



STAMPED
CELLAR
SHOWDOWN

MARCH 1 - 3, 2025

MEET THE JUDGES!



EUGENE MLYNCZYK, MW

Eugene Mlynczyk's love of wine began in California while studying at Stanford University in the 1980s and was further elevated after his return home to Toronto.

He began studying wine seriously in the late 1990s and launched a new career in the wine trade shortly thereafter. Eugene's current role is National Fine Wine Ambassador at Principle Fine Wines, the luxury team within Arterra Wines Canada. He is also a passionate educator, helping deliver the WSET Diploma programme at the Independent Wine Education Guild.

Eugene became a Master of Wine in 2015 after four years of study, passing both parts of the written examination on his first attempt. He is the proud recipient of the Robert Mondavi Winery Award for the best performance across all the Theory papers in his year.

When not tasting, sharing or describing wine, Eugene focuses on family activities, and can often be found running in the woods competing in his favourite sport, orienteering.

Eugene holds a BA from Stanford University and an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) in Painting from Indiana University. When he retires, he hopes to become a passionate artist once again, inspired by his Abstract Expressionist heroes.



RHYS PENDER, MW

Rhys is a Master of Wine who combines his time writing, judging, teaching, presenting, consulting, curating wine lists and dirtying his boots at his 4 acre vineyard and winery - Little Farm Winery - in the Similkameen Valley of BC, Canada. He runs a wine school, Wine Plus+, judges wine competitions nationally and internationally such as the Decanter World Wine Awards, TexSomm as well as the National Wine Awards of Canada for WineAlign. In 2018, Rhys's contribution to the industry was acknowledged as one of just five global nominees for the WSET Outstanding Alumni Award. To make sure he eats well he has also completed a Professional Culinary Diploma and has been named by Western Living magazine as one of the "Top 40 Foodies Under 40" in Western Canada. He curates wines lists and is a regular contributor to publications such as SIP, Vitis, Macleans, Montecristo and Taste.



STEPHANIE EARTHMAN BAIRD

Stephanie Earthman Baird is a Houston, Texas-based wine educator, speaker, consultant and wine judge. She has achieved numerous accreditations including WSET Diploma, SWE Certified Wine Educator, Advanced Sommelier and a UC Davis judge certification, among others. With more than 30 years in the industry, Stephanie has established herself as a beloved wine educator and accomplished event coordinator in the industry. She was instrumental in leading and developing international wine competitions for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo and the Fort Worth Stock Show & Rodeo.

Through her consulting company, Journey Into Wine, Stephanie helps other wine aficionados attain certifications through The Texas Wine School and Texas Tech University. She equally enjoys interacting with industry professionals as well as novices, working to elevate everyone's journey into wine through events and education.



ELYSE LAMBERT, MS

Born in Montréal, Québec, Elyse graduated with a degree in hotel management from the prestigious Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec (ITHQ) in 1998 and as Sommelier from L'École Hôtelière des Laurentides in 1999. In May of 2015, she became Canada's first Quebecer and fourth Canadian to hold the prestigious title of Master Sommelier.

Elyse has been working in the restaurant industry for more than 25 years. Currently she is working as a Sommelier Consultant for the hotel Ritz Carlton Toronto and, continues sharing her passion at Radio-Canada's morning show. She also consults for private and corporate clients and is often invited to facilitate wine education seminars and to speak at corporate functions in Canada and around the world.

ANDREA EBY



Andrea Eby is the Italian Programs Director at the Wine Scholar Guild. Andrea is a Stage Two Masters of Wine student with over a decade of experiences in the wine trade as a wine buyer, in retail sales, and as a drinks educator at one of Canada's top wine stores. In 2020 she founded Vinsanity Consulting and Vinsanity School of Wine, with locations in Winnipeg and Saskatoon. Andrea is a sommelier instructor with the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers (CAPS/ACSP) and a member of the CAPS National Education Committee. She imports Italian wines and consults for Italian wineries looking for help to navigate the complex Canadian market. Andrea is a judge at the Decanter World Wine Awards, International Wine & Spirits Competition, International Wine Challenge and Vinitaly 5 Star Wines.



TOM FIRTH

Tom Firth is a Calgary-based drinks writer, consultant, and beverage judge who has been travelling the world and pulling corks for nearly 30 years. Tom has judged wine at domestic and international wine competitions including the International Value Wine Awards, the Canadian Wine Awards, and the National Wine Awards of Canada and has judged at Concours Mondial de Brussels, the Argentina Wine Awards, the Canadian Artisan Spirits Competition, and been a grand jurist at the Portuguese Wine Challenge plus many others. He is the Managing Editor for Culinaire Magazine, and is the Competition Director for the Alberta Beverage Awards. Tom was also instrumental in the creation of the Canadian Association of Professional Sommeliers - Alberta Chapter and serves as the chapter's inaugural President. He has no qualms about tasting first thing in the morning, and his desk is covered in paper and bottles - somewhere under all that, a corkscrew might be found.



