

We are the champions ... of the world

With entries consistently improving in quality, this year's line-up of IWC gold medal winners had to fight hard to secure a position on the trophy leader board, as Laura Clark reports



If winning a gold medal at the International Wine Challenge is tantamount to being crowned champion of (dare I mention it?) the World Cup, then being awarded an IWC trophy is an honour akin to being made player of the tournament. Ranked among its peers as the very best, the wine has been singled out for special praise.

This year, 111 wines achieved such status, with each of the 326 gold medal-winning wines being tasted blind against others in the same category to find the finest example of its kind.

France becomes the top trophy-winning nation for a second year running, with 21 trophies, followed by Japan's sake category with 14 and Australia in third with 12. Hot on Australia's heels is Portugal with 11, followed by Germany, Italy and New Zealand, which all won eight trophies each.

Preparing for battle

This year saw the highest-ever number of countries entering the competition, with 46 nations battling it out on the wine field. Wine expert Oz Clarke joined the judging panel of IWC co-chairmen – Tim Atkin MW, Sam Harrop MW, Charles Metcalfe and Derek Smedley MW – who were impressed to see a 15% increase in entries over 2009.

Victor de la Serna, deputy editor of Spanish national newspaper *El Mundo*, also joined the judges as international guest co-chairman.

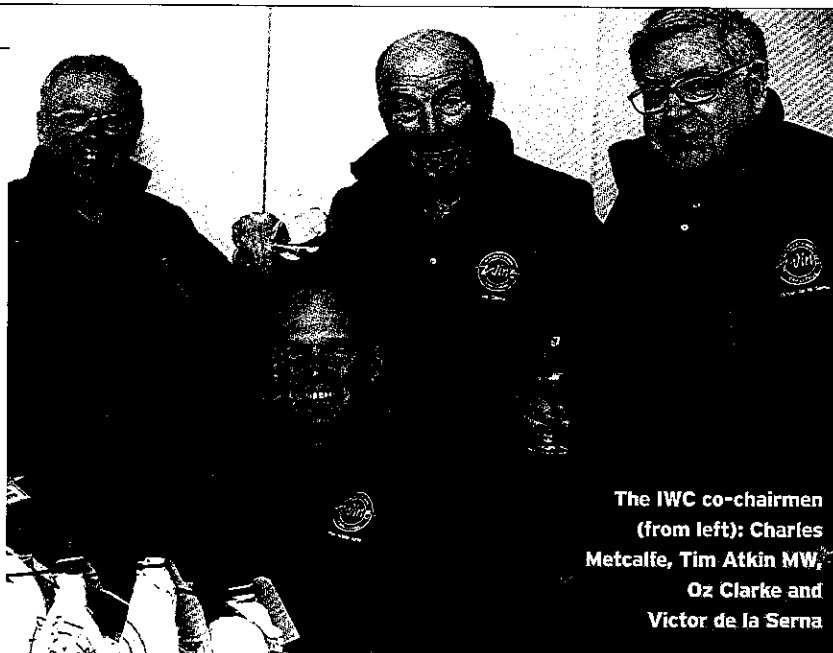
For Metcalfe, where the IWC really stands out among international competitions is the way it awards both boutique, niche wines and well-known, large-volume names.

“You have that breadth between tiny producers making very small amounts of wine and the big brands of this world,” he says. “Trophy winners present an opportunity for both the large-scale buyers, such as supermarkets looking for enormous quantities, and the people who have little wine shops and are looking for smaller quantities, such as the independent sector.”

Vrede en Lust Boet Erasmus 2007, which won the South African Red Trophy, is a wine which importer Hard to Find Wines hails as falling into the niche camp.

Sales manager Mark Davies says: “Our trophy-winning wine is a boutique product from a small producer nestled in the Simonsberg-Paarl area. For Vrede en Lust the awards offer a great opportunity to pit its wine against the larger producers, and for the judges to merit the individuality and quality that many of these smaller producers bring to the wine industry.”

Being able to display an IWC trophy-winning logo on a bottle of wine is a “fantastic way for wine drinkers to



The IWC co-chairmen
(from left): Charles
Metcalfe, Tim Atkin MW,
Oz Clarke and
Victor de la Serna

WINNERS OF THE GREAT VALUE WINE AWARDS REVEALED

Judged for their style, availability and price, 14 gold or silver medal winners scooped Great Value Wine awards. Among the winners, the major supermarkets' own-label wines featured highly:

- Marks & Spencer enjoyed triple-award success for its Brut Natural 2007, South Africa, £9.99 (Great Value Sparkling Wine Under £10), Moon Bridge Riesling 2009, Australia, £5.49 (Great Value White Wine under £6) and Secano Rosé Pinot Noir 2009, Chile, £7.49 (Great Value Rosé Wine between £5 and £10)
- Waitrose celebrated with its Champagne Brut NV, £19.99 (Great Value Sparkling Wine between £15 and £20) and Reserve Shiraz, Australia, £8.99 (Great Value Red Wine between £6 and £10)
- Waitrose also collected the Great Value Fortified Wine under £10 with its La Gitana Manzanilla NV, Spain, £8.39, and the Great Value Sweet Wine between £10 and £15 with Tamar Ridge Kayena Vineyard Botrytis Riesling, Australia, £13.99.

be assured of quality from wines they may not normally sample", Davies believes.

