



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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"... underneath the barren bush, flits by the sea-blue bird of March."

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

"In Memoriam, xci"

IN THIS ISSUE:

by Paul Dunseath



The AWO Festival is now only three months away; time to fill out your registration forms and send them in to the organizers to ensure that you do not miss out on the wide variety of events coming in June. Later in this issue you will find further information on the program for the weekend as well as the official registration forms for the Festival and for Residence accommodation. Why not take the time now to read them over, fill them in, and mail them off?

For those with e-mail access to the Internet we also have a partial listing of addresses of suppliers to the hobby. If you are a supplier and we have missed you, please send your e-mail address to the editor and we'll include it in a future edition.

President John La Berge gives us a "heads up" on current issues, Chief Judge Peter Pigeon shares his views with us on items of interest to the hobby; Gordon

Barnes and Don Eastman (with questionnaire!) continue the discussion on the future of AWO; the Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition explains the meaning of Gold, Silver and Bronze medal awards in that competition; we surf the Internet for more interesting sites; Steve Gunning announces a gourmet VQA tasting; and we look back on the origin of the AWC "key" logo. All grist for the mill, as the brewers among us might say!

PRESIDENT'S NOTES

by John La Berge

Greetings! This is the time of year when we eagerly anticipate the upcoming competitions and June Convention. Those of us who have been part of AWO for some time have noticed the calibre of competition steadily increasing each year, with little sign of levelling off. Our top amateur wines long ago surpassed the quality of most commercial wines. Perhaps our motto should be "Melius, Sapidus, Elegantius".

Beer Competition There has been some debate as to whether AWO should

continue to have any competitions at all in the beer categories. Years ago when we first instituted the beer classes, there was no other organization that catered to the amateur brewers, but that is no longer true. At the Annual General Meeting in June, the club reps will be asked to decide the issue. Any changes would not take effect until 1998. In the meantime, I strongly urge you to discuss the matter at the club level.

Brew-on-Premises A decision was made by AWO in 1994 that wines and beers made at brew-on-premises will be ineligible for competition. Also, the owners of the brew-on-premises establishments have not been eligible to compete as amateurs. This matter is now up for reconsideration, and the club reps will be asked to vote on it in June.

1998 Convention A number of clubs have expressed interest in hosting the 1998 Convention. I would like those clubs to make a firm decision and contact me no later than April or May so that an announcement can be made at the June Convention.

Membership in Several Clubs There are some individuals who are members of more than one AWO club. If you are such an individual, when you renew your

membership, you should indicate yourself as being a "primary" member of one club (at the full \$13 rate) and as a "secondary" member of the other clubs (at the reduced \$5 rate). It has always been our policy that you can enter wines at the provincial competition from only one club, so you would compete in the club of which you are a primary member. Also, you would only receive one copy of the newsletter. I hope this clears up any confusion.

Better Winemaking As most of you are aware, Better Winemaking is no longer the organ of AWO. Rather it is now a commercial venture completely separate from AWO. However we are entering into discussions with the publishers of Better Winemaking with a view to having subscriptions to that magazine made available to AWO members at favourable rates. We will keep you posted when something has been finalized.

March Mailing to Club Reps A package will be mailed out to the club reps in March containing the Notice of Annual Meeting and draft Agenda, Director Nominations forms, Outstanding Achievement Award Nomination forms, the competition regulations, etc. If anybody is anxious to come on to the AWO board of directors, now is your chance.

WINE ON THE INTERNET

The second (and, regrettably, final) issue of Winemaker's Quarterly contains a number of World Wide Web addresses for companies and individuals either interested, or involved, in winemaking. Web pages, as experienced net surfers will know, can be very colourful and very informative, but often tend to be one-way communications without the means for the reader to communicate back with the sponsor of the Web page. E-mail, on the other hand, is inherently a vehicle for exchanging two-way correspondence.

In that light, herewith to begin is a partial list of e-mail addresses of interest.

