



AWOnews



Produced by The Amateur Winemakers of Ontario

A forum for the exchange of news and opinions on home

winemaking in Ontario

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"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Percy Bysshe Shelley

"Ode to the West Wind"

IN THIS ISSUE:

by Paul Dunseath



We have a fact-filled issue for you with this, the third publishing, of AWOnews. Inside you will find a thoughtful piece by Don Eastman on the future of the AWO; the Chief Judge's column; news from the organizers of AWO Festival 1997; an entry form for the 1997 Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition; and some interesting recipes just in time for the holiday season. From all of us at AWOnews, best wishes for a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and a rich and rewarding New Year!

WHITHER (OR WITHER) AWO?

by Don Eastman

My wife, Bea, and I tremendously enjoyed the AWO convention at

Kitchener-Waterloo this year. It was a wonderful opportunity to meet old friends and renew acquaintances. However, the pleasure of the event could not completely overshadow the observation that the old friends weren't just people we had known for a long time, but people who, like us, are now significantly older than when we first met them. There is nothing wrong with that, except that there wasn't a lot of new blood in evidence. The AWO has provided us with a lot of fun and enjoyment over the past couple of decades (+!), as well as being a vehicle for improving our winemaking skills and knowledge.

The AWO was designed to meet the needs of serious amateur wine and beer makers at a time when the hobby was groping in relative darkness, in a different legal environment, in a pre-computer era. The purpose of this article is to begin a dialogue to determine whether the changed capabilities of amateur winemakers, and the changed environment within which we are pursuing our hobby, point to a need for significant changes in our organization. I begin with the bias that change is an essential component of survival and growth. It is my impression that there is an explosion in amateur winemaking activity that has largely passed the AWO by. I know that our vineyard has a number of grape buyers who are serious, progressive amateur winemakers who are not currently

AWO members, and are unlikely to be with the current AWO structure. I fear that the Amateur Winemakers of Ontario is on a road that is slowly leading to irrelevance and oblivion unless we soon take some actions to re-invigorate and renew.

The purpose of this article is not to end a dialogue, but to begin one that will lead to fundamental change, or at least an active decision to remain largely as we are. Most organizations find it easier to back into the future and slowly fade away rather than go through what can be a traumatic process of change.

Successful change is a three step process. The first is to set clear, agreed-upon goals. The second is to develop a workable action plan for achieving those goals, beginning with any required organisational changes. The third is to execute the plan (no, I don't mean kill it!).

Goals:

Why does the AWO exist? What do we want to accomplish? What are our priorities? Have there been any significant changes since the organization was created?

Observations:

The AWO has been a fermenting organization encompassing almost all (non-distilled!) fermented products. We include both wine and beer, as well as one very specific type of cider (still ciders and sakes are excluded from our fermentation umbrella). At this point we are the pre-eminent amateur wine-making organization in the province, but the serious brewers now belong to the Canadian Amateur Brewers Association (CABA). Because it is a beer-only organization, it is able to be more focussed, providing more specific brewing information, a vehicle for amateur brewers to get together, and has a significantly expanded array of beer classes for their competitions. Serious amateur brewers may belong to the AWO if they happen to make wine as well. As it currently stands, our Grand Champion Brewer can't claim to be the best amateur brewer in the province, but the person who happened to make the best beer as a sideline to his winemaking hobby. Despite its long tradition as part of the AWO, has the time come to let CABA do what it does best, and for the AWO to reflect its name, and focus exclusively on wine-making? In my opinion, that would include all direct sugar fermentations such as cider, but exclude grain-based products such as beer and sake.

While nominally we are focussed on amateur winemaking, in practice, commercial wines have had a substantial presence at our conventions. Originally that was so that we could have something that we could actually drink, and to have some bench marks to strive for. Currently most of our active winemakers are producing stuff that is not only drinkable, but exceeds most of the commercial wines. However, many of our members* are not active winemakers. Some are spouses of winemakers. Others are people who were once, but no longer active winemakers that still enjoy the camaraderie (and wine tasting/drinking), of their local club, and AWO convention. Should we re-focus on amateur winemaking, or should we become a more broadly based wine appreciation organization, with amateur winemaking as one important component?

*** Technically, none of us are individual members of the AWO. The AWO is currently a club-based organization. The AWO maintains a list of mailing addresses and qualified competitors as provided by paid-up clubs (each having no less than 6 members). If my club, or your club, drops out of the AWO, we as individuals are no longer qualified to participate in AWO activities. We could temporarily store ourselves in the "Members at Large Club", but that is really a**

pretext, not a real club. It was created to temporarily solve the problem of what to do with serious amateur winemakers who want to be associated with the AWO but are unable to join a club either because there is no club in their area, or the local clubs are not accepting new members., or one of the major issues that should be addressed is whether the AWO should continue as a clubs-only organization, or whether it should become an organizations of individuals, who may, of course, also be organized into local clubs. However, as important as that issue is, it is a "how to" issue to be dealt with following consensus on what we want to accomplish.

