

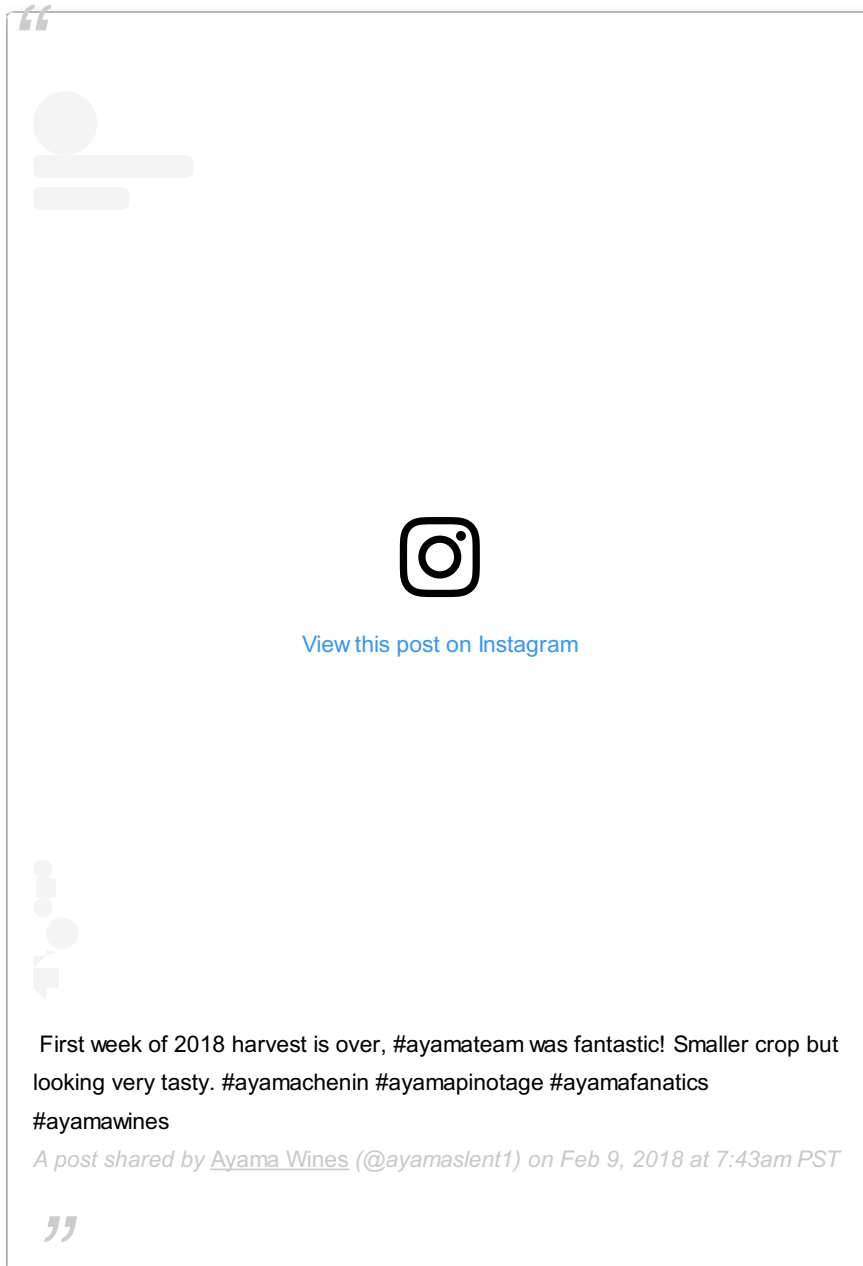
# The authentic Italian charm and rustic SA flair of Ayama Wines

By [Leigh Andrews](#)

8 Oct 2018

On a chilly Wednesday in late-September, select members of the Cape media were shuttled to Ayama Wines at Slent Farm in the Voor Paardeberg region of Paarl, for the official opening of their deli and wine-tasting room.

Don't be alarmed if you've not yet sampled Ayama Wines, as they export 95% of the wine they produce to 30 countries across the globe. The newly opened wine-tasting room means you'll now have time to put their produce to the test.

