

Black-owned wine brands boost SA in New York

Sixteen Black-owned brands will represent South Africa's wine industry at Vinexpo America in New York. The trade-only expo, convening some of the world's top-producing wine regions, will be hosted



Source: Supplied

New York will soon welcome some of the biggest groups of black-owned South African wine brands to ever participate at North America's leading international wine exhibition.

For the first time, the percentage of Black-owned businesses participating at Vinexpo America will be significant, thanks to an initiative jointly driven by Wesgro, the official tourism, trade, and investment promotion agency for Cape Town and the Western Cape, the SA Wine Industry Transformation Unit (SAWITU) and the South African Department of Trade, Industry, and Competition (DTIC).

Seizing opportunities to enter the US market

The United States (US) market has always been a high-priority market for South African wine brands. However, market access to the US has been a challenge for several decades. In the last few years though, a concerted effort has been made to engage with this market.

According to Wendy Petersen, executive manager of Sawitu: "A renewed focus on SA wines has especially attracted

market share for black-owned wine brands that have not in the past been privy to this growth of the SA wine category in the US.

"The US market is difficult to penetrate, especially with the imposed three-tier system of importers/producers, distributors, and retailers. When trying to find an importer willing to take a product on board, brands need to take advantage of favourable trade agreements to enter the market.

"SAWITU's partnership with Wesgro on the US initiative is a result of increased market access through Wesgro's Export Advancement Programme. Wesgro's input over several years, especially by Mrs Nadine Smith Clarke, Head: Export Advancement Programme, has been instrumental in driving the process as well as trade and promotions activities for SA brands in the US market.

"The Vinexpo America event will build on the work that has already been done and will allow brands to engage with importers, buyers, retailers, and journalists to showcase their award-winning wines and new products."

The 16 black-owned brands participating at Vinexpo America will be Aslina Wines, Carmen Stevens Wines, Khai Wines, Sesfikile Wines, Thokozani Wines, The Bridge of Hope Wines, Klein Goederust Wines, La RicMal Wines, PaardenKloof Estate, Rockbelt Ridge Wines, Bayede Royal Wines, Koni Wines, Highberry Wines, M'hudi Wines, African Roots Wine, and The Nice Beverage Company.

Denise Stubbs of Thokozani believes South Africa and America share a long walk to freedom: "Sixty-five farmworkers own our brand, Thokozani, a Zulu word for celebration. Listing Thokozani in the US and sharing its story of transformation, empowerment, and award-winning wines would be our biggest achievement."

Two female African entrepreneurs, Lesego Holzapfel and Ezanne Gouws-du Toit, founded Khai by embracing diversity and fusing two cultures. "We believe our brand and story will resonate with many American consumers who value diversity, inclusion, and sustainable impact," says Holzapfel.

Dine with SA wine in New York

Prior to meeting buyers and industry experts at Vinexpo, the expedition to the US will kick off with an evening in New York. On Tuesday, 7 March 2023, the SA Consulate in New York will host a brand owners' and importers' wine tasting and networking reception. At this event, brand owners will offer tastings of their wines and showcase their companies.

"This will be the first event of its kind with such a substantial number of Black-owned brands participating and a very specific focus on entering the US market," says Petersen, who together with Smith- Clarke will present their organisations' roles in assisting these brands as well as the work they do towards sustainable development.

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