

Wine Tourism Awards

The results are in for Drinks International's Wine Tourism Awards. **Holly Motion** reports

This year the judges at the fourth annual *Drinks International* Wine Tourism Awards sifted through more categories and entries than ever. The panel of industry experts welcomed entries from all over the world during the judging at the Wine & Spirit Education Trust in London.

The awards aim to recognise innovation and excellence among wine producers, winemakers and associate businesses, generic bodies, brand owners or individual vineyards and 10 entries were crowned Highly Commended across the six categories.

In response to the increase in applicants, this year the judging panel was also given the option to present an Innovation Award.

Visitor Centre

The first category recognised the winery that implemented the best introduction to its overall operation and a record 23 entered Best Visitor Centre.

Instantly a favourite among the judges, Spain's Bodegas Gonzalez Byass (Tio Pepe) impressed with its impact on the community in and around Jerez in south west Spain and its global accessibility.

Nicky Forrest, managing director at Phipps PR, said: "Bodega Gonzales Byass is nicely established and popular."

Open all year round, the centre offers a ninety-minute tour, part of which is conducted on a small train and can be enjoyed in eight languages.

Bodegas Gonzalez Byass visitor

numbers exceed 30,000 a year and attractions include Flamenco or Andalusian horse shows; night visits in the summer and zambomba celebrations at Christmas, all while maintaining a sense of history.

A varied option, Bodegas Gonzalez Byass's links with tour operators and grape stomping experiences were all a hit with the Wine Tourism Awards panel.

It was commented that had Gonzales Byass applied, it would also have been a genuine contender in the Wine Event category.

While it did not receive first place, Viu Manent in Chile did receive a highly commended certificate for offering 'winemaker for the day' and guided tours on horseback. Judge Ian Harris, WSET chief executive, said: "You could take all ages there. It's not the best at promoting wine, but I would actually like to go there."

Viu Manent was commended for its good promotion, variety of activities and visitor figures of more than 25,000 a year.

Forrest said: "It looks lovely, I want to go."

Quinta Nova NS Carmo, in Portugal's Douro region, also received the highly commended honour for what Emma Roberts, director of Eviva Communications, said was: "A strong tailored entry with good photos."

Praised for its 'winemaker for a day' attraction, the visitors' centre boasts a hotel, restaurant, railway station, 8km wine trail, a wine game and more.

The Chapel Down Winery in the English county of Kent also received a



BEST VISITOR CENTRE

Winner: Bodegas Gonzales Byass Tio Pepe,
Highly commended: Viu Manent, Quinta Nova N.S.
Carmo, Chapel Down Winery

BEST FOOD AND WINE MATCHING EXPERIENCE

Winner: Leopard's Leap Family Vineyards
Highly commended: Viu Manent

BEST WINE EVENT

Winner: Diemersfontein

BEST ACCOMMODATION

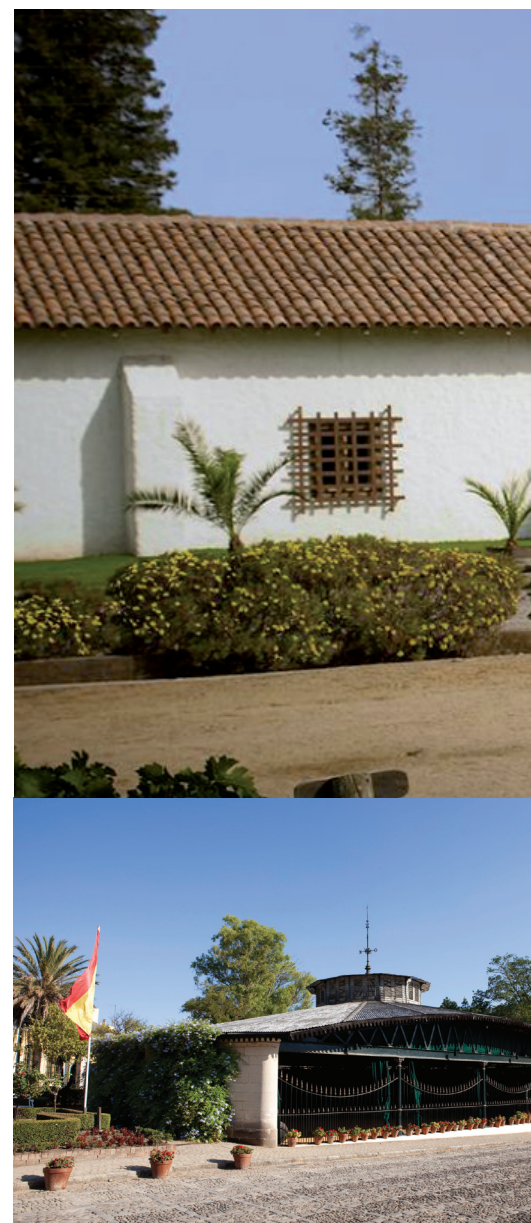
Winner: The Yeatman

BEST PROMOTIONAL BODY

Winner: Stellenbosch Wine Routes

BEST DIGITAL & SOCIAL MEDIA INITIATIVE

Winner: Porto Cruz



high commendation. The winery's vine-leasing scheme enables visitors to make a gift at the same time as being educated about wine. It provides the opportunity for visitors to own a number of vines for an agreed period that can be visited and harvested.