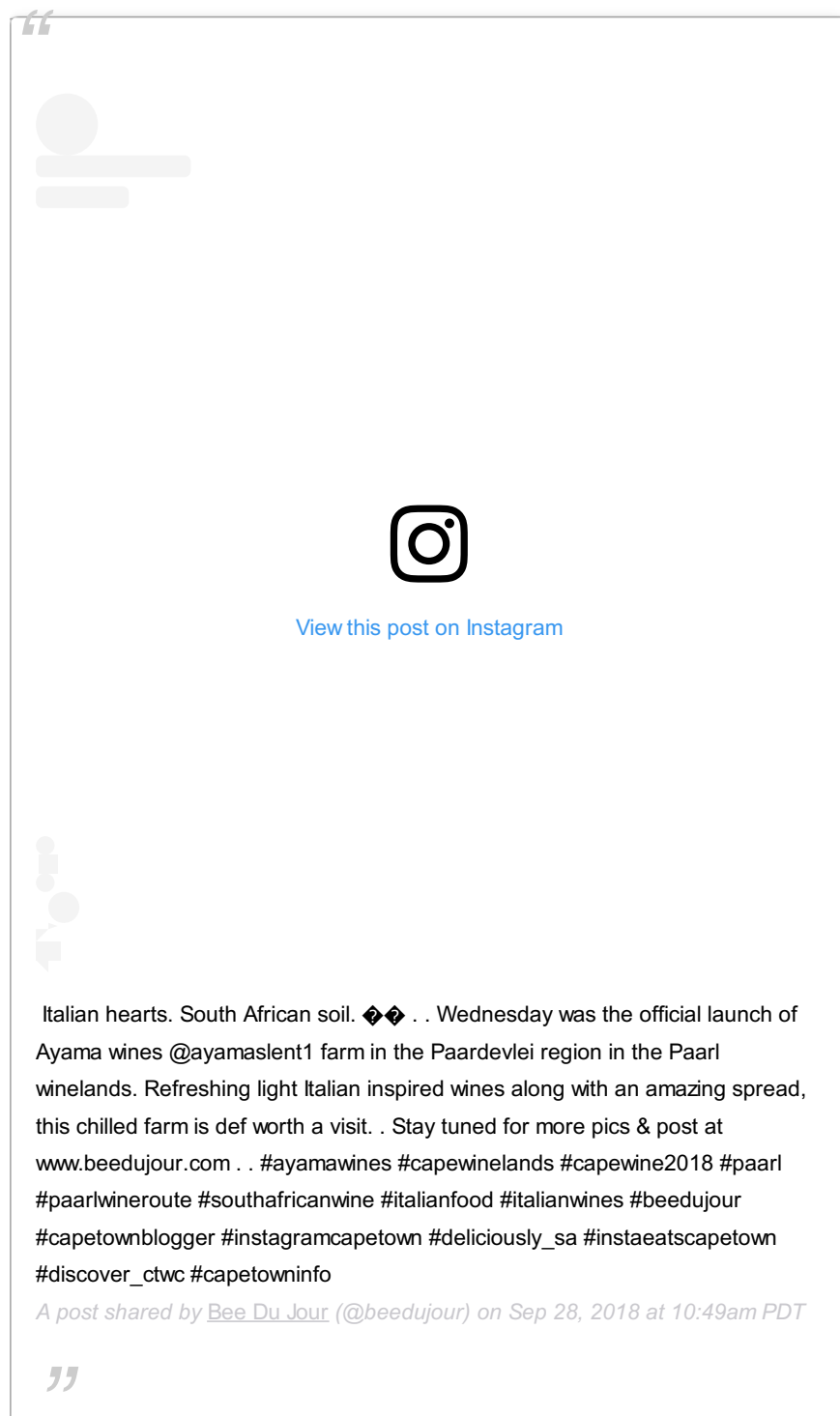


met with smiles, strong Italian accents and tunes of Prosecco we stood in the sun while hearing the farm's origin story from Michela, with snippets added by her husband Attilio.