- learn more about wine**
- learn more about winemaking**
- become more skilled in our winemaking**
- fellowship with like-minded people**
- promote the hobby of amateur winemaking**
- recognition of our personal winemaking achievements (collecting medals & awards)**

- ensure that our hobby enjoys a positive legal environment
- improve our access to raw materials (grapes, juice and concentrates) and equipment
- other?

Each, or all, of the above can be legitimate objectives for our organization.

Which ones are important to us? How should we prioritize them? Is the competition an end in itself, or should it more properly be considered to be one means of advancing our skill as winemakers? If it is the latter, is the competition really structured in the best way to accomplish that? Historically, our annual competition has been the pre-eminent test for amateur winemakers (as long as they belonged to an AWO club). Intervin now has categories for wines made by amateurs and is issuing medals based on its own rigorous (sic) judging procedure. What does our "members-only" competition really mean?

A lot of activity, as amateur winemakers, wine consumers, and our club-based activity is governed by provincial laws and regulations. The provincial government has a serious revenue problem. One of the current concerns is that there is an endemic problem of "bootleg" wine in commercial establishments.

Governments have a poor track record of thinking through all of the consequences of proposed legislation. Is there a risk that our hobby could be seriously sideswiped by legislation aimed at "bootleg" activities? Should the AWO represent the interest of amateur winemakers at the provincial government?

How effective an organization can we be without a larger membership base?

How aggressively should we be trying to be a larger organization?

The above is not intended to be a complete list of all of the possible issues and concerns (perhaps exhausting, but not exhaustive). It is intended to stimulate discussion and dialogue that will either lead to some significant changes, or to an active decision to remain largely as we are. These are issues for you to think about, and discuss in your local clubs. I would greatly appreciate any feedback you can offer. Intention is to follow up with a questionnaire survey in the next issue of AWO news.

Don Eastman

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CHIEF JUDGE'S COLUMN

by Peter Pigeon

Reflections on last year: not only a great vintage but also a fruitful year for the Judges Commission.

We are delighted with our first year grads of the New Judges Training Programme, and anticipate a number of successful trainees joining the Commission before this spring's club competitions. Eager to serve you and certified competent are:

Ian Beausoleil-Morrison

Ted Griesbrecht

Bob Madill

George Pikor

Bill Thornton

Andy Trottier

Dean Wilkinson

Herman Zapletal

I expect that if enough interest exists another "New Judges Training Programme" will be offered a year from now. If you or someone you know (not necessarily a home winemaker), would like to sit the entry test next fall, please contact me.

I am very pleased with the changes we made to the annual Ontario Competition. The "two days" format ensured fresh palates and allowed sufficient time for a thorough judging of the entries. Every wine was tasted by every judge at the table; in most cases that meant four to six judges. If any one judge thought that the entry was worthy, it was moved into medal consideration tasting.

Congratulations to Rick Jones, the "AWO Wine Taster of the Year", and the first name on the annual "Intervin Trophy". Make sure your club is represented at the Toronto Festival next June.

Thanks to the many people who supported our first annual Judges' Silent Auction at the Waterloo Festival. Our continued training and skills/ knowledge upgrading through the "Master Judge" programme is dependent on your support. If you have anything to contribute to the next auction please contact any judge ASAP. We know that you want your wines judged by the best judges possible and we are eagerly working toward that end.

CLUB NEWS

Bytown Master Winemakers

Bytown Master Winemakers held a spectacular blindfold tasting on October 23 featuring 18 dessert and ice wines, including both commercial and home-made wines. At the conclusion of each flight the wines in it were revealed and discussed. The first flight included the star of the evening, and the wine against which all others were judged, a 1989 Château d'Yquem with a price-tag of \$286! Secretary Don West, who hosted the meeting, provided as well a post-tasting buffet which included Walnut Focaccia with Gorgonzola and Pears, and a

Turkey and Sausage Meat Terrine with Pistachio and Cranberry (see page 8).

Clearly, Bytown members' skills extend well beyond the wine cellar!

... AND SPEAKING OF FOOD...

Capital Amateur Winemakers

Marie Droste of Capital Amateur Winemakers sends along the following recipe

with a festive flair:

Brie with Sun-Dried Tomatoes

1 round or large triangle of Brie cheese

4 oz chopped sun-dried tomatoes

olive oil

3-4 cloves of garlic, chopped

chopped parsley

Soak the tomatoes in olive oil to cover, overnight in the refrigerator.

Add chopped garlic several hours before serving.

Pile the mixture on top of the Brie and sprinkle with parsley.

