



# The Finalists

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# FINALISTS

## NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR



### DIOGENES THE DOG

Texan and Polish wines are among the esoteric choices to be found at Diogenes the Dog, a new hybrid bar and wine shop in the upcoming area around Elephant & Castle in south London. Owner Sunny Hodge has made it his mission to unearth under-the-radar gems for customers at the venue, which has been a real labour of love for the young entrepreneur. In addition to sourcing the wines he designed the space himself and even constructed his own bespoke racks on which to display the wines for off-sale purposes.



### EIGHT STONY STREET

The people of Frome in Somerset were fortunate enough to be the recipients of a stunning new hybrid restaurant/wine shop concept after owner Kent Barker's search for the perfect venue took him across the breadth of southern England. The former restaurant he chose has two floors with a spectacular glass fascia, behind which he and his team have paid high attention to detail in creating a luxurious space to browse for interesting bottles of wine to take home or to sip a refreshing beer - or even combine the two.



### GRAPE MINDS

Ex-Majestic managers Graeme Woodward and Michael Jelley took the bold step of going it alone in the shadow of their former employer. The pair have opened Grape Minds in Oxford's prosperous Summertown area, close enough to mine the seams of goodwill and customer rapport they'd built up in their old jobs, but far enough off the main drag to keep costs down and maximise margins. The wine range aims to establish difference from the multiples at accessible price points with customer service a high priority.



### INDIE BEER

London isn't exactly short on decent bottle shops, but beer nuts Owen and Clare Daniel were astute enough to find a hitherto untapped high-footfall area of north London when they decided to turn their own retailing ambitions into reality. They've also shown a lot of other beer shops how to do things with the Indie Beer concept, which combines drink-in and take-out sales with a commitment to educate and inform. Fridges and walls are adorned with gen on styles and flavours to get customers tuned into beer's joys.

## DRINKS WHOLESALER OF THE YEAR



### CRAFT DRINKS

Craft Drinks was established in 2014, specifically to champion British drinks from a growing army of artisanal producers. Its portfolio of 150 brands includes microbrewers, craft cidemakers, English vineyards, small-batch distillers and niche soft drink producers, targeting small independents: c-stores, village shops, wine merchants, specialist beer stores, online retailers, farm shops, delis and garden centres. It provides a flow of samples to help retailers understand new products and encourages producers to work with them to offer training and in-store tasting support.



### HT DRINKS

HT is one of the largest specialist drinks wholesalers in the UK carrying a list of over 5,000 products. It aims to ensure it is more than a box-shifter, engaging with retailers through trade days where brand owners set up pop-up experiences within depots for customers to get a taste for the products they'll be selling. The HT Drinks Retail Plus club provides customers with plan-for-profit schemes, practical guidance on merchandising, promotions with supporting POS and investment in branded fascias. In-depot "knowledge guardians" receive training from suppliers to pass on expertise to retailers.



### PIG'S EARS BEER

In the nine years since it launched, Pig's Ears has quickly earned a reputation as one of the UK's foremost specialist craft beer suppliers, but it has also now diversified into independently-made spirits to meet the growing needs of its customers across the broader drinks market. Pig's Ears operates around a core set of ideals, which reshape the traditional relationship between wholesaler and customer, such as transparent pricing, in-house delivery drivers and no minimum orders. All employees take Beer Academy training each year to ensure their collective knowledge is second to none.



### PARFETTS

Parfett's has a long-held reputation for excellent product range and service in beers, wines and spirits. It continues to develop its drinks offer with promotions themed around key calendar dates such as bank holidays and major sports events. Seasonal packages in the past year have included its first ale festival, providing retailers with insight into a fast-changing part of the market to help them keep ahead of the game. Parfett's digital platforms have been upgraded recently to keep customers' drinks packages at the cutting edge, while its Gold retail club processes online orders overnight for next day delivery.





# FINALISTS

## CONVENIENCE DRINKS RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### COSTCUTTER BROCKLEY

Peter Patel has seen a massive surge in BWS sales at his Costcutter store adjacent to Brockley Overground station in south London. The success lies in a complete revamp for the shop, which successfully fights off competition from two nearby Sainsbury's Locals with a convenience package that offers a great product range and achieves exceptional standards of retail discipline. The drinks section is immaculately presented in a prime position at the front of the store and has a special focus on beers from London.



### JUST FRESH ST ANNES

Sudheesh Pallikulangara bought his fifth c-store in April 2018 and immediately set about giving it a new lease of life with investment in food-to-go. Upscaling the shop's drinks offering was a key part of the revamp with a bigger range that combines the best of mainstream brands and premium products, to match the needs of shoppers in the well-heeled Lancashire town of St Annes. The refit included a substantial investment in chillers to maximise the potential of the alcohol offering.



### RAVENS BUDGENS ABRIDGE

The Raven family have been trading in various businesses on the same site in the Essex village of Abridge since 1929, with current owner Goran Raven's father turning their petrol station into a full-blown convenience retailer in the 1990s. Under its current Budgens guise, things have been taken to another level, with BWS forming a central part of a recent refurbishment. The package ticks all the boxes of modern c-store excellence with added high-value wines sourced in a deal with Laithwaite's.