## How the Italian Dalpiaz family came to own Paarl's Ayama Slent Farm

Long story short, they fell in love with SA while out on holiday, returned to look at 50 farms on the market in early 2004, and knew they were in trouble the moment they saw turned in through the pillared posts of Ayama on the very last day before

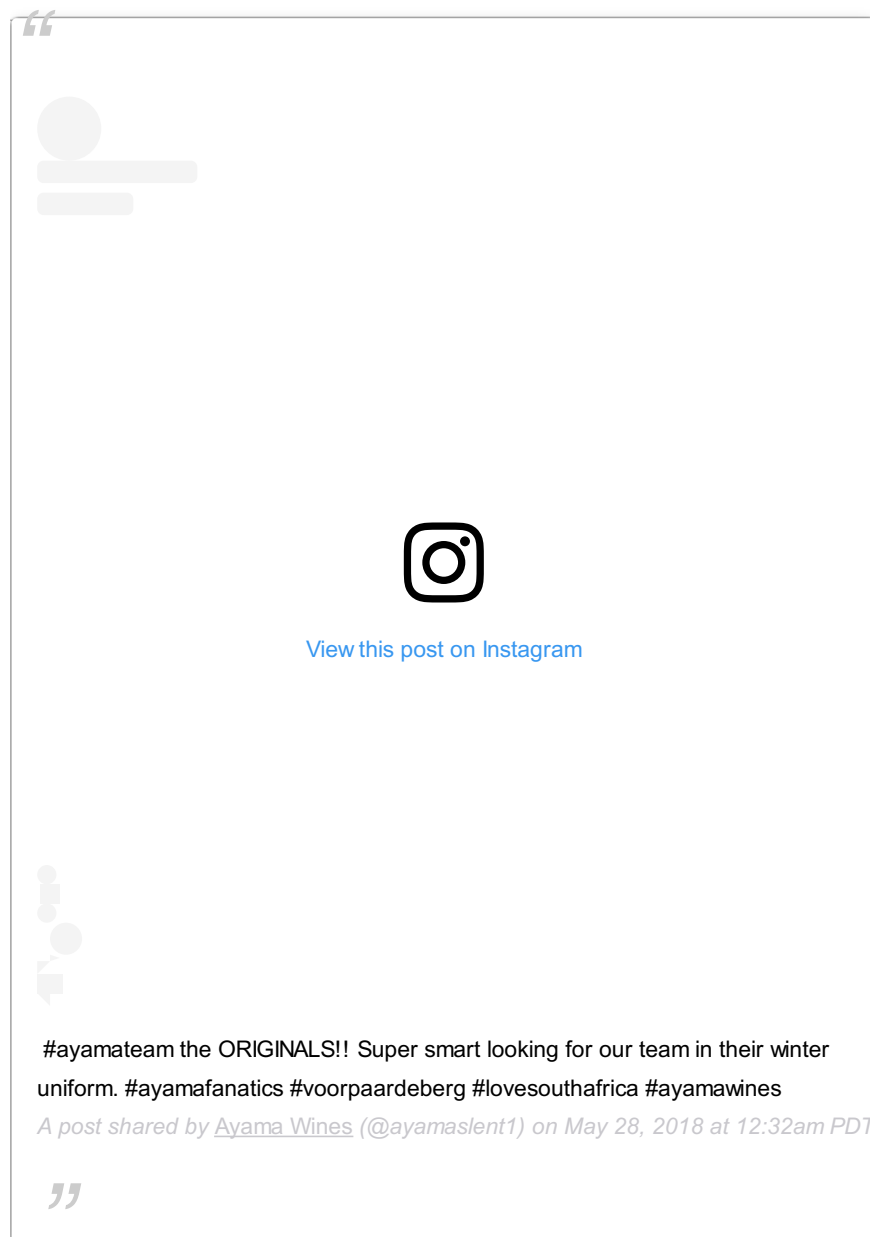
their return to Italy. They knew this was the one, despite being five times bigger than they had initially bargained for, at 172 hectares in total.



Officially owners since 2005, they made their first wine as early as February 2005 – Chenin, Cabernet, Shiraz and Merlot.

And while the Dalpiaz family certainly know wine, they didn't necessarily know South Africa just yet, so needed lots of guidance from the previous owners, now retired, as they had come to a culture of not just 11 official languages but also lots of different people with different histories and different tastes.

Michela says, "We didn't know we were also becoming parents, doctors, psychologists and relatives of the community of 35 people already living on the farm and kept on as employees."



