

# THE 2019 WINNERS



Has there been a more challenging wine retail environment? It's hard to think of a more adverse set of conditions, beset as we are by low consumer confidence, Brexit issues, a fluctuating currency, ever-greater competition and consolidation, punitive duty... and people drinking less. 'We need our best wine retailers now more than ever,' says chairman **Peter Richards MW**.

'These awards not only celebrate our best wine sellers, they also remind us how lucky we are as a drinking nation to be served by such talent, imagination and resilience in adversity.'

## THE JUDGING PANEL



**Peter Richards MW** is an awarded wine writer, broadcaster and consultant, and DWWA Regional Chair for Chile



**Laura Clay** is the current chairman of the Association of Wine Educators



**Andy Howard MW** is a contributing editor to *Decanter*. He was formerly a retail wine buyer for 30 years



**Peter Ranscombe** is a journalist, author, wine columnist and drinks blogger for *Scottish Field*



**Matt Walls** is a contributing editor to *Decanter* and a former buyer for a London wine retailer



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## Outstanding Retailer of the Year

**Winner**

### Waitrose

Several exciting names from very different ends of the wine spectrum were in the mix for this award. Waitrose ultimately earned the accolade through bravery, creativity and laudable commitment to the wine cause. As one judge said: 'The pressures on them are different to many other wine retailers.' And, while some large retailers batten down the hatches, Waitrose has steadily emerged as a mainstream standard-bearer for wine (and other causes, including sustainability). The safe option? Hardly.



## Innovator of the Year

**Winner**

### Cru

**Runner-up** The Whisky Exchange

As well as its digital wizardry, fine wine company Cru impressed the judges with a clear and engaging sustainability initiative aimed at reducing carbon emissions (for example, by offering clients different shipping choices based on emissions calculations) and offsetting. The Whisky Exchange has had an exciting year, with a successful debut Champagne Show signalling its fruitful diversification.



## National Wine Shop

**Winner**

### Cambridge Wine Merchants

**Runner-up** Tanners

How to select a wine gift? Cambridge Wine Merchants' helpful flow-chart choosing system starts with: 'How much do you like the recipient?' The personal touch and sense of humour, allied to a fine wine range, engaging events and well-diversified activities and portfolio, combine to make CWM very special. Runner-up Tanners remains an outstanding wine retailer with an encouraging focus on innovation.



## Local Multi-Store

**Winner**

### Loki Wines

**Runner-up** WoodWinters

Loki has 'transformed the Birmingham wine scene' and 'just never stands still', in the words of one judge. The original city-centre shop and bar has been upgraded, a new store opened and customer engagement improved, including successful events. Loki is now a leading British wine retailer. The WoodWinters list remains strong and the three stores are laudably community minded.



## Local Wine Shop

**Winner**

### The Whalley Wine Shop

**Runner-up** Lockett Bros

A fiercely competitive field saw the approachable charms and fairly priced, well-sourced range of Lancashire's The Whalley Wine Shop win through as the UK's best local wine shop. Meanwhile Lockett Bros in North Berwick majors on an easygoing attitude and a newly reconfigured shop that offers cosy tasting areas and a cheese deli counter. 'Well worth a detour,' commented one judge.



## London Multi-Store

**Winner**

### Vagabond

**Runner-up** Lea & Sandeman

Last year's winner Lea & Sandeman - purveyors of a herculean list, 90% sourced directly from producers, with more events than ever - were just pipped to the post by Vagabond. As the impressive expansion of Vagabond continues, its deliberately pared-back list, colour-coded wine-style stations and hybrid wine bar-cum-shop model all help encourage and empower wine lovers to be adventurous in an interactive and fun way. ➤



London Wine Shop

**Winner**  
**The Good Wine Shop (Kew)**

**Runner-up** **Uncorked**  
A phoenix-like recovery after a 2018 fire in The Good Wine Shop's Kew site was attributed to 'strong community foundations'. This may be down to an enviable customer loyalty rewards programme, an enticing range and a new on-premise wine service. 'There's a sincerity and genuine love of wine here,' said one judge. Uncorked continues to improve its already outstanding wine list.



London Neighbourhood Wine Shop

**Winner**  
**Noble Green Wines**

'Enthusiasm and energy' characterise this Hampton Hill wine shop, which runs buzzy events, works with the local butcher and deli, supports local charities and aims to 'make people welcome in a community-focused neighbourhood shop'. A list topping 1,100 bins and advice from well-qualified staff help to create a wonderful wine experience for anyone shopping here.



