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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Robert Whitley Memorial Award Announced; Palazzo Wine and El Cristiano 1761 Tequila Take Top Honors

San Diego, Calif. (July 20, 2023) - The 2023 Critics Challenge Wine & Spirits Competition celebrated its 20th anniversary during the June 23-24 event at the Westgate Hotel in downtown San Diego. The anniversary was marked by naming the competition's top wine award after Critics Challenge founder and wine journalist Robert Whitley.

"Twenty years ago, Robert had the idea to create a different kind of wine competition, one that gathered his fellow wine writers from around the country to bring their unique talents and worldwide perspectives to a blind tasting," said Rich Cook, who has served as Competition Director since 2015. "We lost Robert in 2021, but his innovative spirit lives on in this annual competition."

The inaugural **Robert Whitley Trophy for Wine of the Year** went to **Palazzo Wine's 2019 Left Bank Red Cuvée Master Blend Series**, a Cabernet Sauvignon-based Bordeaux-style blend from Napa Valley. Chief Wine Judge Michael Franz described the Palazzo as having "very smart styling, resulting in a superb wine." Palazzo also received Small Producer of the Year honors.

Other top awards included **Eberle Winery** of Paso Robles taking Domestic Winery of the Year, and Australia's **Zonte's Footstep** claiming Import Winery of the Year. Jean Charles Boisset's portfolio showed quality across the board landing the **Boisset Collection** the Wine Company of the Year award.

The Spirits division had one of its strongest showings to date. Led by Chief Spirits Judge Michael Cervin, judges awarded **Reposado Tequila** from **El Cristiano 1761** the Spirit of the Year prize. **Courvoiser's** stellar line of Cognacs earned the venerable producer the Distiller of the Year award.

Wine and spirits entries represented producers from around the globe. In all, 685 medals were awarded, including 64 Platinums.

A recap of top awards follows. For a complete list of results, go to www.CriticsChallenge.com

Critics Challenge International Wine & Spirits Competition, founded in 2004, has become one of the most prestigious wine and spirits competitions in the world. The blind tasting is judged entirely by noted wine journalists. Gold and Platinum winners receive publishable comments from the critics that award the medals, and Platinum winners are reviewed in WineReviewOnline.com or SpiritsReviewOnline.com. Critics Challenge is part of the Challenge Series of international wine and spirits competitions that includes the San Diego International Wine & Spirits Challenge (formerly San Diego Wine Competition), Winemaker Challenge, Distillers Challenge, and Sommelier Challenge.

DIRECTORS AWARDS - WINE

Robert Whitley Trophy for Wine of the Year

PALAZZO 2019 Left Bank Red Cuvée Master Blend Series
Napa Valley \$50.00 Platinum 96 points

Winery of the Year, Domestic

Eberle Winery
Paso Robles, California

Winery of the Year, Import

Zonte's Footstep
McLaren Vale, Australia

Wine Company of the Year

Boisset Collection
Napa Valley, California

Small Producer of the Year

PALAZZO WINE
Napa Valley, California

Best of Show Sparkling Wine

Castelneau NV Le Chemin du Roi Brut Methode Champenoise
Champagne AOC \$160.00 Platinum 95 points

Best of Show White Wine

Lightpost Winery 2021 Chardonnay Reserve Spanish Springs Vineyard
San Luis Obispo County \$39.00 Platinum 95 points

Best of Show Rosé

Dark Horse 2022 Rosé
California \$9.99 Platinum 94 points

Best of Show Red Wine

PALAZZO WINE 2019 Left Bank Red Cuvée Master Blend Series
Napa Valley \$50.00 Platinum 96 points

Best of Show Dessert Wine

Jeff Runquist 2021 Sisney Estate Grown Peroni Ranch
Amador County \$40.00 Gold 93 points

Best Albariño

Miramonte Winery 2021 Albarino
Temecula Valley \$32.00 Gold 92 points

Best Barbera

Eberle 2021 Barbera
Paso Robles \$40.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Blended Red Varieties

Herzog Special Reserve 2020 Quartet
California \$44.00 Gold 92 points

Best Blended White Varieties

La Vieile Ferme 2022 Blanc
Vin de France \$11.99 Gold 92 points

Best Bordeaux Style Blend

PALAZZO WINE 2019 Left Bank Red Cuvée Master Blend Series
Napa Valley \$50.00 Platinum 96 points

Best Boxed Wine

Bota Box NV Dry Rosé
California \$22.99 Gold 91 points

Best Cabernet Franc

PALAZZO WINE 2019 Cabernet Franc Reserve
Napa Valley \$115.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Cabernet Sauvignon

Louis M. Martini 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon
Napa Valley \$42.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Canned Wine

Maker Wine Company 2022 2022 Alta Orsa Chardonnay
Sonoma County \$9.00 Gold 91 points

Best Cava

Poema NV Cava Brut
Cava DO \$12.99 Gold 92 points

Best Chardonnay

Lightpost Winery 2021 Chardonnay Reserve Spanish Springs Vineyard
San Luis Obispo County \$39.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Chenin Blanc

Baron Herzog 2021 Chenin Blanc
California \$10.00 Gold 93 points

Best Dry Rosé

Dark Horse 2022 Rosé
California \$9.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Fruit Wine

St. James Winery NV Blueberry
\$8.99 Gold 92 points

Best Fruit/Grape Blend

Barefoot Fruitscato NV Lemonade
\$6.99 Silver

Best Grenache

Miramonte Winery 2019 Garnacha
Temecula Valley \$40.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Gruner Veltliner