Luckily, they have a fantastic working relationship at the moment and have put a lot of effort into that, with years of learning to understand each other.

Key among these has been the appointment of Talia Engelbrecht as manager, having started as assistant viticulturist two years ago and bringing her energy and positivity to the team and it's day-to-day running.



Rudi, Michela Dalpiaz, Talia Engelbrecht and Attilio Dalpiaz.

Charmed by their tale, we were ready for a tractor tour of the land – followed by the family's enthusiastic dachshund, Rudi.

The Dalpiaz family has also taken four years to renovate most of the buildings on the farm, with more to come. That said, the farm is still very rustic and down-to-earth, quite different from what you typically see on the wine farms of Stellenbosch and Franschhoek, which are geared to be more touristic and modern – instead, Michela insists Asama Slent will be kept African.

“ Got to leave my mark at [@AyamaSlent](#) tasting room launch this weekend, as part of [@PebblesProject](#) hand prints: [#fun](#) [#happyinnerchild](#) [pic.twitter.com/gLUVYm9aEw](#)— Mart-Mari du Preez (@Appleseed60) [September 10, 2018](#) ”

“ We found the farm is perfectly named, as 'Ayama' roughly translates to 'someone to lean on' in isiXhosa, while 'Slent' means land, people and passion. It was clear from our action-packed afternoon that owners Michela and Attilio Dalpiaz enthusiastically put their all into growing the best quality produce, with a dedicated team of workers, while respecting the environment. ”

And what a breath-taking environment it is, with the tractor tour the perfect way to experience the 40 hectares of vineyards, 12 hectares of plums and 2.5 of pears first-hand. Michela shared that they started focusing on artichokes three years ago, and also grow garlic and other Mediterranean style crops that do well without much water – a boon as the Cape is still suffering from water restrictions.



## #WomensMonth: Perseverance is key for Michela Dalpiaz

Robin Fredericks 31 Aug 2018



Speaking of the wildlife surrounding the farm, there are baboons and leopards that move all around the mountain, as well as caracals and porcupines.

The setting it treated as a nature reserve of sorts, which is why Ayama Slent's logo is the leopard, to remind themselves and others to protect the animals. Michela says two of their sheep disappeared a month ago, so while the leopard doesn't come down often, they know it's there – they plan to either build a bigger kraal or follow up on the suggestion that they invest in a donkey to protect the sheep.

Having by now reached the other end of the farm, past the dam and various plantations, we stopped to assist in planting a few vines on the land. We wore protective blue booties to do so, both to keep our shoes dry and clean and to prevent contamination of the soil with all we'd been walking on.

## A food-and-wine feast!

By then, we'd worked up quite an appetite and quickly took our seats in the newly furbished-yet-rustic Ayama Slent wine-tasting room. Its floors are particularly interesting, with a raised platform of planks made from old staircases, as well as long wooden tables and chairs. The room is airy and bright due to the high-beamed ceilings, and exposed bulbs strung on different coloured lengths of flex.

Michela added that the artwork on the walls will change every month to showcase different South African artists and their authentic heritage of the land.

Setting set, it was time for the food and wine.