### WHITE'S OF CALVER

Business is booming a year down the line from a substantial refurbishment at Edward White's Spar store at a busy crossroads in the heart of the Peak District. The rebuild incorporates food-to-go and a coffee shop for weary travellers as well as all the everyday shopping needs of locals from the village of Calver in which the store sits. A separate space for beers, wines and spirits has been created at the rear, making it a feature department, with premium wines sourced through local independent John Hattersley Wines.

## CONVENIENCE CHAIN OF THE YEAR



### BUDGENS

The Budgens name has been on the high street since 1872 and it's only relatively recently that the group, under Booker ownership, has been recast as a symbol group for independently-owned businesses. The Budgens brands sits at the top end of the convenience market and stores' drinks offerings usually reflect this with a more premium skew on a branded BWS range. Flexibility in sourcing has allowed several members to source higher-price tiers of wines from Laithwaite's as a further signpost of quality for their customers.



### CO-OP

Few multiple retailers' drinks packages have seen such a rapid uplift in quality and variety as that of the Co-op in recent times. The retailer is already a UK leader in Fairtrade and it has reconfirmed its commitment by stepping up Fairtrade sourcing for South African wine to another level. It has also sought to take convenience customers on a journey beyond the bog-standard brands by adding contemporary wines, such as a blend of 85% Pinot Blanc and 15% Grüner Veltliner from Hungary, English sparkling rosé under the Irresistible label and an own-label PX sherry.



### SPAR

Consolidation and collaboration in the convenience market have made it a more competitive place to do business in the past couple of years and, in BWS, Spar has responded in fine style with significant developments in its approach. It has added a vegan-friendly Vine & Bloom wine range and is aiming for all its own-label wines to qualify for the description by 2021. It has also set up an incentive-driven wine club for retailers to build sales and share best practice, including education, dedicated social media groups and invitations to consumer and trade wine shows.





# FINALISTS

## INDEPENDENT CIDER RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### BIER HUIS

David Jones may have originally named his shop with beer in mind, but it's carved a substantial reputation for cider too during the time it's been trading in the centre of Ossett in West Yorkshire. This is not cider's natural territory but Bier Huis has championed it continuously, in particular providing a showcase for producers from Yorkshire. It's also amassed a range from all corners of the UK, with county flags on shelf edges to highlight their origins. Country flags big-up international ciders, which form a substantial part of the Bier Huis cider range. Sales benefit from a busy events programme, including cider and cheese tastings that have become the stuff of local legend.



### DIKE & SON

This family-owned supermarket in rural Dorset is no stranger to the DRAs as a former winner of our Convenience Drinks Retailer of the Year Award. Part of the reason for its past success is the way it has displayed excellence in a number of BWS categories that would more than match many specialist drinks stores. Cider is one of those, with an enormous range of products from smaller, local producers backed by big-name brands and speciality ciders from overseas producers. Floor stacks and chillers ensure that cider has prominent visibility within the BWS aisle, hitting the high notes on speciality while satisfying everyday needs.



### PILANGO CIDER VAULTS

Few drinks retailers display a more single-minded focus on their core product than Victor Zasadzki's shrine to cider in a west London railway arch. Naturally there's a fantastic range of ciders for customers to get enthused about but it's the all-round Pilango retail experience that makes it stand out. There's a tasting station with free samples on entry, information to help cider novices make choices based on the taste profile of their wine-drinking preferences, food matching suggestions scrawled on blackboards, and jars of fruit and other items designed to help customers appreciate how apple-growing terrain and weather can impact a cider's flavour.

## MULTIPLE CIDER RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### CO-OP

The Co-op's renaissance goes on apace, with the Nisa and Costcutter tie-ups helping to take its cider, along with other products, to a wider audience than ever before across the convenience sector. Its Irresistible Tillington Hills dry cider is one of the best own-labels on the block, but the Co-op gets behind the products from brand owners, small and large, to give the cider industry as a whole valuable support. Local cider ranges are a feature in many of its stores across the UK.



### MORRISONS

Morrisons has given extra space to cider in many of its stores as the category contributes to BWS growth. Secondary promotional siting for key lines and unrivalled product information at the point of sale help to make cider shopping a less confusing process for Morrisons customers, who can select from an eclectic mix of mainstream and premium brands that covers all the key touch-points in apple, fruit and flavoured ciders, including several brands that don't get a look in on other multiples' shelves.



### TESCO

Tesco has achieved consistent growth in cider in recent times by keeping a steady focus on breadth of range and visibility for the category in its stores. It was among the first to market with Kopparberg's new rosé cider last summer, but it's not just about the latest big thing in the category for the retailer, which offers multipacks of leading brands, quality in own-label, exotic ciders from around the world, crafty things in cans, organic products in bag-in-box and all the latest in on-trend flavours.