Heat in oven at 350 F for a few minutes until the cheese begins to melt. This can also be done in the microwave but be careful not to overheat and make the cheese tough.

Serve with crackers, bread, or Triscuits.

TWELFTH ANNUAL EOAWC

The organizing committee for the twelfth annual Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition has announced that judging will take place in Ottawa on February 15, with bottle entries due by February 8 (and entry forms by February 1). This is an "open" competition, which means that any individual may enter in any one or more classes, with the limitation that an entrant may enter only one bottle per class. With eight AWO-qualified judges in the Ottawa area, as well as a number of individuals who regularly judge in international wine competitions, entrants are assured of professional judging. The judging and scoring are the same as in AWO, including the medal awards (in fact, EOAWC was ahead of AWO on this,

having originated the concept of medal awards). An entry form with further details is on the facing page. Only one entry form is required per entrant, and the "clip-out" bottle label may be photocopied in the case of entry in more than one class.

As a final note, the \$3 per bottle entry fee includes a copy of the judges' comments.

THE SEMINAR PROGRAM

Unfortunately the seminar program did not get off the ground as planned.

HOWEVER, Andy Trottier, chair of the 1997 Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition, has announced a seminar program to be held in conjunction with the 1997 competition, and slated for February 22.

The tentative schedule is as follows:

9:30 am - 12:00pm Two 55-minute seminars

12:00pm - 1:00pm Lunch

1:00 pm - 3:30pm Two 55-minute seminars

6:00 pm - 7:00pm Tasting of competition entries

7:00 pm - 10:30pm Awards dinner

The break from 3:30 pm until 6:00 pm is to allow seminar participants to refresh themselves and change before the Awards Dinner.

Seminar topics under consideration include a Riesling workshop with individual component tastings; Sherry-making; Champagne-making; fruit liqueur-making; the wines of the Languedoc; Corks; and Ontario Pinot Noir: commercial vs Amateur.

The evening tasting is of the entries judged the previous week, which will have been nitrogen-flooded and resealed. Home-made wines ARE permitted at the dinner.

For further information and costs, please contact Andy at (613) 741-6777.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Greetings! By now you will have completed most of your winemaking from the 1996 harvest, although I understand that the late-harvest wines are not done yet. As you know, 1995 was one of the best vintages we have had in years, and 1996 had a tough act to follow. Unfortunately, because of the late spring and rainy weather, 1996 has not been one of our better years. You may have found that some of the grapes which you ordered were either unavailable or in short supply. However, as any Cubs fan will tell you, there's always next year!

Niagara Bench Bunch I am pleased to welcome a new club into AWO, the Niagara Bench Bunch. Not only do we have famous grape-growers in the Niagara area but also a lot of excellent amateur winemakers there. We look forward to the good wines and active participation of the members of our new club.

Festival 97 I'm delighted with the way next year's Convention is shaping up. Peter Bennell and the other Festival Committee members are looking at doing some things that we haven't done before, and they've taken the trouble to seek input from our membership. You'll find a lot more information about the Convention from Peter on page 5 of this issue.

1988 Convention I have received an expression of interest from one club in

hoisting the 1998 Convention, although nothing is firm yet. Any other clubs that are interested in hosting it should contact me or any other member of the Executive. I think it's time we had a convention somewhere north or east of Toronto.

Membership Dues By now, your club has either paid its membership dues or received a reminder from our Treasurer, Gord Barnes. Clubs that have not renewed by the deadline may not be eligible to join in next year's competition. I strongly urge you to renew if you haven't already done so.

Where is AWO going? I raised this issue in the last issue of AWOnews. Don Eastman, a member of the Executive, has agreed to carry the ball on this issue. We are looking for expressions of opinion from as many people as possible. At some point in the future, after the consultation process has been completed, the Executive hopes to come up with a policy or action plan, which can then be put to the membership. We cannot do this however without your participation.

John La Berge

DON WEST'S TERRINE WITH PISTACHIO AND CRANBERRY

2 lbs ground raw turkey

2 lbs sausage meat

2 chopped onions (1 cup)

1 cup dried or fresh cranberries, coarsely chopped

1 cup pistachios, coarsely chopped

½ tsp salt

½ tsp allspice

2 eggs, beaten

½ cup chopped shallots/chives/green onions

¼ cup dry vermouth

4 slices bacon

6 bay leaves

Combine all ingredients except bacon and bay leaves. Avoid mushing it together or the texture will be heavier.

Place 2 strips bacon and 3 bay leaves on the bottom of a terrine or baking dish.

Fill with meat mixture, top with bacon and bay leaves. Bake in 350 oven until meat reaches 170. (A shallow baking dish will take ~ 30 minutes, a deep loaf dish up to 1 hour). Pour off any fat. Chill overnight. Remove from pan, remove bay leaves, garnish with orange segments or zest.

Happy Holidays to All!