



Group photo f.l.t.r.: Frank Apfel, Luca Lobenberg, Andrea Meininger-Apfel, Dr. Andreas Brokemper, Dr. Laura Catena, Bruno Paillard, Bandino und Antonio Lo Franco, Tobias Maier, Christoph Meininger.

#### WINE, EVENTS

## Meininger Awards Excellence in wine & spirit 2023

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Six prominent representatives of the wine industry were presented with the coveted awards, as around 500 invited guests looked on during the ceremony at the Kö59 luxury hotel in Düsseldorf.

### The awardees at a glance:

- International Wine Entrepreneur of the Year: Dr Andreas Brokemper, CEO of Henkell Freixenet
- National Wine Entrepreneur of the Year: Luca Lobenberg, Lobenbergs Gute Weine
- Wine Family of the Year: The Lo Franco family, La Vialla
- Outstanding Achievement Award: Dr Laura Catena, Catena Zapata, Argentina
- Spirit Company of the Year: Lantenhammer Destillerie
- Lifetime Achievement Award: Bruno Paillard, Champagne Bruno Paillard

### International Wine Entrepreneur of the Year: Dr Andreas Brokemper, CEO of Henkell Freixenet

The award for **International Wine Entrepreneur of the Year** went to Dr Andreas Brokemper, CEO of Henkell Freixenet and the driving force behind the increasingly international outlook and dynamic development of the house of Henkell. The merger between Henkell & Co. Group and Spain's Grupo Freixenet in 2018 represents a unique entrepreneurial achievement. Henkell and Freixenet are even stronger now than they were individually, and without a doubt are today the number one name in the sparkling wine scene. Brokemper has worked for the Oetker family business since 1998 where, in the early days of his tenure, beer and non-alcoholic beverages were his core responsibilities. He provided crucial strategic input when it came to transforming the then Binding brewery into the Radeberger group. In 2002 he was appointed Director of Controlling & Finance at Henkell & Söhnlein Sektkellereien, subsequently integrating several renowned sparkling wine and spirit businesses and masterminding the incorporation of Mionetto, today the company's internationally most successful prosecco brand, in 2008.

## National Wine Entrepreneur of the Year: Luca Lobenberg, Lobenbergs Gute Weine

The achievements of Luca Lobenberg, recognised as **National Wine Entrepreneur of the Year**, are a prime example of successful transformation in the wine business. He joined Lobenbergs Gute Weine, Germany's largest owner-operated wine trader, in 2018. His entrepreneurial spirit allowed him to revolutionise his father's online wine retail arm and triple the top line by investing in marketing and digital sales channels. His father Heiner Lobenberg had founded the business in 1991 as a wine retail and mail order company. "Lobenberg's Good Wines" – the name is well deserved. Its unique portfolio includes a large number of winemakers with a cult following and major names of worldwide renown, along with young talents and personal discoveries.

## Wine Family of the Year: The Lo Franco family, La Vialla

The **Wine Family of the Year** is the Tuscan family Lo Franco, who run Fattoria La Vialla. The business was born out of Piero and Giuliana Lo Franco's ambitions in 1978 to start an organic farm. For years now, the La Vialla brand has stood for family values, high-quality organic products, a pioneering spirit, a respect for nature, sustainability and prudent entrepreneurship. La Vialla is a complex agricultural operation that has been managed by brothers Gianni, Antonio and Bandino Lo Franco for a number of years now. Visitors to the region are invited to stay in the company's lovingly restored country houses and enjoy locally crafted organic products. Today, Fattoria La Vialla is the largest biodynamic farming operation in Europe, and its biodynamic and natural wines are sweeping all the awards. The brothers' latest ground-breaking discovery is yeasts grown out of bee pollen, which they use to promote the fermentation of their wines.

## Outstanding Achievement Award: Dr Laura Catena, Catena Zapata, Argentina

Dr Laura Catena was presented with the **Outstanding Achievement Award**. She is the fourth generation to manage the Catena Zapata vineyard in Argentina and is considered to be the face of Argentinean wine. In 1995, she founded the Catena Institute of Wine in pursuit of her vision to produce top wines even at the country's high altitudes. That move has turned out to be a resounding success: her wines are today counted among the best in the world. Laura Catena has a background in the natural sciences – she studied biology and medicine in Harvard and Stanford – and so, when she took over the helm of the vineyard in 2009, there was no question that she would focus on sustainability both in growing and producing wine.

## Spirit Company of the Year: Lantenhammer Destillerie

Its inspiring and forward-looking entrepreneurship has earned Lantenhammer Destillerie on the shores of Schliersee lake in Bavaria the title of **Spirit Company of the Year**. The company's philosophy centres around using regional Bavarian ingredients to create ever-popular spirits. Their Bavarian vodkas, rums, dry gins and whiskies sport names such as Bavarka, Rumult, or Josef. Recently they also started selling single malts created on the North Sea island of Sylt. Lantenhammer's premium products have become a fixture on the menus of Germany's top bars and restaurants. Founded in 1928 by Amalie and Josef Lantenhammer as a gentian schnapps distillery, today Lantenhammer is one of the most modern distilleries in Europe and features a fully immersive visitor centre. Tobias Maier was the first non-family member to join the management team in 2018 – although he likes to claim Lantenhammer family membership nonetheless, given that he began working for the company as long as 25 years ago as an apprentice.

## Lifetime Achievement Award: Bruno Paillard, Champagne Bruno Paillard

The **Lifetime Achievement Award** this year went to Bruno Paillard, who hails from an old winemaking family and like his father trained as a wine broker. Early on, Bruno Paillard discovered his love of champagne: in 1981, aged just 27, he founded the eponymous champagne house that today is considered one of the best domaines in the region. Thanks to his close-knit network and extensive expertise, he has succeeded in securing access to top-class vineyards, demonstrating courage and an uncompromising attitude since the early days of his career as a winemaker. Rather than leasing an old, tradition-rich wine cellar, in 1990 he opted for a production site with state-of-the-art equipment and steel tanks side by side with wooden barrels and aimed his sales strategy squarely at top restaurants and bars, an approach that has proven incredibly successful. Producing his eponymous champagne is by no means Bruno Paillard's only venture; in 1991 he joined forces with others to establish what is today known as Lanson BCC Holding, which over the years has incorporated brands such as Philipponnat, De Venoge, Boizel and Maison Burtin to become one of the major players in the champagne business.



Wine Family of the Year: The Lo Franco family, La Vialla (Photo: Sascha Kreklau)

#### About the Meininger Award

The Meininger Award was first presented 17 years ago at the day before ProWein trade fair in Düsseldorf. It is given in recognition of outstanding achievements by representatives of the German and international wine scene. Previous award-winners include Gina Gallo, Miguel A. Torres, Fritz Keller, Baron Philippe de Rothschild, Angelo Gaia and Margrit Biever-Mondavi. The initiator is Meininger Verlag, publisher of a large number of wine journals.

# EXCELLENCE IN WINE & SPIRIT MEININGER AWARD 2023