Online Retailer

**Winner**  
**The Wine Society**

**Runner-up** **Lay & Wheeler**  
Online retail becomes more competitive by the day and wine is no exception. For a traditional mail-order merchant, The Wine Society has innovated and adapted in impressive fashion. Fully 72% of its sales are now online and its user-friendly website is rich in content, with fair prices allied to a truly outstanding list and nationwide tasting events. Lay & Wheeler's majestic list, meanwhile, finds a fitting home on its engaging site.



Newcomer

**Winner**  
**Noble Grape**

**Runner-up** **The Tapas Room**  
Established in Cowbridge, Wales in 2017, Noble Grape is a welcome addition to the UK wine scene with a well-chosen list, personal MW service and a can-do attitude. The emphasis, according to owner Richard Ballantyne MW, is on 'authenticity of style and sustainability'. Also open since 2017, The Tapas Room is an impressively accessible and unpretentious place to celebrate Spain in London through tapas and wine.



Burgundy Specialist

**Winner**  
**Goedhuis & Co**

**Runner-up** **House of Townend**  
Numerous visits to the region; a dedicated website section; excellent communication and interaction; commercial success; a sumptuous and growing Burgundy range with tantalising parcels and older vintages: these were the key reasons for Goedhuis' triumph. House of Townend's policy of storing half its (well selected) Burgundy en primeur buys and releasing them mature at sensible prices earned particular praise from judges.



Central & Eastern Europe specialist

**Winner**  
**Novel Wines**

**Runner-up** **Croatian Fine Wines**  
Ben Franks' mission is: 'To work hard to introduce the UK to a range of truly unique wines.' The clear commitment to this challenge, allied to a wide-ranging, eclectic list and excellent, personal service saw Bath-based Novel Wines take top gong. The impressive and engaging Croatian Fine Wines was originally inspired by a holiday experience and is now diversifying into other regions.



Champagne & Sparkling specialist

**Winner**  
**The Whisky Exchange**

**Runner-up** **Waitrose**  
Dawn Davies MW is helping The Whisky Exchange to defy the limitations of its name, sourcing a wide-ranging and well priced fizz list. Its debut Champagne Show in late 2018 made waves and is part of a wider series of education and events. Runner-up Waitrose has an outstanding sparkling range – its impressive sales growth being testament to this strength and depth.



England & Wales specialist

**Winner**  
**Waitrose**

Waitrose has actively championed English and Welsh wine for some time and its laudable commitment shows no sign of abating. With an extensive core range, from sparkling to sweet via white, red and rosé, stores are also able to support local vineyards. Its Leckford sparkling wine, grown on the Waitrose & Partners' Hampshire estate, is a further high-profile endorsement of the category.



En Primeur

**Winner**  
**Goedhuis & Co**

**Runner-up** **Justerini & Brooks**  
Both Goedhuis and Justerini reported strong numbers for their Burgundy campaigns, the latter's mouthwatering list and excellent service being commendable. Goedhuis won through not just on the basis of sound business basics (sensible storage policy, fair pricing, and a superb list that continues to grow and improve) but also a notably proactive and personal approach to the whole en primeur experience.



Subscription Wine Club

**Winner**  
**Vinoteca**

**Runner-up** **Honest Grapes**  
Plenty of diversity in this category – a joy to judge. As runner-up, Honest Grapes is a wine merchant and club with bags of character and a dynamic feel, that's well worth getting to know. The Vinoteca wine club is a spin-off from its London wine bars and shops. The smallish list is brilliantly chosen; subscriptions are fairly priced and deliver a real sense of discovery; and food matching is a particular (if unsurprising) forté.



Australia specialist

**Winner**  
**The Vinorium**

This Kent-based wine merchant clearly takes great pride in its Australian specialism, with an emphasis on direct sourcing and premium wines backed up by a strong online and wholesale operation. The Vinorium describes the future for Australian wine as 'incredibly bright' and it serves this category commendably well.



Bordeaux specialist

**Winner**  
**Berry Bros & Rudd**

**Runner-up** **BI Wines & Spirits**  
Berry Bros does outstanding work celebrating Bordeaux. Not just via a mouthwatering fine wine list but also at the more affordable end of the spectrum, with initiatives to push everyday Bordeaux wines under £25. Combined with well-attended events and a drive to source lighter, more sensitively made wines, this is a compelling proposition. A more diversified entity now, BI remains a fine destination for Bordeaux lovers.



Germany specialist

**Winner**  
**Justerini & Brooks**

**Runner-up** **The Wine Barn**  
Wine insiders know Justerini & Brooks not just for its strength and depth in the likes of Bordeaux, Burgundy and Piedmont. Its treasure trove of a German list, with more than 880 wines, is impeccably sourced, with names to make you drool. Runner-up The Wine Barn continues to show good growth with its exclusively German focus.