# FINALISTS

## INDEPENDENT BEER RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### BATH ROAD BEERS

Keen attention has been paid to the customer journey by owners Andrew Coates and Will Coates (no relation) in setting up Cheltenham's newest specialist beer store. The layout guides customers through a seating area where they can sip on a draught beer, past a bank of fridges aimed at impulse purchasers, and into the shop's heart where they can explore ranges from traditional brewers and the best of the new guard. There's a separate events space to the rear and bags of brewing information stencilled on to walls.



### THE BEERHIVE

Beer is the hero category at Peter Sherry's all-round drinks specialist in Edinburgh's Canonmills district. A range that can number more than 700 at any one time includes an excellent selection from Scottish brewers, some of the best from the English craft scene, timeless classics from Belgium and Germany, and an exciting contribution from smaller Irish producers. Peter and his team are immersed in the beer industry, bringing unrivalled levels of knowledge and inspiration to customer conversations.



### BEER ZOO

Dom and Fiona Holt opened their second Beer Zoo store, in Dunbar, towards the back end of 2019. The original shop is in Edinburgh's seaside district of Portobello, a tiny unit that manages to cram in some of the best beers and brewers from around Scotland, the rest of the UK and overseas, giving beer fans lots of opportunity to experiment and explore. People from much further afield can also enjoy Beer Zoo's range as the Holts have put energy and investment into building a credible online business too.



### LITTLE LEEDS BEERHOUSE

It may be little but the store owned by Richard and Bryony Brownhill in Leeds city centre is perfectly formed. Situated in the city's Corn Exchange, the Beerhouse is in a community of independent businesses, and the couple work their extensive contacts book, built up in past on-trade careers, to formulate a carefully-chosen range that makes the best use of the space available. The business excels in social media and is an influencer of beer tastes in the city through its participation in major local industry events.

## MULTIPLE BEER RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### MARKS & SPENCER

Through its long-standing sourcing partnership with former independent beer DRA champion Real Ale, Marks & Spencer's exclusive-label beer range has long stood apart from the crowd in multiple beer retailing. The range is subject to consistent review and regeneration to keep up with the nuances of modern trends, and individual beers frequently sweep up competition gongs. The chain was named Retailer of the Year after its own-label offerings scooped a clutch of awards at our own International Beer Challenge in 2019.



### MORRISONS

With the proliferation of brewers and fragmentation of beer styles, the modern beer-shopping experience can be tricky, but Morrisons makes things easy with hard-to-miss point-of-sale that gives a breakdown of all the key information. It helps shoppers differentiate a sour from an IPA and a stout from a best bitter, down to the correct serving temperatures for each. Multibuy offers encourage exploration, elevating the beer shopping mission above the everyday. Local beer ranges are sure-fire winners as they're put together with the help of customer feedback.



### TESCO

Craft and speciality beer has grown out of its niche to become a substantial side-arm of the mainstream beer market and no multiple has done more to encourage this progression than Tesco. It has brought smaller brewers into its range, was quick to embrace small cans as a new - or second time around - packaging format and has widened the horizons of shoppers by offering mix-and-match deals to promote experimentation. It is one of the few supermarkets to give gluten-free beer a place in its free-from aisles.





# FINALISTS

## INDEPENDENT SPIRITS RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### FIELD & FAWCETT

Field & Fawcett occupies a characterful former farm building just outside York. It makes for a labyrinthine retail space that combines deli and café with one of the best all-round drinks retailing offers to be found anywhere in the UK. Spirits are a particular focus with hundreds of products across all of the major sub-categories, displayed with precision and personality. Sample bottles allow customers to try before they buy, and the shop does a great line in gift packs that offer shoppers everything they need to make popular classic cocktails.



### OXFORD WINE CO

Spirits have always had an important role to play at Oxford's famous specialist wine merchant, but the past couple of years have seen it ramp up its spirits offer, both in product range and events, to make the category a feature focus of the business. It offers a strong blend of recognisable names and more left-field choices across all of the major spirit types to establish a customer journey of exploration and discovery. Its own-brand gin provides a point of focus in a local range highlighted in both of its stores in the city.



### THE WHISKY EXCHANGE

After opening its second store in London's Fitzrovia district in 2018, The Whisky Exchange is in the process of bringing a third to fruition close to London Bridge station. Stores dedicate a whole floor to celebrating the spirit that gives the business its name, and another to a range that provides a benchmark for other retailers to aspire to in every conceivable corner of the spirits market. The shops are fitted out to a luxurious specification and The Whisky Exchange's customer service ethic is second to none.



### WRIGHT WINE CO

A one-time blacksmith's workshop in the North Yorkshire town of Skipton is the unlikely location for one of the most jaw-dropping ranges of spirits anywhere on the UK drinks retailing map. The building occupies a deceptively large space that creates separate rooms for particular spirit types and wine regions. It's the sort of store where it's easy to lose a couple of hours browsing through the range, chatting to the staff about selections or sampling from some of the hundreds of bottles that are always open to offer someone a taste.