SHELLEY BOETTCHER

Shelley Boettcher is a wine writer based in Canada and Italy. She holds her master's degree in journalism and her advanced WSET certification, as well as her level 2 International Sommelier Guild certification.

A member of the prestigious Circle of Wine Writers, Shelley has written three books about wine and her byline has appeared in magazines and newspapers around the world, including the New York Times, The Guardian, The Globe and Mail and Postmedia newspapers across Canada.

Shelley has travelled to many of the world's great wine regions and countries, but has had a soft spot for Italy for the past decade or so. She splits her time between Calgary, Canada, and a small beach town in Lazio, where locals are very patient with her lousy Italian. You can follow Shelley on Instagram [@shelleyboettcher](https://www.instagram.com/shelleyboettcher)



ELIZABETH CHORNEY-BOOTH

Elizabeth Chorney-Booth is a Calgary-based journalist, author, and media personality. A former music journalist, she's been writing about food, beverage, and travel (sometimes all three at once) for well over a decade. Currently, Elizabeth is the weekly restaurant columnist for the Calgary Herald and the monthly food trends columnist for The Homestretch on CBC Radio, as well as a regular contributor to Avenue and Culinaire Magazines. Her work has also appeared in the Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, CNN, Canada's 100 Best, and a number of other publications. She is also the co-author of two best-selling cookbooks and publishes a bi-weekly local food and beverage newsletter. When she's not out exploring food and drink in Calgary or around the world, Elizabeth is likely at home with her family enjoying a good meal and a glass of wine.



JAMIE HERBISON

Jamie retired from a 39-year career in radio in 2019. His wine journey began several years before. Friends in the industry encouraged Jamie to take the WSET courses after attending many wine tastings and trade shows. He is now a Level 3. Jamie successfully completed the French Wine Professional course through Fine Vintage last year. He lived close to Napa Valley from 2010 - 2014 and worked as a Wine Educator at Robert Mondavi Winery for three years. He spent part of another year as a wine consultant at the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn. And he was a part-time WSET instructor under Adam Chase in San Francisco. Prior to COVID, he taught the Wine Appreciation Course at Willow Park Wines and Spirits. On the culinary side, Jamie has judged the Iron Chef competition during the Stampede and, for several years, been part of the judging panel for the Great Canadian Kitchen Party and its predecessor, Gold Medal Plates. Jamie is particularly passionate about wine and food pairings.



EVA HUDSON

Eva was born and raised in Canberra, Australia. She grew up working in her family's restaurant and developed an interest in food and wine early. Her career took her to Melbourne where she completed her Court of Master Sommelier Advanced certification as well as WSET Level 3. In Melbourne, she managed the wine program at the critically acclaimed Attica, a 'World's 50 Best' restaurant. She relocated to Canada in 2018 and has been working with Metrovino Fine Wines since then. Eva is now a partner in the business and manages the Italian portfolio as well as events and communications.



CAM PINKNEY

Cam is a hospitality professional with experience in diverse roles in hotels, restaurants, retail, education and consulting. Today, Cam leads the Food & Beverage program at The Carriage House Hotel in Calgary where he frequently hosts multi-course dinners within the four restaurant outlets and hosts weddings and events in the multiple event spaces.



PATRICIA KOYICH

Hospitality is in Patricia's blood, and while growing up in a restaurant family, she seemed destined to work in the industry. After working in some of Calgary's best and award-winning dining rooms and graduating from the Hospitality Management Program at SAIT, she opened a fine dining restaurant in August of 2000, Il Sogno. In 2012, she joined the Faculty at SAIT, teaching for the School of Hospitality & Tourism. She continues to pursue her dreams to help influence our future industry professionals by mentoring, supporting, and facilitating the learning required to achieve their goals and realize their dreams. That said, respecting, connecting to, and learning from SAIT's diverse student body over these years, has emphasized her desire for further knowledge, new perspectives, and the use of multiple lenses.

Patricia graduated from Royal Roads University with a Master's degree in Global Leadership in 2022. She is dedicated to serving as a leader and a change agent, promoting human rights advocacy and advancement with humility through hospitality, education, communication, and community.



