

The Platter Five Star awards have been around for roughly 35 years - much the same length of time as Diners' Club Winemaker-of-the-Year - and yet the annual announcement of the guide's laureates provokes far greater interest. In fairness, except for the fact that the Platter Guide is now owned by Diners' Club, they share little in common. The Platter Five Stars were originally an idiosyncratic choice made by John Platter himself when his was the only palate producing scores for his eponymous guide - and they were simply his selection of the top wines tasted in a particular year. The Diners Club Winemaker-of-the-Year, on the other hand, was the brainchild of the late Peter Devereux and its focus changed every year from one designated variety or style of wine to another. In that sense, the name has always been something of a misnomer: the winner is not necessarily the country's best winemaker. More accurately he or she is the producer of the best wine - in the opinion of the judging panel - amongst all the entries in a pre-selected class.

For the first decade or two of its life the Diners Club award attracted a great deal of hype. This was partly because it was one of only a few competitions for the country's winemakers, and because it introduced what were once innovative judging methodologies (including an international judge) to an industry which had been lost in the Dark Ages. In the end, it failed to evolve while all around it smarter, better managed and more representative competitions invaded its space. It's still about, seeking out the best wine from a finite number of entries, either united by a theme (the senior competition) or submitted by winemakers young enough to qualify in the young winemaker category.

The Platter Five Star Awards are more widely representative of the industry's production since they are chosen from among all the wines which have attained a score of 4.5 stars in a tasting for the annual guide. Most of these wines are initially judged sighted by the team which works its way through the roughly 8000 new releases produced annually in the Cape. The top wines then go to a blind tasting where several panels (comprising mainly groups of the primary judges) reflect on them anew. This is a process which has seen constant evolution - the inevitable result of Platter's absence as well as the arrival on the scene of a younger generation of judges, many with more formal qualifications than were available a few decades back.

Judging commitments abroad this year kept me from sharing chairman's responsibilities in the Five Star tasting, leaving me free to review the results with dispassionate disinterest. Until the list of laureates was released a few weeks back I had no idea which wines had made the cut - and I still do not know who sat on the various panels which dealt with the different classes. What I do know is that - allowing for the inevitable churn of the vintages and the fact that wine is, in part, performance art with some bottles doing better than others on a given day - it's a pretty solid list of the country's top wines. There will no doubt be nay-sayers who will find fault with the whole enterprise (there are almost 100 wines in the top bracket) because of what did not make the cut, or who will ridicule the overall achievement because of a wine which did.

However, anyone armed with a reasonably complete list of the Cape's best wines will find many of them among the 2017 Platter Five Star laureates. By the same token, when a seemingly unknown name appears on this list, it's worth taking note: there's enough credibility among the known seeded players to suggest that the newcomers on the podium got there on merit, and not on luck.

For a full list of the Platter Five Star winners for 2017 go to

HYPERLINK

"<http://www.winewizard.co.za/out-there/platters-2017-five-star->