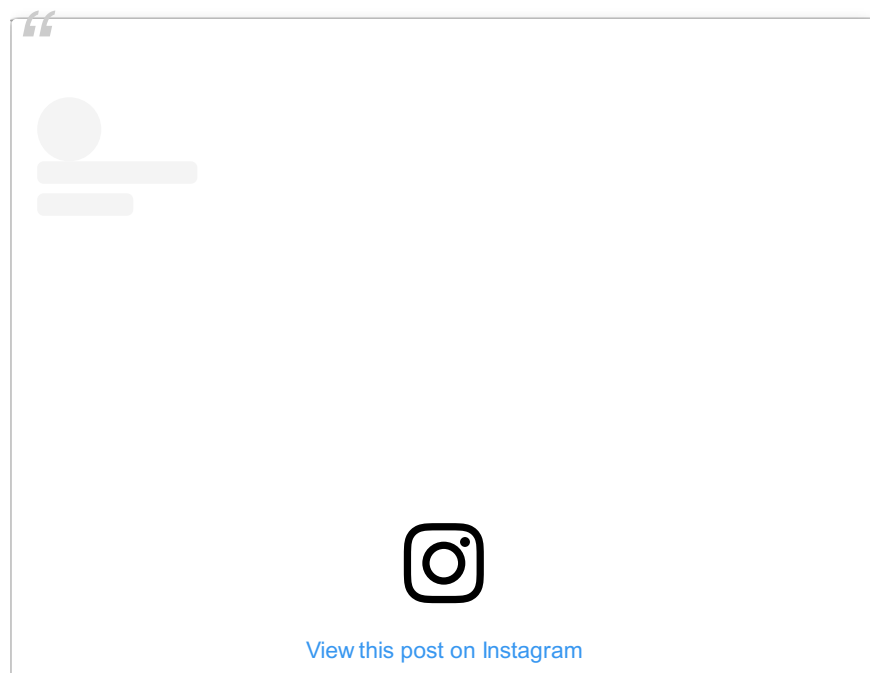
“ [#WINEWEDNESDAY](#) | 🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷🍷 For something different, the bulk of today was spent at [@AyamaSlent](#) - an SA wine farm run by Italians. We went on a tour of the farm, ate, drank and even planted vines. 🍷🍷 Coverage on [@Bizcommunity](#) soon, see a fewsnaps for now.. [pic.twitter.com/di7feSDAQO](#) — Rambling Litchi (@Leigh\_Andrews) [September 26, 2018](#) ”

Before we even had a sip we noticed the keen attention-to-detail – even the glasses had the farm's leopard logo frosted onto them. We started with a glass of the chilled 2017 pure Viognier, perfect with crusty bread made in Stellenbosch, and helped ourselves to a selection of salty, cured meats like salami and prosciutto, as well as balls of bocconcini and Gorgonzola – they roll in 12kg wheels of their favourite version.

Michela also shared the love story of how Gorgonzola became a cheese – I won't ruin the surprise, you'll have to experience Ayama Slent yourself to discover the story. There was also artichoke paste, actual artichokes, and a broad-bean artichoke soup sprinkled with Ayama's own pinotage salt.

## That wonderful white Vermentino

Chatting away, the second glass we sampled was the richly textured, saffron- and pine-aromatic Vermentino. It's an unusual one for most South African palettes as Ayama makes the first of this kind locally. A slightly more grapefruit-citrusy version of the more classically dry, almost salty Sardinian Vermentino,





#ayamavermentino starring @TDAwards last night, awesome evening between finalists and winners of #sanlamtopdestinationawards2017

A post shared by [Ayama Wines \(@ayamaslent1\)](#) on Sep 14, 2017 at 10:33pm PDT

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Michela explained how they had first started this particular process of the wine that's 'fermented in music' back in 2006 – as South Africa is strict on new plants being brought into the country, the vines were kept in quarantine for two years.

“ Finally planted in 2014, Ayama made its first bottles of Vermentino in 2016 with an impressive set of their second vintage now available in magnums. This was proof of the fact that an Italian vine grown in the Cape climate is ideal. ”