JESSE WILLIS

Jesse received his diploma from the International Sommelier Guild (ISG) in 2008, and served as an instructor for the ISG teaching wine education courses at SAIT for several years. Jesse has previously served as a judge for the BC Wine Awards and the Alberta Beverage Awards.

In addition to his experience in wine, Jesse was also named one of Avenue Magazine's Top 40 under 40 in 2017 along with his business partner Jeff Jamieson for their work both in business and community engagement in Calgary. Jesse was the founder of Carnival Cocktails for Cancer, a charity fundraiser that raised over \$300,000 to support critical cancer research in Alberta.

Jesse is a born and raised Calgarian who enjoys travel and spending time with his wife Laura and their two children.



DUSTIN LAGLER

Working in the beverage alcohol industry for nearly two decades selecting products for customers has been a great experience for Dustin. His time spent tasting, sourcing and marketing new products has been very rewarding. He has spent the last several years developing private label products as well as cultivating rare spirits programs and online businesses. While Dustin has worked in all different segments of alcohol, wine has always been his passion, both personally and professionally. Wine has a rich history and romance unlike any other food or beverage product. His journey from vineyard, through commerce to the ever-changing customer demands has allowed him to continually learn and experience new pieces of the business.



DARREN OLEKSYN

Darren is an experienced writer and editor who has worked at newspapers and magazines as a reporter, copy editor, wire editor and assignment editor. He has a vast passion for wine and has travelled to several wine regions. He has also passed his WSET Level 3 Advanced test with merit.

Darren has worked for Postmedia for 21 years, including as a copy editor and assignment editor. He is currently a senior producer with Postmedia Content Works, the publisher's commercial content division, and has written a monthly wine column for the Calgary Herald since 2013.



LAURIE MACKAY

Since 2006, Laurie has been the Drinks Columnist on CBC Radio One. She has also judged for various competitions including the Alberta Beverage Awards, Stampede Cellar Showdown International Wine Competition and Judgement of British Columbia. In 2010, she competed in the Kobrand International Wine Seminar in Sonoma California and won first prize.

In 2022, Laurie branched out into wine and beer tourism by collaborating with Expedia Cruises on a 10-day customized deluxe river cruise vacation on the Danube River.



MICHAEL BIGATTINI

For over nineteen years he has been the Senior Product Consultant for Willow Park Wines & Spirits. Michael teaches Wine Basics 101 as well as the WSET levels offered by Willow Park Wines & Spirits. He also hosts private wine tasting events and makes appearances at special functions. He has traveled to a variety of places such as France, Italy, Spain, Oregon, and Washington State, to continually become educated on wines, beers and spirits.



PETER SMOLARZ

Peter has been with Willow Park Wines & Spirits for over fifteen years, during which Peter has become a true expert in everything from wine to tequila to scotch. Peter has successfully completed his ISG 1, WSET 1, 2 & 3 and attended Bordeaux Appellation Classes in France to strengthen his knowledge within the industry.

To accompany his education, Peter has travelled across the globe to places such as France, Argentina, Chile, Italy, Belgium, Australia, California and Spain to further his understanding in the methodology of wine production.



DAVE GRINGRICH

Dave Gingrich started his beverage career at Willow Park Wines and Spirits over 23 years ago and has built quite a name for himself and Willow Park Beer section with his 'Dave the Beer Guy' persona. He has also embraced two other specialty categories, Sake and Mead, which add a fun dynamic to the sales floor.

Fondly referred to as 'The Beer Guy', David Gingrich brings an infectious passion for beer and really, anything containing alcohol, to Willow Park Wines & Spirits.



JASON JENSEN

After working in retail liquor at 19 years old Jason joined Corby Wine and Spirits Ltd. as a Merchandiser where he became interested in a career within the alcohol beverage industry. He moved over to beer a few years later to work with Labatt/Oland Specialty Beer Company and helped launch Stella amongst other Belgian brands in Western Canada with a focus on product quality, glassware, and proper pouring techniques for 5 years. Continuing in beer, he joined Sleeman Breweries for the next 7 years that included Western Canada Key Account and a Sales Manager roles. The experience lead to a Manager, Beverage Programs role with the Franworks Group of Companies (Original Joes, State & Main, Elephant & Castle, Anejo, and Blanco) where he was the Liquor/Beer/Wine buyer for 101 restaurants. His wine education has come through global travel and industry experience along with the WSET program.

He is educated in wine and choose to take the pretentious out of the category. His training notes are simple. "There is red & white, and you like it or don't... There are many layers to wine education and the goal is to learn at your own pace, ask if you don't know, and meet some great people along the way."