This is clearly far from complete, and we will be happy to publish others as they are made known to us:

Funk Winemaking Supplies: funkwine@vaxxine.com

Hop Stop: hopstop@magi.com

Wine.Art: wineart@veccon.on.ca

e-mail-enabled Web sites:

While not providing a separate e-mail address, the Wine Council of Ontario web site at <http://www.wineroute.com> does provide a facility for communicating with the Council directly. This site provides a wealth of detail, including maps and tourist information, and is well worth a visit.

Kamil Juices does the same, through a hot-link on their Web page. They may be reached at <http://www.marknetplace.com/marknet/kamil.html>; click on Joseph to send mail to Kamil Juices.

One of the more attractive and functional sites we've visited is that of Vintages, located at <http://www.vintages.com>. This site includes a large number of links to other sites, too numerous to list completely, but including, as well as a number of wineries, such unusual ones as "The Internet Wine Shop", "Sam's Wine Warehouse", "WineX" magazine, and "Robin Garr's wine bargain page", reached through menu item "Other Wine Related Sites" All of these may be accessed simply by clicking on their address, as may the informative LCBO home page (<http://www.lcbo.com>). The LCBO site also features a mail facility for sending your comments directly to the LCBO.

In addition to its direct e-mail address, Wine.Art also has an attractive and well-designed site at <http://www.wineart.com>. Founder "Buzz" Arthurs is cast in the role of a guide to the multiple topics on the site, and invites viewers to "tap me on the shoulder" for further information. Doing so with the mouse takes the viewer to another page on the same subject. Nicely done!

THE KEY TO THE KEY

by Paul Dunseath

Most readers will be aware that the logo for the Amateur Winemakers of Canada is a massive, antique-style gold key, as is the symbol of achievement (the "keeper trophy") awarded to the Grand Champion of Canada. Newer members in particular may not be aware of the origin of this device. The story dates back to the late 1960s when John G. Armstrong, who had been a major moving force behind the creation of the Amateur Winemakers of Ontario, set his sights farther afield and conceived the idea of a national organization, and a national competition in which only Provincial award winners would be eligible to

compete, with the person achieving the highest overall point score being declared the Grand Champion of Canada. In the 1960s the law in Ontario required that every amateur wine competition had to be approved in advance, in writing, by the LCBO; strictly speaking, it was illegal to take a bottle of your own wine to a friend's house, or even to drink someone else's wine when visiting them! John's struggle was an uphill one, but ultimately successful (John's influence lives on; the certificates used to this day by AWC employ the same rendition of a grape-crushing scene as the original AWO certificates). The first national competition was held in 1971, and Gary Lussier of Windsor became the first Canadian Grand Champion. In 1972 it was held in Calgary, and when the results were announced, I had achieved the honour for that year. Winners and finalists in the various classes received awards of engraved wine decanters and silver goblets, but there was no trophy for the Grand Champion, unlike the chain of office and silver tastevin for the Provincial Grand Champions. John therefore struck a committee of three (himself, Gary and me) to identify a suitable "keeper" trophy for the Canadian Grand Champion. We quickly decided upon a gold key, representing the key to the wine cellar, on a ribbon rather than a chain (to avoid entangling chains when the provincial and

Canadian Grand Champions turned out to be the same person), and John then tasked me with finding a suitable key.

It turned out that a local (Ottawa) firm of locksmiths still had a small stock of blank keys from the defunct (1800s-era) "Ottawa-Carleton Gaol" and these had the desired look of solidity and style. After some persuading (and a lot of suspicious looks from the locksmiths), I managed to convince them to sell the key blanks, cut to a generic pattern specifically designed not fit any of their locks! John then had these gold-plated and suitably engraved; when the stock ran out, Dave Muir of Whitby provided a further supply, cut to the original pattern but made out of brass.

Although both the original keys and their replicas appear identical, there is one giveaway for the original stock; the depth of the engraving is much shallower on the originals. I've often wondered what the engraver of those original keys thought when he realized that the material into which he was attempting to cut the name of the recipient and year of award was not a relatively soft brass or copper base under the gold plate, but solid forged steel!

THE MEDAL CONCEPT

Medal awards, in lieu of 1st, 2nd and 3rd placing, were introduced in the Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition a number of years ago in recognition of the following drawbacks of a numeric rating system:

C Numeric ratings are relative, and only to the class in question. A First, for example, in one class has no direct comparison to a First in another, or even in the same class in another year.

