The 2018 tipples to watch

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Last week the drinks elite came together for the International Wine & Spirits Competition's Annual Awards Banquet at Guildhall. The prestigious event revealed the emerging trends that will shape our drinking habits as we head into 2018:

Gin bubble yet to burst

This year, the IWSC received nearly 400 gin entries from 35 different countries" an enormous 571% increase since 2013. With consumer loyalty yet to wane, gin has continued to dominate the aperitif scene" as producers experiment with new craft creations and evermore obscure botanical concoctions. Recognising this, the IWSC has introduced the Signature Botanicals category, which this year saw a plethora of weird and wonderful flavours being entered" from ants, to seaweed, to clotted cream.

Supermarkets' own wines are contenders for the top table

Own-label wines have been popular for years, renowned for being cheaper than branded alternatives. However, retailers are upping their game at the premium end of their ranges, and shoppers are taking note. No longer is it taboo to take a supermarket bottle to a party, and recognising their quality is almost a status symbol in itself.

This year, Tesco walked away with the Sauvignon Trophy for its Tesco Finest North Row Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, 2016˝ no mean

feat in this highly competitive category. Across the board, it has been another fantastic year for retailers, with a total of 366 medals being awarded to own-label wines.

What's more, the judges decided this year to award the rarely-bestowed Innovator of the Year award to Morrisons. The supermarket was recognised for its efforts to transform not only its wine range, but also the marketing and shopper experience.

Organic wines: naturally becoming a tipple of choice

The popularity of organic and natural wines has boomed in recent years, with wine lovers shopping at artisanal farmers markets and drinking 'natural' at hipster wine bars. The IWSC has introduced the Organic Wine Trophy for the first time this year, awarded to theVin Santo del Chianti Riserva DOC 2012. For those hunting for winning organic wine on home soil, the Cave de Tain Crozes-Hermitage Biologique 2015 has been awarded a Silver Outstanding medal for its excellence.

High-altitude wines scrape the summits

This year, the trophy for best Malbec in the world was awarded to the Viniterra Single Vineyard Malbec 2015″ grown at a lofty height of 1,020m above sea level.

Winemakers have long recognised the benefits of altitude, with prime spots in the likes of the foothills of the Andes renowned for their intense sunlight, dramatic temperature shifts and excellent drainage" all contributing to producing top quality wines.

Wine lovers are increasingly fascinated by the 'story' behind what they're drinking" even the altitude at which the grapes were grown. As a result, producers are stating this on their labels, indicating that they have braved the elements to produce an exceptional wine. Gold medal winning Viñabla Reservado de la Familia Malbec 2016 and Silver Outstanding

medal winning Terrazas De Los Andes Parcel Norte Los Cerezos Malbec 2012 mention their high-altitude origins on their labels. Similarly, the Cheval des Andes Malbec from Lujan de Cuyo adorns its label with an image of the Andean peaks, declaring their high-altitude credentials.