WILLIAM GRANT & SONS

## MULTIPLE SPIRITS RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### ASDA

Spirits is one of the buzz categories of BWS at the moment and Asda's stores reflect the sector's energy. It has a multitude of gift packs, secondary siting of spirits on multiple gondola ends around its bigger stores and beats many of its competitors to the punch with big-name brand exclusives and launches. Asda's own gin range goes from strength to strength, with its Extra Special Premium Pink gin named best in its class in a recent Good Housekeeping taste test.



### BOOTH'S

The Preston-based multiple is north west England's own gem in the upmarket supermarket sector, so it should come as no surprise that it has tapped into the demand for local spirits that is a dominant theme in the modern UK spirits market. Around one in seven of its stores' ranges are from the county in which they sit and it achieved a coup in 2019 when it managed to secure 500 bottles of the first single malt release from the Lakes Distillery, around one in 12 bottles of the total output.



### WAITROSE

There's plenty of action in the Waitrose spirits aisle, with exclusive lines over the past 12 months including an XO brandy in a Christmas jumper, a Famous Grouse blended whisky aged in wine casks and VSOP Cognac and Armagnac joining its revamped No 1 upper tier of own-labels. It's taken the spirits fun outside stores too, with the launch of an in-home whisky tasting experience, following on from the success of its Gin O'Clock experience. It was named best multiple in our own Think Gin awards.





# FINALISTS

## INDEPENDENT CHAMPAGNE & SPARKLING RETAILER



### BON VIVANT'S COMPANION

Champagne and sparkling wine are hero categories at this boutique specialist drinks emporium in the centre of Edinburgh. The warm, inviting shop also serves as the sourcing hub for a group of the city's leading independent restaurants, which gives it the buying power to put together an exciting sparkling range that includes major Champagne producers, grower wines from the famous French region, exceptional crémants, and some of the best that England, Wales and the New World have to offer.



### CAMBRIDGE WINE MERCHANTS

Cambridge Wine Merchants is well into its third decade of doing exciting things in all areas of drinks retailing in the city that gives it its name. Its various sites comprise a mix of bars and hybrids, with Champagne and fizz given prominent retail space within them. A drink-in offer at its hybrid locations includes premium English sparkling and posh Prosecco, while the bottled range includes a burgeoning crémant portfolio, New World excitement and upmarket Europeans.



### LEA & SANDEMAN

The west London wine merchant has become one of the most respected in the UK in recent years and turned things up a notch in 2019 by opening its fifth site. The stores strike a perfect balance between high levels of specialism and making wine an accessible shopping experience for all, and their fizz range reflects this ethos: Grandes Marques for gifts and big occasions, grower Champagnes for the curious, premium Italians for the everyday treat, and excellent English wines for those for whom localness is a buy-in.



### THE WHISKY EXCHANGE

No, that's not a mistake - The Whisky Exchange is on the right page. The business has rightly staked a claim as one of the best spirits specialists in the market in recent years, but buyer Dawn Davies MW has also been using her wine expertise and passion for the subject to expand its horizons into fizz as well. The range, both in-store and online, has been vastly expanded to showcase the category's variety and excitement, and the business has launched the Champagne Show, which enjoyed its second year in 2019.

## MULTIPLE CHAMPAGNE & SPARKLING RETAILER



### MORRISONS

Morrisons' range in Champagne and sparkling has moved up through the gears in recent times in line with the retailer's overall reputation for getting things right in wine. Its range has plenty of crowd-pleasing Proseccos but also offers bountiful choice, from price-fighting Asti through value-for-money own-labels, fun-loving Californians, artily-packaged Spanish brands, gift-boxed Grandes Marques and top-of-the-range Champagnes for those big occasions. Halves and magnums ensure there's something for a picnic in the park or a serious dinner party, and the whole package is presented in-store with plenty of information to guide shoppers through styles and countries of origin to ensure they find the right fizz for them. The attention shown by Morrisons to honing its range and promoting sensibly has resulted in extra sparkling points on the bottom line.



### WAITROSE

Waitrose's fizz selection is twice the size of many of its rivals, reflecting the higher spending power of its core customer base. The Champagne range includes a clutch of high-quality own-labels, which offer credible, affordable alternatives within what is already the biggest choice of big-name brands offered anywhere in the supermarket sector. Waitrose has also showed a willingness to look far and wide for alternatives to Prosecco. The ubiquitous Italian fizz is still an important factor in the Waitrose offer but the chain reports a resurgence in cava and in sparkling sales for bubbly from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. It's also been at the forefront of championing English and Welsh sparkling wine over the years, currently listing in excess of 30 SKUs. Producer profiles are a feature of the Waitrose Cellar website.