C The numeric system gives no acknowledgment to superior wines which, due to the overall superiority of a particular class, do not rank in the top three; on the other hand, it gives undue recognition to a wine which turns out to be the best of a class of indifferent quality.

C Numeric ratings are seldom encountered in commercial competitions, which instead use medal awards as an indication of quality.

The question that arises, of course, is how to establish an objective standard for a particular medal award; in other words, what does a Gold (or Silver, or Bronze)

award really mean?

Following is an extract from an instruction prepared for EOAWC judges which addresses this (and other) issues. Readers' comments are welcome.

Background

First, a word of caution. The Oxford Companion to Wine observes that "When tasting wine, the nuances of Colour, Aroma, Flavour, and Taste, the interplay of alcohol, aldehydes, esters, and acids, the location, temperature, even one's companions, have such complicated effects that, whilst providing much of the enjoyment of wine, they make the idea of describing a wine numerically seem oversimplified at best, ridiculous at worst." The Companion goes on to state that, when experienced tasters work on a 0 - 20 point scale, "they can, about half the time, be out by as much as 2, and not infrequently by as much as 4." Even price is not a very reliable guide; market conditions and demand play a very large part; it should not be forgotten that the great Bordeaux classification of 1855, which was based on price, placed Château Mouton Rothschild in the category of second growths, a situation which was not corrected until 1973.

Awarding medals based either on point score, or equivalence to commercial

wines in a particular price range, has the same drawbacks and arbitrariness.

However the commercial world does offer rough classification systems which could be emulated. In considering a wine for a medal award, judges should therefore compare it in terms of colour, clarity, bouquet and aroma, and overall quality and balance, to commercial wines with which he or she is familiar, and identify it for a medal (or lack thereof) on the basis of the following comparison:

Recommended comparisons for medal awards

GOLD Equivalent to French AOC, Canadian VQA, German QmP*, or Italian

DOCG

SILVER Equivalent to French VDQS, German QbA*, or Italian DOC

BRONZE Equivalent to French vin de pays, Canadian standard commercial (but not screw-capped or bulk wine), German Landwein, or Italian IGT

*** The German categories of Qualitätswein bestimmter Anbaugebiete (QbA) and Qualitätswein mit Prädikat (QmP) do not directly equate to the other quality classifications since they refer in part to ripeness levels; in addition the French and Italian classification systems are geographically-based and overall quality**

varies from year to year, particularly in France.

The Judging Process

Each judge assesses each wine on his/her portion of the show bench (in the case of very small classes, this may include all entries).

In the first round, each judge identifies those entries considered to be suitable for medal consideration and "pulls them forward". This results in a subset of the total entries "pulled forward" and a larger number which have been rejected.

In the second round each judge tastes the entries rejected by the other judges, and pulls forward any which he/she feels merits further consideration. There is no challenge to this process; in other words, no wine can be rejected from medal consideration based on the assessment of a single judge; all judges must consider that it does not meet medal standards.

In the third round all judges reassess, and discuss, all wines which have been pulled forward ("the finalists"). It is essential that this be done in a professional manner without histrionics or pressure tactics, and with courtesy and respect for the other judges. Views may be freely expressed about the medal category (if

any) that a judge believes is suitable for an entry, but this view must NOT be imposed on others. (In the event that no entry is felt to be of medal quality, the judges should simply agree on a rank-ordering of the top three).

In the final round each judge marks a confidential ballot with the recommended medal award for each of the finalists, and turns it in to the Chief Steward. This process ensures that no judge is unduly influenced by the opinions or attitude of another judge; AND that the final results are still unknown to the judges. The Chief Steward tabulates the results and determines the final result, which is kept confidential until the Awards Dinner.

Tabulation Matrix

Tabulation of the final medal awarded for each finalist is based on the "Curnow Rule of 58". For each Gold recommendation for an entry, 100 points are assigned; for each Silver recommendation 58 points are assigned, and 36 are assigned for each Bronze. The scores are totalled and divided by the number of judges to obtain an average score. A final Gold requires an average score of 75 or more, a Silver 50 to 74, and a Bronze 36 to 49. These computations are performed privately by the Chief Steward to maintain confidentiality.