"All the winners have attributes that make them stand out from what is a crowded marketplace – and one that is often strewn with wines of questionable quality and value. An IWC trophy guarantees consumers that, even if the wine is not to their taste, it is one worth trying," he adds.

Scoping an accolade such as an IWC trophy "gives recognition of outstanding quality and provides an added guarantee for customers", according to Sara Lopedote, national accounts and marketing manager for Eurowines, whose Tordiruta Verdicchio Dei Castelli Di Jesi Passito 2006 won the Italian Botrytis Trophy.

She says: "People recognise the IWC as one of the most prestigious competitions in the UK – and indeed, the world. The trophy will undoubtedly help push sales through premium restaurants, as the trade recognises the value of this accolade."

Winning a trophy also gives a big boost to a region which might be relatively unknown among consumers, by "giving it more exposure and building awareness", according to Amelia Aragón Garcia, export manager for Cillar de Silos, which won the Ribera del Duero Trophy for its Torresilo 2006.

"The trophies reveal which wines leading world ▶



People recognise the IWC as one of the most prestigious competitions in the world

WHAT'S IT LIKE TO WIN?

"Many awards in the wine industry can become diluted and often irrelevant. However, IWC gold or trophy medals are certainly highly regarded by consumers, sommeliers and retailers alike. The international status of the awards also helps promote the wine both in domestic and foreign markets, and is an incredibly useful aid in marketing terms."

Mark Davies, sales manager, Hard to Find Wines

"It's really helpful for customers – so many are blinded by the array and diversity of the wines on offer. It gives them trust [because of the] independent third-party endorsement."

Anne Jones, information manager wines, beers, spirits and tobacco buying, Waitrose

"We know how thoroughly the process is supervised and by winning a trophy we are representing our region in the eyes of the trade. The IWC also offers the chance to present medals to wines in emerging markets such as Asia, which could potentially generate new markets for the wineries."

Amelia Aragón Garcia, export manager, Cillar de Silos

"The sticker on the bottle helps a wine stand out on the shelves, particularly in large retail stores where there's no one on hand to provide information. It's a fantastic accolade, it says a huge amount about the quality of the wine."

James Fleetwood, owner, Delibo Fine Wines

"Winning a trophy or Great Value Wine award gives a wine real prestige. It is a well-earned recognition of the dedication and commitment that has gone into producing a top-quality wine and puts the producers on the wine map of the world."

Chris Ashton, IWC event director, William Reed Business Media

"Winning a trophy is confirmation of my work and philosophy to winemaking – making handmade wines that express the terroir of Austria's Kremstal Valley. It is also a very good thing to grow sales and get more listings."

Franz Türk, owner, Weingut Türk



STICKERS MEAN SALES

If you've won an award in the IWC, putting stickers on your wines will directly influence consumer selection in-store. Stickers can be supplied in rolls of 1,000 or 5,000, with substantial discounts for large orders, or in high-resolution jpeg, eps or web format for you to produce your own labels from the IWC's copyrighted artwork. To place your order, go to internationalwinechallenge.com/medals or email iwc@william-reed.co.uk.

HOW DO WINES WIN TROPHIES?

The trophy stage is the final round for these award-winning wines. Having already achieved a gold medal through the IWC's rigorous judging process, the wines are tasted once more by an elite panel of judges against others in the same category, to determine if they are worthy of a trophy in addition to their gold medal.

Jancis Robinson MW at the recent Taste of Gold event, tasting the 111 trophy winners



experts think are the best from a particular region. In a region such as Ribera del Duero, where many wine critics and trade buyers have found it difficult to find typicity and sometimes balance, winning an IWC trophy is a very good sign," she says.

Multiple trophy winners

Among supermarkets winning trophies for their own-label wines, Marks & Spencer should be singled out for praise, with its Puligny-Montrachet Premier Cru Les Chalumeaux 2007 (rrp £38) scooping four trophies – International Chardonnay, French White, White Burgundy and Puligny-Montrachet.

Other wines awarded four trophies each included Director's Cut 2007 (rrp £17.95), which took home trophies for International Shiraz, Australian Red, Australian Shiraz and South Australian Shiraz.

Last week Stratford's Wine Agencies was appointed UK distributor to Rioja's Lar de Paula, which scooped three trophies for its Lar de Paula Cepas Viejas 2005 (Spanish Red, Tempranillio and Rioja Alavesa).

Commercial manager Neville Harris says: "The IWC is very diverse and gives wines from all backgrounds a chance to shine. It is one of the top international competitions and the accolade will definitely help in selling the new brand. It will emphasise the quality of the winemaking."

This year's line-up is testament to the ever-increasing quality of wines being entered into the IWC, according to Metcalfe. "There were very few bad wines sent to us this year, we all felt that the quality was improving. Everything seemed to be much better," he says.

With 16,000 bottles entered into this year's challenge, the competition has been tougher than ever – proving that the 111 trophy winners certainly have cause for celebration. ■