Italy specialist

**Winner**  
**Jeroboams**

**Runner-up** **Justerini & Brooks**  
Jeroboams has been undergoing a revamp and its new incarnation is buzzy and engaging – with a definite Italian accent. Wine director Peter Mitchell MW has grown the Italian range to account for 20% of the portfolio, Italian-themed events are frequent and there's a sense of fun and passion – they've even got a deli. Justerini's Italian list continues to get better; described by the judges as 'amazing' and 'mouthwatering'.



Languedoc-Roussillon specialist

**Winner**  
**Stone Vine & Sun**

**Runner Up** **Yapp Bros**  
Stone Vine & Sun has long been committed to the wines of Languedoc-Roussillon but its list has not stood still, covering an excellent range of styles, appellations and producers, from classic to new wave – testament to frequent buying trips and the dedication of the team. In its 50th year, Yapp remains a benchmark for Languedoc-Roussillon wines in the UK, brilliantly mixing the iconic with the quirky.



Loire specialist

**Winner**  
**Lay & Wheeler**

**Runner-up** **Yapp Bros**  
Lay & Wheeler's enthusiasm for its Loire portfolio is evident in its extensive (145-strong) range, from Grolleau Gris to a 1979 Coteaux du Layon, together with its biggest-ever print campaign and tasting this year. The range, which features classics as well as newer faces, makes for delicious reading. Meanwhile Yapp's 100% direct sourcing makes it a fine destination for Loire lovers too. ➤



## New Zealand specialist

**Winner**

### Specialist Cellars

'They embody the vibrancy of the New Zealand wine scene,' was how one judge put it. This innovative, buzzy operation continues to thrive, having doubled its events programme in 2019, deliberately reaching out to a younger wine-buying demographic, and now with a range that encompasses Australian and other New World wines. It's no surprise to hear that even more plans are in the pipeline.



## Regional France specialist

**Winner**

### The Wine Society

**Runner-up Yapp Bros**

The Wine Society really does cover parts of France that other merchants don't reach. Its regional French offering is strong and unique, covering 172 wines, almost all direct-sourced, from regions such as Corsica, Lorraine, Iroulégy, Jura and Côtes du Forez – even en primeur Madiran. 'They put energy and passion into it – and it shows,' said one judge.



## Rhône specialist

**Winner**

### Lay & Wheeler

**Runner-up Yapp Bros**

Lay & Wheeler continues to expand its Rhône range, which now numbers 550 wines; a mouthwatering spread of classics and newer faces, testament to intelligent sourcing and an eager buying clientele. Yapp's list of vaunted Rhône names – from Jean-Louis Chave to Georges Vernay and beyond – almost inspires an automatic genuflection from wine lovers and remains a notable specialism for the company.



## South Africa specialist

**Winner**

### Handford Wines

**Runner-up Museum Wines**

Handford's list is 'a Who's Who of what's exciting in the Cape', that 'keeps up with a fast-moving wine scene'. Such were the comments about this stalwart merchant that stocks a range of over 300 South African wines, including many hard-to-get, small-allocation bottles. Museum Wines, despite its size, is remarkably proactive, growing its list with lesser-known exclusivities and focusing on South Africa at its Dorset Wine Festival.



## Spain specialist

**Winner**

### L'Oculo

**Runner-up The Wine Society**

L'Oculo's impressive expansion continues, having opened a new site, grown the team and boosted its direct-sourced, eclectic list that's dedicated to natural, organic and biodynamic Spanish wines. Another well-deserved win. Meanwhile runner-up The Wine Society provides excellent value for money across its range, including the own-labels.



## Sweet & fortified specialist

**Winner**

### The Oxford Wine Company

**Runner-up Waitrose**

A large and growing range, plus an obvious commitment to communicating and sampling the delights of its sweet and fortified selection won it for TOWC. This family-run merchant allies the best of a traditional merchant with social media initiatives like videos marrying en rama Sherry with different foods. Waitrose's range in this category is outstanding.



## US specialist

**Winner**

### Roberson Wine

**Runner-up Berry Bros & Rudd**

The US is becoming an increasingly impressive area of operations for Berry Bros, with an enviable and growing list, including a new own-label Pinot Noir by Au Bon Climat. But Roberson goes from strength to strength in this category, successfully maintaining momentum with an excellent list and its innovative events, online campaigns and initiatives like the *Somm* 3 UK premiere at its urban winery.



## Organic & biodynamic specialist

**Winner**

### Buon Vino

**Runner-up Wanderlust**

There's a real sense of purpose and progress to Buon Vino, the Yorkshire-based specialist making waves with its range of organic, biodynamic and natural wines. More exciting plans are in the pipeline as expansion continues – a 'Natural Wine Scale' is being mooted to help customers. Focusing on tech innovation and consumer service has also proven successful for Wanderlust. **D**