirits competitions founded by wine journalist Robert Whitley that includes Winemaker Challenge, Distillers Challenge, Critics Challenge, and Sommelier Challenge.

For a complete list of award winners, go to SanDiegoWineChallenge.com.

A recap of the top awards follows:

DIRECTORS AWARDS – WINE

Wine of the Year, Domestic

Ledson 2021 Cepage Estate Vineyard Sonoma Valley \$110.00
Platinum 97 points

Wine of the Year, Import

Wakefield 2022 St Andrews Shiraz, Clare Valley, Australia \$80.00
Platinum 96 points

Winery of the Year, Domestic

Monserate Vineyards & Winery
San Diego County, California

Winery of the Year, Import

Wakefield/Taylor's Wines
Clare Valley, Australia

Wine Company of the Year

Trincherro Family Estates
Napa, California

Import Company of the Year

Pernod-Ricard Winemakers
Worldwide

Best of Show Sparkling Wine

King Estate 2019 Brut Cuvée Estate Grown Willamette Valley \$40.00
Platinum 95 points

Best of Show White Wines – tie

Dutcher Crossing 2021 Chardonnay Stuhlmuller Vineyard Alexander Valley \$45.00
Platinum 95 points
Navarro Vineyards 2023 Pinot Gris Anderson Valley \$26.00
Platinum 95 points
Whitehaven 2023 Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough, New Zealand \$20.00
Platinum 95 points

Best of Show Rosé Wine

Miramonte Winery 2022 Rosé Temecula Valley \$27.00
Gold 91 points

Best of Show Red Wine

Ledson 2021 Cepage Estate Vineyard Sonoma Valley \$110.00
Platinum 97 points

Best of Show Dessert Wine

Rancho de Philo NV Triple Cream Sherry Cucamonga Valley \$59.95
Platinum 96 points

DIRECTORS AWARDS - SPIRITS

Spirit of the Year, Brown

Garrison Brothers Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey Guadalupe
2024 Release, Port Cask Finish United States \$129.99
Platinum 97 points

Spirit of the Year, White

Tashi Baijiu China \$65.00
Platinum 96 points

Distillery of the Year

Larado Whiskey
Windsor, Colorado

Best Vodka

Vodka 57 Pure Glacier Vodka French Winter Wheat Switzerland \$60.00
Platinum 94 points

Best Gin

Highclere Castle London Dry Gin England \$39.99
Gold 93 points

Best Tequila (Overall)

Alto Canto Tequila Blanco High Proof Mexico \$89.99
Platinum 95 points

Best Blanco Tequila

Don Londres Tequila Blanco Mexico \$49.99
Gold 93 points

Best Reposado Tequila

Tres Agaves Organic Tequila Reposado Mexico \$34.99
Gold 92 points

Best Añejo Tequila

Tequila Bribón Añejo Mexico \$26.99
Gold 91 points

Best Brandy

Courvoisier XO Cognac France \$200.00
Platinum 94 points

Best Rye

Minden Mill Nevada Straight Rye Whiskey Estate Grown, Aged 4 years United States \$45.00
Platinum 96 points

Best American Single Malt Whiskey

High Peaks Distilling LLC Straight Single Malt Whiskey Cloudsplitter, 6 Year United States \$59.00
Gold 91 points

Best Whiskey under 50% abv

Gryphon & Grain California Bourbon Whiskey Aged Five Years, Batch #GB1 United States \$74.99
Platinum 94 points

Best Whiskey over 50% abv

Garrison Brothers Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey Guadalupe
2024 Release, Port Cask Finish United States \$129.99
Platinum 97 points

Best Whiskey, 2nd Barrel Finish

Garrison Brothers Texas Straight Bourbon Whiskey Guadalupe, 2024 Release,
Port Cask Finish United States \$129.99
Platinum 97 points

Best Liqueur

Evil Bean Cold Brew Coffee Liqueur United States \$30.00
Gold 92 points

Best Cocktail

El Mar Margarita Auténtica Lot No. 001 Mexico \$31.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Seltzer

High Noon Peach Vodka Seltzer United States \$2.50 Gold 90 points

See the full list of award winners at www.SanDiegoWineChallenge.com

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