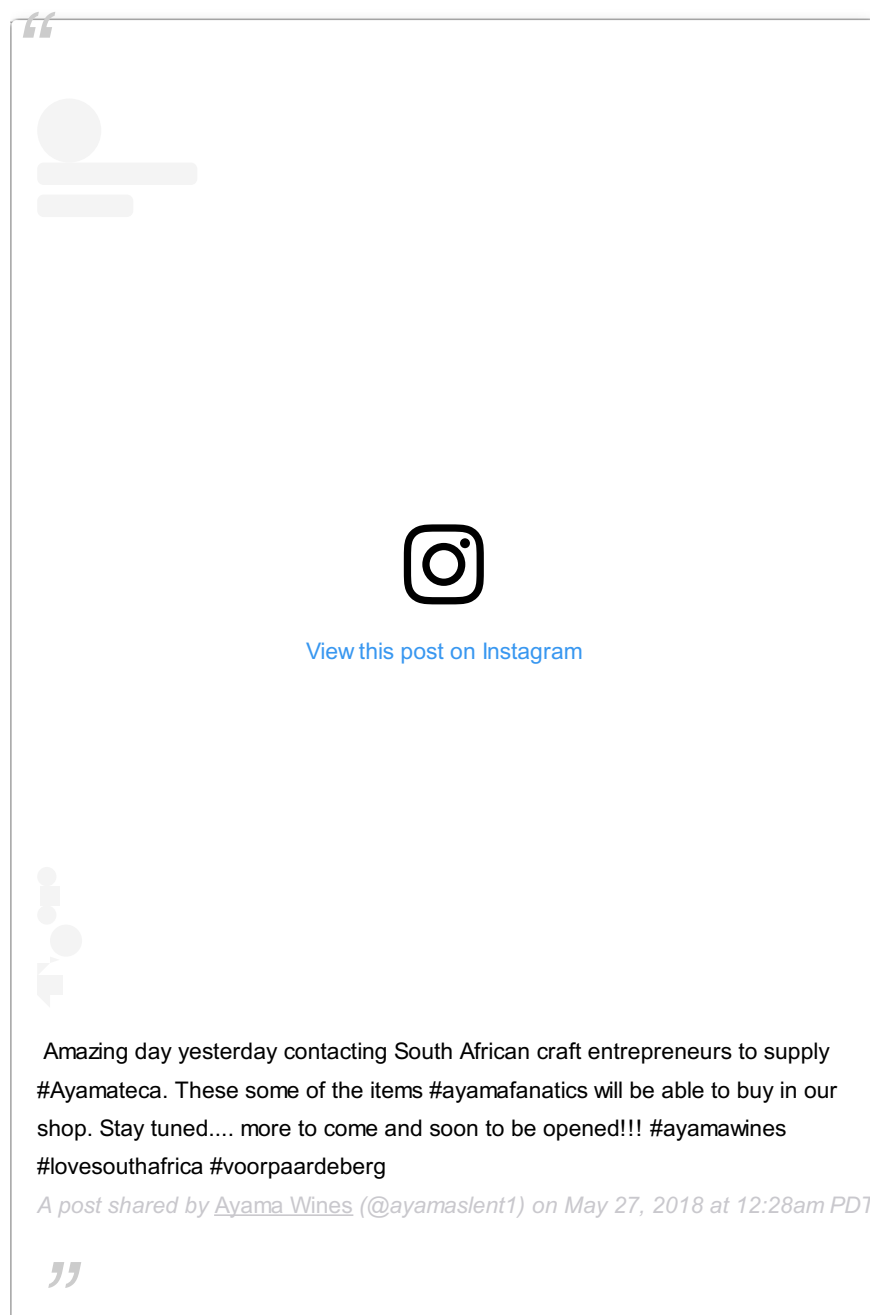
Suitably impressed with the whites, it was time to sample the Ayama reds. We chose between a glass of the Petite Syrah and the Pinotage, both particularly dry and fast coating the mouth – just the thing when eating salty artichoke slices, topped with crispy bacon bits for contrast.

And if all that talk of artichokes is making you hungry, you're in luck as Ayama is planning an artichoke-specific event a little later this month:

**This Facebook post is no longer available. It may have been removed, or the privacy settings of the post may have changed.**

By then we were ready for something sweet, and were treated to individual jars of tiramisu for our final course – the crumbled amaretti biscotti were completely moreish and perfectly balanced the creaminess of the dessert.

In the typical Italian way, we ended our visit with a brief post-meal *giretto* stroll to the mill, where we got to see first-hand how they mill various grades of flour, and ended with a tour of their also newly opened Ayamateca deli and farm store.



Open for just a few weeks and selling bottles, jars and bags of their own finest wheats, vegetables and oils, as well as locally produced Italian delights like grappa and limoncello, while the upstairs *enoteca* section offers chocolates, soaps and Africa-inspired arts and crafty home décor items made by friends in the community.

All in all, a wonderful afternoon. Next stop, afternoon siesta on the shuttle back to Cape Town. *Magies vol, ogies toe!*

A word of warning before you set off – the food is definitely not for banter – it's delicious, bready and creamy, perfectly cut through with a glass of your favourite Ayama wine.

Also note that while the tasting room isn't open for general meals, you're welcome to book out the venue for special occasions.

Visit the Ayama Wines [website](#) and their social media handles: [Twitter](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) for further updates.

## ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh\_Andrews.

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