# FINALISTS

## INDEPENDENT WINE RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### CHRISTOPHER PIPER WINES

It's doubtful there are too many places selling wine in the UK with more authority and expertise as this traditional merchant in the Devon town of Ottery St Mary. The eponymous Chris Piper and business partner John Earle notched up 40 years of trading in 2019 and - although Piper's other life as a Beaujolais winemaker means French classics are highlights - they have always been open to modern trends and styles to keep the shop moving forwards. It lists around 1,800 wines in all, and uses its expertise to ship many of them directly.



### DUNELL'S

The Pinel family operate three top-notch wine shops in Jersey. They all have a common visual thread while retaining distinct personalities that suit diverse locations. The flagship Beaumont store has recently been given a major refurbishment, expanding the footprint to include luxurious in-store and private tasting areas. Sampling machines offer try-before-you-buy, while the range as a whole benefits from precision in merchandising that includes tasting notes, staff picks, bestsellers and new-in features, and highlights vegan and biodynamic wines.



### HOULTS WINE MERCHANTS

The family business run by Rob and Bridget Hoults is into its fourth decade of selling wine to the people of Huddersfield. In that time, it's gone through several evolutionary stages, always willing to change to adapt to modern trends. The latest of these has seen its modern premises in the town centre transformed into a hybrid operation, creating distinct on and off-trade experiences that combine under the banner of being a "purveyor of drinking better". The reconfiguration of space has allowed it to step up its events activity.



### JAMES NICHOLSON WINE

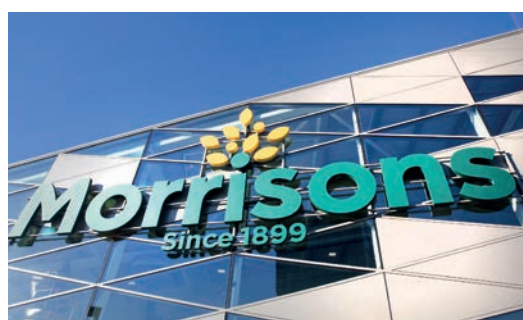
James Nicholson started out selling wines to private clients from the boot of his car in 1977. Since then the business has become Northern Ireland's pre-eminent specialist wine retailer and one of the most respected across the UK. These days it operates from a purpose-built unit in the town of Crossgar, a light and spacious unit that makes shopping for wine a pleasure. The wine selection benefits from Nicholson's industry contacts and his buying team's expertise, hitting the right notes in interest and quality from the very bottom to the top of the price ladder.

## MULTIPLE WINE RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### MARKS & SPENCER

Marks & Spencer has long had trade admirers for its wine-sourcing programme, in which buyers work closely with producers to make high-quality wines to spec for the retailer's customer base. M&S made headlines in 2019 with the announcement of plans to make all its own-label wines vegan-friendly by 2022. Many of its most popular wines - including M&S Prosecco, Chablis, Vinalta Malbec and Delacourt Champagne NV - already qualify to be part of its vegan-friendly range. The chain has had notable gains in sparkling wine, with French crémant sales going through the roof.



### MORRISONS

Morrisons goes a little further than most to guide shoppers through their wine-buying journey, with information at the point of sale on styles and regions, and wines merchandised next to fresh food to encourage food matches and upsells. During 2019, it teamed up with the Lyme Bay winery in Devon to make its first own-label English still white wine, carried an exclusive on Campo Viejo's first pink Rioja and added a low-calorie Prosecco in the La Gioiosa range. Its The Best premium own-label range continues to win admirers for combining quality with good value.



### WAITROSE

Waitrose is always looked to as a leader of the pack in multiple wine buying and several developments last year confirmed this reputation. It became the first supermarket to list an English orange wine and launched the W range of lesser-known gems from around the wine world, including Pais from Chile, Cannonau from Sardinia and Mencia from Spain. It also revamped the top tier of its own-label under the No 1 name, adding new wines such as Cederberg Private Cellar Syrah, Astrolabe Sauvignon Blanc, an Argentinian Malbec, a Bordeaux, a red and a white Burgundy, and a crusted port.





# FINALISTS

## DRINKS BUYING TEAM OF THE YEAR



### ASDA

Under the stewardship of BWS senior category director Andrew Tiffin, Asda has come out fighting in drinks, shrugging off the challenge from discounters and the fallout from the group's non-merger with Sainsbury's. Tiffin and his team have shown they have a capacity for negotiating exclusives and product launches that rivals would love to get their hands on, and a willingness to go off the beaten BWS track to source interesting products to push customers into new, high-quality drinking experiences. Asda's drinks merchandising and availability are consistently high scorers in the sector.



### CO-OP

Recent expansion of the Co-op brand into Nisa and Costcutter stores means BWS boss Simon Cairns and his team now effectively buy for more than 7,500 outlets across the UK. Fairtrade, vegan and more obscure countries have been features in wine buying in recent months and the Co-op's also gone the extra mile in meeting different convenience shopper needs by adding more 50cl bottles, cans and mini-bottles. Ranges are increasingly being tailored to suit individual store locations, with a particular focus on adapting to younger adult populations around its urban shops.



