

2024 National Finalists

Leon Henson

At the age of 23, Leon Henson is currently the Vineyard Manager at Batch Winery, a hilltop oasis located on Waiheke Island. His viticulture journey began in the sun-soaked vineyards of Herons Flight Matakana through an old-school apprenticeship kicking off in the summer of 2017.

Currently he is pursuing a Graduate Diploma in Viticulture Science at EIT. Beyond the vineyard, Leon hangs out in the depths of a World War II army tunnel, where he will be recording his first EP this winter..... stay tuned. A culinary spirit at heart, he also dedicates his time to perfecting his renowned blueberry & chocolate babycake recipe.

Joe Stenberg

Joe is 27 years old and is a vineyard operator for Woodthorpe Terraces. Joe found an interest in wine through bartending and studied Wine Science on Waiheke Island through Auckland Uni.

He has worked 3 vintages in the Hawkes Bay so far, all being very different from each other. Outside of work he plays hockey and does boxing which is a great way to take your mind off all the broken posts you've seen that day.

James Sutcliffe

James is 25 years old and a foreman at Craggy Range's Martinborough vineyard. He has been in the wine industry for seven years, working in vineyards across New Zealand and has done vintages in Margaret River and the southern Rhone. James is currently studying viticulture at EIT. Outside of work you'll find him in the bush, snowboarding or making music.

Anna Kelland

Anna is a Viticulture Technician for Constellation Brands, and first worked in the vineyard in 2020 during her studies towards concurrent degrees in Viticulture and Wine Science at EIT. Originally from Hawke's Bay, she has worked as a cellar door assistant, cellar hand, laboratory technician, and vineyard operator. She now enjoys the research and data analysis involved in her job as a viticulture technician after making the move to Marlborough last year. Anna is dedicated to gaining as much knowledge as she can about all things wine and is always interested in anything involving science. She hopes to study even more in the future and add value to the industry by sharing new findings from research and field trials. When she's not in the vineyard, Anna likes cooking and she's also a soprano who loves singing musical theatre and opera.

Nick McArthur

Nick McArthur is a 25-year-old Operations Manager at Tiki Wine and Vineyards in Waipara.

Nick grew up in Outram just inland of Dunedin on his family's market garden where he gained his passion for horticulture. He moved up to Canterbury where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in Viticulture and Oenology from Lincoln University. Nick has since worked three vintages in Marlborough and is now moving into his third year at Tiki Wines.

He has a passion for technical viticulture and is interested in exploring innovative grape growing techniques and new technology.

When he is not in a vineyard, he enjoys the outdoors whether that be trail running, dirt bike riding or hunting.

Nina Downer

Nina Downer is 24 years old and works at Felton Road Wines in Central Otago. Nina began her viticulture journey when she started her bachelor's degree in Viticulture and Oenology at Lincoln University back in 2017, while studying she spent her summers working in the vineyards at Dry River Wines in Martinborough. She made the move down south to Central Otago in the winter of 2020 and has been at Felton Road Wines ever since.

Growing up on dairy farms she has always had a strong appreciation for working outdoors and while studying she found she is most passionate about soil and plant sciences which makes working in viticulture always fulfilling. Working organically and biodynamically Nina's goals are to continuously find better ways to farm that minimise our carbon footprint and improve soil and vine health, specifically the ways we manage the undervine soil.

Outside of work Nina enjoys catching up with friends and family, gardening, and a good vino.