Reustle Prayer Rock Vineyards 2022 Grüner Veltliner Estate Grown Estate Selection; Hefeabzug
Umpqua Valley \$34.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Hybrid Wine (3-way tie)

JOLO Winery & Vineyards 2022 JOLOTAGE
North Carolina \$39.00 Platinum 94 points

St. James Winery NV Project 1970
Ozark Highlands \$18.99 Platinum 94 points

Carlos Creek Winery 2022 Minnterra White
American \$24.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Italian Blend

Tostorredu 2020 Tostorredu
Isola Dei Nuraghi IGT \$19.99 Gold 92 points

Best Low Calorie Wine

Brancott Estate 2022 Brancott Estate Flight Song Sauvignon Blanc
Marlborough \$12.99 Gold 91 points

Best Malbec

Zonte's Footstep 2022 Violet Beauregard Malbec
Langhorne Creek \$30.00 Gold 93 points

Best Merlot

Merriam Vineyards 2018 Merlot Estate Windacre Vineyard
Russian River Valley \$54.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Montepulciano

Zonte's Footstep 2021 Rosso Cova
McLaren Vale \$30.00 Gold 90 points

Best Muscat (Dry)

Navarro Vineyards 2022 Muscat Blanc Dry
Anderson Valley \$25.00 Gold 91 points

Best Muscat (Sweet)

Barefoot NV Moscato
California \$6.99 Gold 91 points

Best Non-Vintage Brut

Castelnau NV Le Chemin du Roi Brut Methode Champenoise
Champagne AOC \$160.00 Platinum 95 points

Best Petit Verdot

Jeff Runquist 2020 Reserve Petit Verdot
San Joaquin County \$48.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Petite Sirah

J. Lohr Vineyards & Wines 2020 Tower Road Petite Sirah
Paso Robles \$35.00 Gold 91 points

Best Pinot Grigio (2-way tie)

Jacob's Creek 2022 Classic Pinot Grigio
Australia \$12.00 Platinum 94 points

The Simple Grape 2021 Pinot Grigio
California \$15.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Pinot Noir

Kenwood Vineyards 2019 Six Ridges Pinot Noir
Russian River Valley \$21.99 Platinum 95 points

Best Port

Jeff Runquist 2021 Sisney Estate Grown Peroni Ranch
Amador County \$40.00 Gold 93 points

Best Prosecco

La Marca 2021 Prosecco Rosé
Prosecco DOC \$19.00 Gold 91 points

Best Red Rhone Blend

Basalt Cellars 2020 Rick's Red
Washington State \$30.00 Gold 91 points

Best Riesling

Walnut Creek 2022 Riesling
American \$14.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Sangiovese

Jeff Runquist 2021 Sangiovese Pioneer Hill Vineyard
Amador County \$29.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Sauvignon Blanc

Rabble 2022 Sauvignon Blanc
Central Coast \$17.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Shiraz

Wakefield 2020 St Andrews Shiraz
Clare Valley \$80.00 Gold 93 points

Best Sparkling Rosé

Castelnau NV Le Chemin du Roi Brut Rosé Methode Champenoise
Champagne AOC \$299.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Spirits Barrel Aged Wine

1924 2021 Whiskey Barrel Aged Red Blend
California \$21.00 Gold 90 points

Best Super Tuscan Style

Le Vigne 2019 Cuore Della Vigna Estate Grown
Paso Robles \$54.00 Gold 92 points

Best Syrah

Heirloom Vineyards 2021 Syrah
Adelaide Hills \$40.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Tempranillo

Miramonte Winery 2019 Tempranillo
Temecula Valley \$47.00 Platinum 94 points

Best Vermentino

Barboursville Vineyards 2022 Vermentino Reserve
Virginia \$23.00 Gold 91 points

Best Vintage Brut (2-way tie)

Domaine Carneros 2018 Estate Brut Methode Traditionnelle Estate Grown
Carneros \$38.00 Gold 93 points

Trump Winery 2016 Reserve Brut Estate Bottled
Monticello \$74.99 Gold 93 points

Best Viognier

Trump Winery 2021 Viognier
Monticello \$29.99 Platinum 94 points

Best Zinfandel

Eberle 2021 Zinfandel
Paso Robles \$35.00 Platinum 95 points

DIRECTORS AWARDS - SPIRITS**Spirit of the Year**

El Cristiano 1761 Reposado Tequila XR Mexico \$110.00
Platinum 97 points

Distiller of the Year

Courvoisier Cognac
France

Best Cognac

Courvoisier XO Royal Cognac France \$285.00
Platinum 96 points

Best Gin

Highclere Castle London Dry Gin England \$39.99
Platinum 94 points

Best Liqueur

Sorel Artisanal Liqueur USA \$40.00
Platinum 94 points

Best Ready to Drink Beverage

BACARDÍ Sunset Punch RTD \$12.99
Gold 92 points

Best Rum

BACARDÍ Reserva Ocho Rare Gold Rum Puerto Rico \$39.99
Gold 93 points

Best Tequila

El Cristiano 1761 Reposado Tequila XR Mexico \$110.00
Platinum 97 points

Best Vodka

Ellison Vodka USA \$30.00
Gold 92 points

Best Whiskey

Horse Soldier Premium Straight Bourbon Whiskey USA \$49.99
Platinum 95 points

Best Whiskey, High Proof

Uncle Nearest Master Blend Edition Premium Whiskey - Blend No. 017 USA \$149.00
Platinum 95 points

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