### WAITROSE

Few retailers can match the armoury of expertise and experience that sources beers, wines and spirits for Waitrose, under the direction of Pierpaolo Petrassi MW. Specialist buyers in spirits and beer ensure its range is always ahead of the game by anticipating when niche trends are about to cross over into being mainstream market hits. The chain has more MWs than any other supermarket, and the head office skill in range selection and inside-out knowledge of producers cascades down to more than 300 in-store wine specialists who pass on advice to customers.

## INDEPENDENT DRINKS RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### AMATHUS DRINKS

Amathus has been going through a period of growth in its retail operation with new stores in Bath and Brighton coming into the fold. With a variety of sizes and locations, the Amathus range is tailored to suit each site but the underlying thrust is the same: high-quality wines and beers, with an extra touch of specialism in spirits that helps make it a first port of call for geeks and gift buyers. Both the head office buying and retail teams are packed with expertise that amplifies an all-round premium drinks shopping experience.



### CHEERS WINE MERCHANTS

Family-run Cheers is now deep into its fourth decade of supplying the fortunate folk of Swansea with one of the best all-round drinks retailers anywhere in the UK. The style is accessible old-school off-licence, but that's a description which can hardly do justice to the range that delves deep into premium products and specialism in all areas of its BWS offering. With an abundance of family members fronting its two shops, it's also great at customer service, combining a friendly approach with great product knowledge.



### HOUSE OF TOWNEND

A famous name in the wine world, House of Townend has been putting a lot of effort into spirits and beer of late to evolve the business into a serious drinks all-rounder. Its plush, purpose-built retail space just outside Hull affords it plenty of space to grow the range and stage tasting events, with the emphasis in those additional areas of the business - as in wine - on affordable luxury: great, high-quality products backed by interesting and esoteric selections that help expand customers' expectations of what the world of BWS has to offer.



### SOUTH DOWNS CELLARS

The strength of South Downs Cellars lies in owner Lucy Driver's openness to new trends and her drive to get the most out of events, marketing and participation in the local community to help build the business. It operates out of two high street locations in Sussex villages, to which it brings a comprehensive traditional wine merchant package, supplemented by extensive ranges of craft beer and boutique spirits. Local producers are central to the South Downs Cellars ethos, whether that's in beer, spirits, sparkling wine or cider.



# FINALISTS

## RETAILER PROMOTION OF THE YEAR



### ALDI SPIRITS FESTIVAL

Aldi launched 11 spirits as part of its first Spirits Festival last August. The activity included the inevitable Instagram-friendly fruit gins, nods to the latest trends in rum, cocktails in cans and an offbeat cream liqueur, but also pushed to the outer limits of the spirits world with a drive behind sales of tequila and mezcal. The additions married quality with best prices, as we've come to expect in BWS from Aldi, but were also publicised with background information and interesting serve suggestions to help shoppers make the most of them.



### ASDA FESTIVE GIN PROMOTION

While most multiples drill down on prices to get customers excited about big drinks categories at Christmas, Asda decided to let the drinks themselves do the talking last year, specifically in gin. Its spirits team created a range of three festive gins, which gained widespread column inches to drive footfall to branches' doors. The trio comprised an Extra Special Winter Spiced gin with cranberry and clementine, a Mince Pie gin to serve with its Extra Special Clementine & Cinnamon tonic and a Toasted Marshmallow gin liqueur, recommended with a Prosecco pairing.



### NISA GIN FESTIVAL

It's sometimes hard for independents to keep up when the big supermarkets promote the proverbial out of the biggest drinks trends of the day. Nisa aimed to help its members cash in on the gin craze with a summer Gin Festival to drive footfall and sales. The event featured competitive pricing and offers on a wide range of some of the UK's favourite gins and mixers, supported with themed marketing material and POS, including shelf-talkers, hanging signs, posters and gondola ends, to help create in-store theatre and draw attention to the category.

## ONLINE RETAILER OF THE YEAR

# 31 DOVER

### 31 DOVER

31 Dover offers an engaging online experience for anyone shopping across the BWS category as a whole. Its wide range encompasses classic brands, trend drivers and niche artisanal bottles. It excels in spirits but also offers Champagnes and table wines, a growing selection of beers and ciders and has embraced the booming low and no-alcohol drinks opportunity. Social media is a key part in the customer communication process and anyone signing up for its newsletters will be among the first to hear about offers and new products, in addition to tailored stories about producers and cocktail recipes.



### BOTTLE CLUB

The company formerly known as Wine Mill had a rebrand in 2018 and set out on a mission to revolutionise alcohol shopping by helping adventurous drinkers on a journey to discover new flavours and ideas. The new-look Bottle Club has brought wines, spirits, beer and cider under a single umbrella and the business has expanded its product range by 75% with a focus on trendy, hard-to-find and exclusive or first-to-market items. A service to supply wedding, party and office drinks sets it apart from much of the competition and it runs mix and match multibuy incentives across wine and beers.



