

Top talent shines at the 2023 Inter Hotel Challenge

The Inter Hotel Challenge (IHC) concluded last night, 28 November, with the announcement of its 2023 winners during a gala event at the Southern Sun Cape Sun in Cape Town. The annual competition, sponsored by Heineken Beverages, aims to identify and nurture the next generation of hospitality talent in South Africa.

This year, a record number of entries from 26 leading hotels across the country showcased their skills in a variety of categories, from wine stewarding and mixology to cooking and baking. The judging panel, comprising industry experts, was impressed by the high standard of entries and the evident passion and dedication of the participants.



Source: Supplied

"They're smart, ambitious, and primed for success," said Millicent Maroga, corporate affairs director for Heineken Beverages, of the finalists. "It's our view that when you show talent and determination, every effort should be made to help you get ahead," she said during the gala event.

"It's a win-win all round. The challenge is structured to fast-track training in hotel and restaurant services. That raises hospitality standards, expands job creation, and promotes economic inclusion. It's an opportunity for all the sponsors to cultivate brand ambassadors and it also helps South Africa to offer local and international tourists a world-class experience, enhancing the country's competitiveness as a foremost travel destination," added Maroga.

"Across the board, standards have continued to rise year after year," said Chania Morritt-Smith, co-founder of the IHC.

Wine Steward of the Year

Nkanyiso Zikhali, a waiter from The Oyster Box in KwaZulu-Natal, took the top honours as Wine Steward of the Year. His prize includes a two-week internship at Margot Janse's acclaimed SAAM restaurant in Amsterdam, where he will experience the fine dining culture of the Netherlands and learn more about the Heineken brand.

Chef of the Year

Cornelius Suthse, a commis chef from Sun City Convention Centre, was named Chef of the Year. He will embark on a three-week immersion programme at Swakopmund's upmarket Strand Hotel in Namibia, a popular tourist destination.

Pastry Chef of the Year

Phathiswa Plaatjie, a pastry chef de partie from The Twelve Apostles Hotel & Spa in Cape Town, was awarded Pastry Chef of the Year. Her prize includes a three-week placement at Château de La Creuzette in Boussac, France.

Most up and coming Wine Steward

Londeka Mkhize, a wine steward from Durban's Beverly Hills Hotel, was recognised as the Most Up & Coming Wine Steward and recipient of The Wonga Award. She won an online bursary worth R30,000 from the International Hotel School.

Other notable awards

- The Rio Largo Most Promising Chef Award went to Shantel Ndlovu of The Silo Hotel in Johannesburg.
- The Scanpan Excellent Kitchen Practice Award was jointly given to Cornelius Suthse of Sun City Convention Centre and Thando Mahlekelele, a pastry chef from Southern Sun Elangeni & Maharani in Durban.
- The Lancewood Pastry Chef of the Year Award went to Phathiswa Plaatjie of The Twelve Apostles Hotel & Spa.
- The KitchenAid Africa Bio-Wheat Baker of the Year Award was awarded to Senzo Khumalo of The Oyster Box in KwaZulu-Natal.
- The top three Avanti SA baristas (per area) were Vusumzi Sithole (54 on Bath), Mpoe Charles Maboshigo (Ivory Manor Boutique Hotel) and Vuyo Kenneth Zuma (Sun City Convention Centre).
- The Best Food & Wine Pairing Award was given to chefs Keelyn Scheepers and Ruaan van Helden of Southern Sun Cape Sun, who presented a dish of Fish4Africa WWF-SASSI green list Cape yellowtail tartare paired with Nederburg The Winemasters Chardonnay 2022.

Overall, the 2023 Inter Hotel Challenge was a resounding success, showcasing the extraordinary talent and passion of South Africa's hospitality industry. The winners and all participants can be proud of their achievements and the bright future that lies ahead in their chosen fields.

