

They are the champions

Forty-nine wines were judged of sufficient quality to merit a trophy at this year's Challenge. But it is the Champion awards, selected from those 49, that represent the highest

pinnacle of achievement each year.

For producers, being named an IWC Champion is among the highest accolades a wine can achieve. For consumers, meanwhile, the awards

are a guarantee of seriously good drinking. This year you might have to do some work to find the champion wines, however. Scandalously, many of them are unavailable in the UK.

Champion Sweet

Weingut Günther Bardorf Randersackerer Sonnenstuhl Riesling Eiswein 2002

Weingut Günther Bardorf's eiswein has all the hallmarks of the style, with fantastic concentration, showing dried nectarines, peach and reticent notes of apricot. That this was the wine's first vintage only adds to the achievement for this Franken winery. No UK stockists.



Ribera del Duero and Spanish Red Trophies, is still unavailable in the UK is a mystery – one that the judges were unable to fathom.

The Daniel Thibault Trophy (Champion Sparkling)

Taittinger Comtes de Champagne Blanc de Blancs 1996

The Champagne and sparkling wine category is one of the toughest categories in the IWC. Our tasters are privileged to sample some of Champagne's finest, and not just from the most recent vintages either. All this makes success for Champagne Taittinger all the sweeter. Stockists: THS £105



Champion Fortified

Quinta do Portal Vintage Port 2003

It was only a matter of time before Quinta do Portal claimed the IWC's ultimate accolade. After picking up a gold in 2003, three silvers in 2004 and a gold in 2005, the Champion Fortified award in 2006 caps off an impressive period for this fine Port producer.

Stockists: CHN, GWW and TWM, £26.20



The James Rogers Trophy (best wine in its first year of production)

Guru 2004 Wine & Soul

For the third year in a row this award has gone to a Portuguese producer, but for the first time it has been awarded to a Portuguese white. Are we seeing a renaissance? The results for this category reveals this may be the case, with no gold or silver in 2004, one silver in 2005 and three gold and six silvers in 2006. No UK stockists.



Champion White

Guru 2004 Wine & Soul

Guru 2004 is a subtle, understated, beautifully-made white wine, from a region, the Douro, far better known for its reds. Produced using indigenous Portuguese varieties; not the usual international suspects, the arrival of Guru is further proof of the country's burgeoning reputation.

No UK stockists.



The Len Evans Trophy (consistent performance over past five years)

Kracher

Since 2002, Kracher has submitted 62 wines and received two trophies, seven golds, 15 silver, 24 bronze and 10 seals. In fact, only four wines of the total submitted have not received medals. Although recognised as one of the world's finest sweet wine producers, Alois Kracher's talents are much broader. In 2005, his Illmitz Zweigelt was awarded the Austrian Red Trophy. Stockist: NYW



Champion Red

Víñas del Jaro Chafandín 2003

Yet another wine with no UK representation. And yet another victory for an unheralded producer. Quite why this fabulous Spanish red, which also took the



IWC Personality Michel Rolland

Few people in the modern wine industry, indeed, few people full stop, could claim to be as influential in their chosen sphere as the winner of this year's IWC Personality of the Year, Michel Rolland.

Generally referred to as either a consultant or a flying winemaker, Rolland's enormous talent has been both his making and, to a degree, his undoing.

Everyone, it seems, would like a bit of the Rolland magic, and he works with an astonishing number and variety of clients throughout the world – the list features more than 100 producers from his native Bordeaux, to Spain, Italy, South America and Asia.

But this ubiquity has made him an easy target for critics of the globalisation of wine, a criticism that was most vividly in evidence in the film *Mondovino*, released in the UK in 2004. The film's director, Jonathan Nossiter, portrayed Rolland as a giggling mercenary responsible for peddling a single, one-size-fits-all winemaking recipe to each of his clients. For the likes of Nossiter, Rolland, for all his talent and charm, is second only to the critic Robert Parker as an enemy of wine's precious cultural traditions.

For those who know and work with him, however, Rolland's celluloid portrait came as something of a shock. This was not the Rolland they respected. This was not the Rolland who, having studied at Bordeaux University under the great Emile Peynaud, had begun his ascent

to fame when he opened a wine analysis laboratory in Pomerol with his wife Dany in the early 1970s. Neither was it the Rolland who forged his reputation as a brilliant and intuitive winemaker in Pomerol and across the Bordeaux Right Bank over the next couple of decades.

Certainly, the Rolland who has been awarded the coveted IWC Personality of the Year Trophy has little in common with the person who emerges from Nossiter's cutting room.

"The world of wine would be a poorer place without Michel Rolland"

As IWC co-chairman Tim Atkin MW explains, "Contrary to the caricatured portrayal of him in the film, *Mondovino*, Michel Rolland has been and continues to be an enormous force for good in the wine world.

"He is best known for his association with one grape (Merlot) in one region (Bordeaux), but he has arguably had an even bigger influence outside France, particularly in Argentina where he has invested in projects of his own as well as advising other wineries.

"Rolland travels the world preaching a simple gospel: that winemaking should be used to express a sense of place, rather than to obscure or conceal it.

"That he does so with a smile on his face and (more often than not) a glass of wine in his hand tells you everything you need to know about his approach to life.

"The world of wine would be a poorer place without Michel Rolland."