The winemaking team then makes the wine and the participant gets a personalised bottle.

The vine-leasing scheme was recognised as innovative and received the highest score in the category from Forrest with a 9/10.

Food & Wine Matching Experience

With only two entries picking up honours in the Best Food and Wine Matching Experience category, judges praised

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South Africa's Leopard's Leap Family Vineyards for providing cooking classes and tastings. From pastries to preserving, Asian cuisine to game dishes, Leopard's Leap was applauded for its innovation and different styles.

Leopard's Leap recently launched a range of wines as part of its Culinaria Collection tasting and judges noted the classes that offer 22 students the opportunity to cook with the company's in-house chef.

The judges questioned whether enough was done to warrant an award in the Wine Tourism Awards, but it was decided that Leopard's Leap Family Vineyards deserved a Highly Commended.

Viu Manent once again won big, this time for its cooking classes and tastings. Hannah Silverman, Wine Australia's

communications and PR manager, said: "It got my vote for food and wine learning about gastronomy."

For this, a highly commended certificate was awarded.

Wine Event

Another South African winery, Diemersfontein was the only entry to pick up any honours in the Best Wine Event. It provides Pinotage On Tap alongside boot throwing competitions, and Roberts said: "This is a fun event that has had great success from very small beginnings."

Diemersfontein's POT festival, as it has become known, was launched in 2004 and has been hosted in three national locations – Johannesburg, Durban and the Cape Winelands annually since 2007.

Hannah Silverman said:

From top left, clockwise: Highly Commended Visitor Centre and Food & Wine Matching, Viu Manent; Winner Food & Wine Matching, Leopard's Leap; Wine Event winner, Diemersfontein; Leopard's Leap; Winner Visitor Centre, Bodegas Gonzalez Byass

"Diemersfontein is good to capitalise on niche markets".

The format varies very little from location to location. Food is created to pair with the Pinotage and games are played alongside live music bands. The number of visitors regularly exceeds 1,000 and Cape Town saw 2,500 flock to taste the Pinotage and try their hand at riding a mechanical bull. ▶ p22

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Best Accommodation

Hailed as “the best of all worlds”, the Yeatman Hotel in Porto was commended for its extensive collection of 1,300 wines, claimed to be the “largest collection of Portuguese wines held anywhere in the world”.

The WSET’s Harris said: “With an amazing cellar of Portuguese wines, it’s a stunning setting and a very strong entry. Stunning location, food and wine.”

The location and picturesque setting of the Yeatman impressed the judges. The only restaurant in Porto to carry a Michelin star, The Yeatman was awarded Best Accommodation 2014.

Emma Roberts said: “The Yeatman has a well thought out wine theme across all aspects of the hotel.”

Promotional Body

The Best Promotional Body award went to Stellenbosch Wine Routes in South Africa for its comprehensive and impressive portfolio. The judges recognised the huge progress made in promoting the region and thought Stellenbosch by far provided the best range of events and activities.

The Stellenbosch Wine Festival received a special mention. With sporting events, musical concerts and art exhibitions, the festival culminates in a three-day Wine Expo with around 130 wine and food producers.

Nicky Forrest scored Stellenbosch Wine Routes 9/10 and Harris said: “It’s got my vote. It’s a very comprehensive entry – Stellenbosch has lots to see and do.”

Digital & Social Media

Porto Cruz claimed Best Digital & Social Media initiative. In a category of only three entries, the judges commented that this was indicative of the modernisation of the wine industry.

Wine Australia’s Silverman said: “The entry offers an explanation and understanding of how to use social media to evoke characteristics of the brand.”

Eviva’s Roberts agreed: “Porto Cruz has innovative ideas to generate lots of international followers, 2,203 in total.”

Porto Cruz aims to provide users with a new sensory experience around Port and myportocruz.com is an extension of this. The website seeks to interact with the visitor and evoke the senses with a choice of stimuli combinations – taste, aroma, sight, sound and touch. The user can navigate through the site and find a Porto Cruz wine that best suits them.

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Top and above right: Winner Best Accommodation, The Yeatman
Left: Winner Promotional Body, Stellenbosch Wine Routes
Above left: Winner Digital & Social Media, Porto Cruz

The judges were: Nicky Forrest, managing director, Phipps PR; Ian Harris, WSET chief executive; Emma Roberts, director, Eviva Communications; Hannah Silverman communications and PR manager, Wine Australia; and Christian Davis, editor, Drinks International