### VIRGIN WINES

The UK's largest independent online wine retailer prides itself on the individual service it gives to customers with a choice between subscription services, a monthly pay-in Wine Bank account or a simple pay-as-you-go model. Product delivery is backed up by free advice and tailored recommendations from a dedicated wine advisor via email, online chat or over the phone. Virgin also likes to get face-to-face with its customers through live events that allow them to sample a selection of products, with more than 20 tastings each year showcasing anything between 100 and 300 wines each.



### THE WHISKY EXCHANGE

The London spirits shop's website provides consumers with one of the most comprehensive selections available anywhere, featuring 13,000 products. In a constantly-evolving range, there are whiskies from 22 countries while rums, gins and Cognacs and Armagnacs all number upwards of 500 products. In the past 12 months it has carried 35 exclusive bottlings and given online exclusive launches to 30 branded products. Personalisation has played a major role in the site's development, with 80 options including five of the Whisky Exchange's own single cask Scotches.





# FINALISTS

## REGIONAL CHAIN OF THE YEAR



### CAMBRIDGE WINE MERCHANTS

Hal Wilson and Brett Turner have been setting standards for the rest of the specialist drinks retailing world to follow for more than a quarter of a century. Their group of shops in Cambridge are built on a simple formula of fantastic choice, great quality and good service, but always executed to the highest standards. It's a business that never stands still, whether embracing trends in local products, seizing the hybrid retail opportunity or massaging its beer and spirits ranges to meet modern market demands.



### HENNINGS WINE MERCHANTS

With four shops in high street locations across West Sussex, Hennings has slowly become one of the UK's most successful and respected specialist wine merchant businesses. Matthew Hennings and his team at the family-run company have invested in stores to keep them on-trend, introducing hybrid elements where suitable and tweaking ranges to suit locations and contemporary tastes. A free wine magazine, in-store tastings, events and free credit on Enomatic Fridays get local shoppers beating a path to its doors.



### JEROBOAMS

Under the direction of boss Hugh Sturges, the Jeroboams chain in west and north London has transformed from old-school merchant to modern wine store in double quick time. Existing stores have all been subject to substantial investment to create light, airy and welcoming spaces to buy top quality wines, boutique spirits and craft beer, while a new acquisition in Muswell Hill has brought the estate up to a total of eight stores. Shops have variations in format and range to suit individual London "village" locations, with some incorporating events spaces.



### OXFORD WINE CO

The secret of longevity in drinks retailing often comes down to how you manage to adapt to the fast-moving pace of change in the industry. In recent times Oxford Wine Co has retrained its focus on to the city from which it takes its name, and subsequently discovered a new passion for good, old-fashioned wine retailing, including the opening of a third, boutique store, in the city centre. This has proved to be a fertile destination for spirits sales, including a range of local gins, which earned it a walk-on part in the "buying" episode of the last series of The Apprentice.

## LUXURY DRINKS RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### HARVEY NICHOLS

Specialist wine and spirit buyers ensure that Harvey Nichols achieves affordable luxury across the board in its stores. The retailer particularly excels at sourcing high-quality own-label across a range of drinks categories, from Champagne to ready-to-drink cocktails, and buyers are always on the lookout for exclusive bottlings and packs of well-known brands. Drinks events are held in stores and have included producer tastings, a whisky fair and food and wine matching dinners. A Harvey Nichols innovation allows smartphone online shoppers to be put in touch with a personal helper who can send live photos, product information and video streams from the shop floor.



### HEDONISM WINES

Hedonism has raised the bar for drinks retailing in the UK with its sumptuous specialist store spread across two floors in the heart of London's Mayfair district. Its range scales the dizzy heights of ultra-rare historic bottlings of leading Bordeaux houses and the everyday affordability of well-known spirits brands, touching all points between. There is a feature chilled room for rare whites and fizz, break-out areas for iconic producers and vertical flights of wines from some of the world's most prestigious estates. It's all done in a way that makes alcoholic drinks of all types aspirational but with a playful touch that doesn't forget this is also a world that's fun.



### SELFRIDGES

The famous London store has made wines, beers and spirits a hero category, with smaller versions of its vast Oxford Street department also incorporated into its satellite stores in Birmingham and Manchester. The buying team have created a selection that manages to balance the traditional expectations of many top-end wine drinkers with the thirst for newness and exploration that the modern world of drinks retailing demands. Exclusives, launches, own-labels and one-offs are all key to the Selfridges BWS character, while tie-ups with luxury brands for personalised products mean shoppers can always take home something they won't find anywhere else.



# FINALISTS

## INNOVATIVE RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### ASDA

Asda's Extra Special Gingerbread gin liqueur sent social media into meltdown at Christmas 2018 and it repeated the festive promotion with a new range for 2019, with similar results. It was just one example of how product innovation has helped the chain raise its profile in BWS, which it has backed up by making great use of feature promotional space in stores. No and low-alcohol was one particular area where Asda shone in 2019, creating an attractive bay to tap into mindful drinking trends.



