

The best spirits and liqueurs available in South Africa

The awards winners for the inaugural Old Mutual Trophy Spirits Show were announced at a ceremony held in Sandton on 31 July. The show identifies the top spirits and liqueurs available in the South African market and makes this information available to the country's consumers.



Open to all producers and importers, the Trophy Spirits Show scored and ranked all products across a series of categories identifying the gold, silver and bronze medallists and awarded a trophy to best-in-class submissions providing they were of gold medal standard.

With an entry of over 200 products, the competition was embraced by the industry. Expectations were high that the country distillers would be able to match the performance of their colleagues and competitors from as far afield as the Scottish Highlands, Scandinavia, Kentucky, Mexico, Cognac and the Caribbean. The outcome – in terms of trophy winners for Best in Class entries – was as broad in its representation of the various origins of the products as the initial submissions.

Overall, there were 13 trophy winners, including six Best of Show Awards, 20 gold medallists, 56 silver medallists and 78 bronzes.

Trophy and gold medal winners

Trophy winners:

Trophy for Best Brandy of Show, Old Mutual Trophy for Best Cognac: Martell VSOP Cognac Aged in Red Barrels

Trophy for Best Pot-distilled Brandy: KWV XO Twenty Year Old Potstill Brandy

Old Mutual Trophy for Best London Gin, Riedel Trophy for Best Gin of Show: Inverroche Classic Gin

Old Mutual Trophy for Best Distilled Gin: Pimville Gin

Trophy for Best Whisky of Show, Trophy for Best Single Malt Whisky: The Glenlivet Code Single Malt Scotch Whisky

Old Mutual Trophy for Best Blended Whisky: Ballantine's 12 Year Old Blended Scotch Whisky

Trophy for Best Pot Still Whisk(e)y: Redbreast 21 Year Old Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey

Old Mutual Trophy for Best Tequila of Show: Leonista Honey Reposado Karoo Agave Spirit

Old Mutual Trophy for Best Rum of Show: Whistler African Style Dark Rum

Old Mutual Trophy for Best Liqueur of Show: Gabriel Boudier Crème de Cassis

Gold Medal winners:

Aberlour Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky 18 Years

anCnoc Highland Single Malt Scotch Whisky 2005 – WhiskyBrother Exclusive

Ballantine's Finest Blended Scotch Whisky

Bayede! XO Royal Cape Brandy

Bisquit Cognac XO

Boschendal Potstill Brandy XO

Chivas Regal 18 Year Old Blended Scotch Whisky
Flivver Rooibos Citrus Gin
Ginologist Small Batch Gin Recipe 01 : Floral
Ginologist Small Batch Gin Recipe 02 : Citrus
Highland Park Single Malt Scotch Whisky 12 Year Old - WhiskyBrother Exclusive
Jin Gin: Olive and Honey
Leonista Blanco Karoo Agave Spirit
Master's London Dry Gin
Private Barrel Co. James Sedgwick Single Malt South African Whisky 6 Years
Redbreast 12 Year Old Single Pot Still Irish Whiskey
Unit 43 The Prospector Gin
Van Ryn's Single Potstill Brandy Aged 15 years
Van Ryn's Single Potstill Brandy Aged 20 years
Viceroy Vintage Brandy Aged 10 years

The trophy for the show's best whisky was won by The Glenlivet Code, crafted in the oldest licensed distillery in Scotland. However, a special barrel selection of a six year old James Sedgwick South African Malt Whisky produced for the Private Barrel Company finished with a gold medal and the highest score for a whisky produced in South Africa.

The Riedel Trophy for the show's best gin was won by a South Africa's Inverroche Classic, which also won the Old Mutual Trophy for the best London Gin. The best rum of show was also a South African entry – the Whistler African Style Dark Rum. South Africa was also the country of origin of the best Tequila/Mezcal, with the Leonista Honey Reposado Karoo Agave Spirit taking the trophy for best in class, and the Leonista Blanco Karoo Agave Spirit from the same distillery taking the gold medal.

With the brandy entries, KWV's 20 year old won the Trophy for the Best Pot-distilled Brandy, but was edged out of the Best Brandy of Show Trophy by the Martell VSOP Cognac (Aged in Red Barrels), which also won the Old Mutual Trophy for the Show's best Cognac.

The trophy for the best liqueur was won by a French entry, the Gabriel Boudier Crème de Cassis, a regular laureate at international competitions, while the best blended whisky was the Ballantine's 12 year old, and the best Pot Still Whiskey the Irish Redbreast 21 year old. In all, there were 13 trophy winners, including six Best in Class Awards, 20 gold medallists, 51 silver medallists and 78 bronzes.



Local and international expertise

The international judges were fulsome in their praise of the judging methodology, developed over the years by the Show's convenor, Michael Fridjhon, who is also chairman of the judges at the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show. The line-up of judge with international experts brought to the country courtesy of Old Mutual's sponsorship, were David Boyd (Scotland), David Smith (UK) and Jerome Royer (France). They were complemented by several local specialists, including Simone Musgraves, Mare-Loe Prinsloo, Andy Watts, Kresan Naidu, Dave Gunns, Mark Backhouse, Marlene Bester and Pieter de Bod.

While classes such as gin saw an unsurprisingly strong local contingent, the presence of entries from eight other countries is an indication of the range and choice in the local market, as well as the response of importers and their principals to the opportunities presented by the show. A strong whisky class – with submissions from five countries – and a broad range of vodkas and rums (four countries each) illustrates the very international nature of the show's entries.

Within the categories there was also a great breadth of styles and methods of production: pure pot-still brandies, whiskies and rums competed against blends; products with declared ages (eight, 12, 15 and 20 years, for example) were lined up against carefully assembled brands where bright fresh spirits had been woven into mature brandies and whiskies assembled from ancient casks.

Show chairman Michael Fridjhon was delighted with the industry's response. "No doubt the presence of the same team which has been involved in the Old Mutual Trophy Wine Show since its inception in 2002 contributed to the enthusiasm with which producers and their representatives engaged with Alex Mason-Gordon, the Show Manager. Almost all of the major players made an effort to participate – a few seemed more tentative than others – which is normal when an event like this is launched.

"Next year we hope to see a stronger presence from the country's pot-still brandy distillers. If they make the obvious connection between the involvement of the craft gin producers and the raised profile of the category as a whole, they could use the 2020 edition of the show to bring the treasure trove of craft South African brandy to a wider audience."



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Judges comments

Jerome Royer, president of the French Brandy Federation, said that the judging affirmed his impression of the extraordinary standard of the Cape brandy industry. "South Africa," he said, "produces some of the world's best brandies, with a range of styles, and clear evidence of very well managed maturation procedures, from the youngest products up to the very oldest examples."

David Boyd, the retired former head of the Chivas Regal production team and the international whisky judge was delighted that the line-up made no distinction as to place of production. "The sample should always be judged on its merits, as opposed to its origin," he affirmed. Andy Watts, another of the whisky panellists, described the judging as "one of, if not the best organised whisky tasting I have been part of."

The UK's David T. Smith, panel chairman and one of the most published and widely recognised authorities on gin in the world, felt that the South African craft gin industry competed comfortably in terms of the expertise and range of styles with anything found elsewhere in the world. He added "you've got such a rich range of flora and flavours to embrace and a lot of that really comes through in the gins."

Visit the [Trophy Spirits Show website](#) for the full list, including [Silver and Bronze medal winners](#).