SERGIO FLORES

Sergio Flores is a seasoned retail liquor expert with over 20 years in the industry. Not only working on the retail side but also as an agent and, a restauranter specializes in creating compelling in-store and online experiences with innovative merchandising strategies, insights, and inventory management.



TAYLOR SIMPSON

Taylor Simpson discovered wine shortly after his 18th birthday, working for Willow Park Wine and Spirits, attending wine events to 'pre drink' before going out. Eventually some of the knowledge penetrated his brain, leading to work in restaurants, including Rush and Rouge, before joining Teatro as a Sommelier in 2018.

Taylor is the Wine Director for Teatro group, overseeing the largest restaurant wine cellar in Calgary.



JACKIE COOKE

Jackie grew up in Ontario wine country. After graduating with an honours degree in environmental studies from Trent University, she moved to Toronto. An opportunity soon arose to relocate to the west coast, which led her to Whistler, Vancouver and eventually the Okanagan Valley. In 2001, she completed WSET 3 and then earned her sommelier diploma from the International Sommelier Guild in 2002. A short time after, she also earned her teacher's certificate from the ISG, which led to time spent as an educator. She moved to Calgary and owned, operated, and was wine director at three restaurants over 13 years.



BRUCE SOLEY

Bruce has been a familiar face for guests and a savvy guide to River Café's wine list since 1999. A graduate of The International Sommelier Guild, Bruce continues to expand his vast knowledge through regular tasting, reading and travel in wine country. Bruce enjoys maintaining the list's quality and diversity and believes that the most important part of his job is listening to guests to help them discover new favorites.



SUSAN BLOOR

My wine epiphany happened by luck, at the end of a trial shift for a server position at Crazyweed in Canmore. I was presented with a glass poured from a brown paper bag, I had never heard of blind tasting at the time and at the time was only just getting into wine. By chance, I noticed the colour was pale, like a Pinot Noir I had tasted recently. I got the job! From there I realized that I was actually pretty good at this wine thing, I took formal training through WSET, worked for a season in the Okanagan and then put in roots at The Cellar Wine Store. I was the General Manager there for 10 years and learned more through time, and tasting on the job, and through industry peers than any course could teach. Today, I am the Club General Manager at Cavernus, Calgary's first Wine Club and Lounge.



CORINNE KEDDIE

Corinne Keddie can often be found with a glass of wine in her hand. She is a dynamic speaker and has a passion for food and wine pairing, and has spent the past fifteen years organizing and hosting educational wine tastings, events and panel discussions, leading wine tours, writing about food, travel, wine and design, and curating the selections for her wine club, 365 Days of Wine. Corinne judges at various international wine competitions, and typically spends several months every year travelling to various wine regions around the world to further her wine knowledge. In 2017, she was one of five women chosen to work harvest in South Africa, through the PIWOSA Women in Wine Initiative. Corinne is certified through the International Sommelier Guild, holds a Wine and Spirits Education Trust (WSET) Level 4 Diploma, is a certified educator, as well as one of only sixteen certified Italian Wine Experts in the world through VinItaly International Academy (VIA). She was also on the editorial team of Italian Wine Unplugged 2.0, which won a 2023 OIV Award in the Wines and Territories category. Corinne is also a registered architect and has designed award winning architectural and interior design projects both locally and internationally. She relishes the opportunity to expand her wine related design portfolio.



ERIN LOADER

Erin discovered her love of wine while working in the restaurant industry; from cellar rat to General Manager she's worked nearly every front-of-house position and even had a stint as a wine rep. She then spent more than 10 years working in wine retail management before starting with Iron Gate Auctions, Canada's largest fine wine and spirits auction house. Constantly striving to learn, Erin has completed courses offered by both the ISG and the WSET, and is currently working towards her Champagne Master certification.



GEORGE HATAJLO

I have worked in fine dining restaurants for over 40 years, both in Toronto and Calgary. As Wine Director at the Prestigious Bears Den, I created award winning wine lists. I have worked at Ranahans at the Calgary Stampede for 12 years as a, and 2025 will be my third year as Cellar Master.



GILBERT DREYFUSS

I have had the opportunity to have tasted, as a very young adult, some incredible wines due to my father's passion that soon became my passion. Like my father, my favourite wine region in the world is Burgundy, which I last visited last fall. I have been working in the wine industry on and off for over 30 years as a sales representative for Kensington Wine Market and more recently Market Wines. I have been working at the Lazy S for the past two years as a Cellar Master.



JULIAN SIMARD-GILLIS

Julian is the Head Sommelier at the Post Hotel.