### CO-OP

The Co-op has met the challenges of the cluttered high street head on. Its rebrand to its blue logo of yesteryear has gone down a storm with shoppers, and its targeting of retail packages to specific locations has shown the benefit of paying careful attention to detail. In drinks, it has championed local ranges and experimented with a whole host of packaging formats across the major BWS categories as it seeks to give shoppers more reasons to choose the Co-op over its rivals.



### WAITROSE

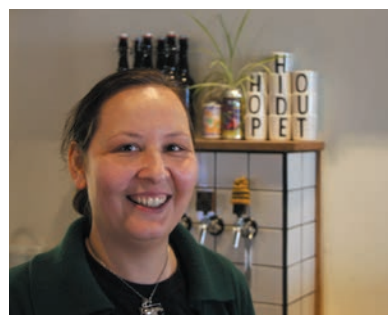
Waitrose's Unpacked trial of bulk, loose and refillable groceries at a store in Oxford was one of 2019's most talked-about developments in supermarket retailing. The experiment involved the sale of four refill wines under the When In Rome brand and a quartet of beers with Toast, the brewer that uses waste bread as a core ingredient. Early impressions were good. The wine and beer fixture is a striking addition to the BWS department and it sold 10 weeks worth of beer in the first four days.

## HYBRID RETAILER OF THE YEAR



### CONNOLLY'S @ ARCH 13

The Connolly family's involvement in Birmingham's wine trade goes back several generations. Current owner Chris brought in the skills of daughter and sommelier Abigail to overhaul the shop in the city's Jewellery Quarter with a 21st-century feel. The traditional Connolly's Wine Merchants now sits as a standalone department within a modern, friendly wine bar, sited in a railway arch close to Snow Hill station and rebranded as Arch 13. The site manages to integrate on and off-premise wine retailing while giving each a distinct personality.



### HOP HIDEOUT

Jules Grey's former store in Sheffield's suburbia was a past winner of the DRA's Independent Beer Retailer of the Year award and a move to new location in the city centre has helped the business evolve. The new Hop Hideout is in Kommune, an open space in the city's one-time Co-op department store, comprising a bar, street food outlets, independent bookshop, art gallery, performance spaces and hot-desk working areas. The extra footfall and user-profile of the location has brought Hop Hideout closer to its growing army of fans.



### MR & MRS FINE WINE

The sleepy market town of Southwell in Nottinghamshire is fortunate to have one of the leading hybrid wine shops in the UK in its midst. Housed in a former bank, owners Chris and Gosia Bailey have used sampling machines to provide an element of novelty for on-premise customers, with every bottle in the wine shop's extensive range also available to drink in. The store has an inviting modern feel with wine cues throughout its interior design, reflecting the owners' passion for the products at the heart of their business.



### SALUT WINES

Jon and Sara Saunby's bar-cum-wine shop in Manchester city centre has rightly earned a reputation as one of the UK's finest exponents of the hybrid format since opening in 2014. The shop takes advantage of a corner site to create an interesting L-shaped layout that allows customers to browse the take-out range of 500-plus wines while enjoying a glass from the on-trade list or a taste from the bank of sampling machines. The range excels in classic regions and styles while also highlighting more esoteric wines.





# FINALISTS

## SUPERMARKET OF THE YEAR



### ASDA

Asda has found itself part of the squeezed middle in recent years, with the polarisation of grocery between the top end and the discounters. It's come out fighting in BWS, working gondola ends and secondary siting like no other retailer and doubling down on efforts to secure one-offs, new products, exclusives and top-quality own-labels. It turned orange wine into an entry-level product and made gin a seasonal affair with bespoke products for Christmas and Valentine's Day. Party drinks are grouped in store for ease of shopping and a wine taste guide helps range navigation.



### MORRISONS

Morrisons has punched above its weight in prestigious wine competitions in recent years and stepped up to the plate in buying for beer and spirits, catering for bang-on trends in craft and local products while ensuring that it remains strong in the mainstream must-stocks. It goes the extra mile in merchandising with prominent bus-stop signage throughout the department making the shopper journey a relaxing trip. Copious product information helps the more adventurous traveller make the best choices about which roads to take.



### WAITROSE

Waitrose has long been a trend-leader among its supermarket peers, championing local gin before it was a thing, listing English sparkling wines when everyone else was ramping up Prosecco and bringing in craft beer while others were still hunkering down over slabs of landfill lager. Its trial of draught beer and wine offerings could eventually prove to be another industry game-changer, and in-home wine tastings and in-store G&T lists show that it is still prepared to boldly go where other multiple retailers fear to tread.

# SEE YOU NEXT YEAR...

## REWARDING QUALITY, CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

The Drinks Retailing awards aim to reward exceptional achievement across all areas of the off-trade. These awards are regarded as the most prestigious in the industry. Everyone benefits, from the sponsors to the retailers, receiving the awards.

For more information on opportunities for 2021, please contact Samantha Halliday on 01293 590053 or email [Samantha.halliday@agilemedia.co.uk](mailto:Samantha.halliday@agilemedia.co.uk)

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