

# February - the month-long birthday celebration for South African wine

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Many people may have the month of February marked down as the "month of love" - however, it should be marked as the month of wine.



February sees South Africa celebrating the official birthday of our wine industry, and wine lovers the world over will agree that this is an occasion to raise a glass and say cheers!

2023 marks 364 years since the first wine was made from Cape grapes – an occasion noted by Jan van Riebeeck in his diary in 1659 when he wrote “Today, praise be to God, wine was made for the first time from Cape grapes.”

To honour this momentous event, South African wine producers, wine lovers, social sippers, connoisseurs, collectors, restaurateurs, and retail outlets countrywide come together and pay tribute to South Africa’s rich wine heritage.

Amongst the celebrations that take place in February is the annual [Wine Harvest Commemorative Event](#), which was hosted at South Africa’s oldest wine-producing farm, [Groot Constantia](#) on 2 February. This is where the wine industry pays tribute to individuals and organisations for their exceptional contribution to the ongoing journey and future success of South African wine. It is thanks to role players such as these, and those they support, that South African wine lovers can enjoy a proliferation of many of the best wines in the world!

Over the years, many greats have been recognised, including Nelson Mandela. And in 2023, Ken Forrester, Rydal Jeftha, Wendy Jonker, and Dr Erna Blancquaert were added to the list of outstanding leaders in the categories of Visionary Leadership (with the 1659 Award for Visionary Leadership), Growing Inclusivity, Wine Advancement, and Viti- and Viniculture.



Ken Forrester (winner of the Visionary Leadership category and widely known as “Mr Chenin”) has profoundly enhanced the reputation of the South African Chenin Blanc cultivar. Over the years, his inspired work has not only resulted in sales growth locally but has also brought global renown to South African wine, Chenin Blanc in particular.

Rydal Jefftha, CEO and managing director of the Koopmanskloof Vineyards and winner in the Growing Inclusivity category, has a passion for emerging generations of farmers and winemakers and is a mentor and inspirational leader to multitudes of young people - creating a sense of hope and future focus for those who may face barriers to enter the industry.

The behind-the-scenes work of Wendy Jonkers, administering officer of the Liquor Products Act and winner in the Wine Advancement category, has significantly contributed to opening doors for the South African wine industry internationally. Without the dedication and expertise of role players like her, the industry would find it difficult to advance consistently and sustainably.

Dr Erna Blancquaert, Viti- and Viniculture category winner, is a lecturer in Grapevine and Wine Sciences at Stellenbosch University, and also acts as Postgraduate Supervisor of Masters and PhD students in Viticulture and Oenology, Sustainable Agriculture, and Biotechnology. She was the first black South African to receive a PhD in Viticulture and her tireless devotion to empowerment sees a strong focus on building and supporting a new generation of black researchers and constructively addressing lingering prejudice in the wine industry and academia.

The Wine Harvest Commemorative Event is also the time when the new South African harvest is blessed – a special tradition going back hundreds of years, and one that is honoured all over the world.



But the wine celebrations don't end there! February also sees other highlights for wine lovers such as [International Syrah Day](#) on the 16th, followed by [Global Drink Wine Day](#) on the 18th, and [Open That Bottle Night](#) on the 25th – a multitude of reasons to savour our outstanding SA wines, and to give a thought to those who work tirelessly to making the wine industry in South Africa so successful!

For more information on the Wine Harvest Commemorative Event, the honourees, and the South African wine industry in general visit [www.sawineharvest.co.za](http://www.sawineharvest.co.za). Share your special celebratory events of the SA Wine Birthday on social media with [@sawineharvest](#) using the hashtag #HappyBirthdaySAwine.

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