With three judges, ratings of Gold, Gold, Silver would result in a final score of Gold ($100 + 100 + 58 = 258$; $258/3 = 86$), while Gold, Silver, Bronze would result in a final score of Silver ($100 + 58 + 36 = 194$; $194/3 = 64.7$). This approach can be extended to either more or fewer judges, as required. Thus with four judges a scoring of G, S, S, B would provide $100 + 58 + 58 + 36 = 252$, or an average of 63, for a final Silver award.

Before the competition ends the Chief Steward will only determine which bottles have qualified for a Gold medal; the "Best In Show" is then selected from ALL Gold medal wines; this implicitly acknowledges that in some classes more than one bottle may be selected for Best In Show judging, while some other classes may have none.

AWO REVIEW

by Gordon Barnes

Structurally, the AWO is a collection of Ontario clubs - makers of wine, beer and cider. Membership of at least 6 persons is the only restriction. Also, the

AWO recognizes only individuals, not family memberships.

Each club, subject to its own rules, accepts memberships thus far from Ontario.

During the days of Better Winemaking over 500 individual subscribers outside of Ontario received that one benefit. The option for these people to participate still exists through the Members-at-Large (MAL) club.

Thus far, no out-of-province person has requested MAL membership. The residency issue is unresolved. I contend that MAL membership should be open to anyone who wishes to join and receive the benefits. AWOnews is now one benefit of AWO membership. Since the right to attend AWO-sponsored events is already extended to Ontario members' spouses and other guests, it seems consistent to welcome MAL members, regardless of residency location.

The competition front is a different situation. Within the existing structure, Ontario AWO residents enter wines in Ontario; Provincial winners then go to the Canada competition. This seems an appropriate routine to continue.

In the past two years MAL members (Ontario residents) have submitted competition entries through MAL. I think it would be appropriate for the AWO competition rules to exclude entries from out-of-province residents.

In 1994 the competition eligibility rules were expanded. Among other decisions, they disallowed "any wine or beer made at a Brew-on-Premise or similar commercial establishments". I believe that these winemakers have no unfair advantage over a member who works at home. Therefore the result is unwarranted discrimination and discouraging many potential AWO members.

The American Wine Society (AWS) has attracted many serious Canadian winemakers. They join and benefit from the AWS conferences and competitions. Our knee-jerk reaction is "me too". However before we jump into this new pair of shoes, let's check the size and count our toes. AWS is a national organization of individuals, largely winemaking professionals. This means that the bulk of the membership, numbering several thousand, attends the events on company-paid expense accounts, not on after-tax personal income. I doubt that there is enough Ontario membership willing, and financially able, to support an AWS-style organization. Even if this is wrong, I feel it unwise to jeopardize a healthy AWO trying to create a new organization.

It has been suggested that the AWO should change to individual memberships rather than club memberships. I would favour this if there were some very large

clubs that were grossly under-represented and disadvantaged by the current structure. I see no evidence to this effect. The by-laws currently define Quorum for a General Meeting as 25% of eligible voters (clubs). Few Festivals have had more that 22% of the individual members in attendance and the Annual General Meeting usually gets less than 10%.

There are however two areas where I feel we need work: 1. Provision of one-day seminars in the spring and fall; and 2. Development of audio-visual resources for clubs to use as program material.

THE VQA WINES OF ONTARIO AT AWO FESTIVAL '97

Within sight and influence of two Great Lakes lie three designated viticultural areas known for their crisp Rieslings, outstanding full-bodied Chardonnays, premium quality Sparkling wines, luscious Dessert and Fruit wines and now for your tasting pleasure, the best Reds from the 1995 vintage.

On Friday June 13 on the Glendon campus you can taste a selection of wines,

never before assembled at an AWO event, from wineries from across the land of shining waters which the Iroquois named Ontario.

Search for the perfect wine and food matches with mouthwatering morsels of smoked salmon canapés, Moroccan chicken, ricotta pesto crescents, ratatouille in pastry shells, feta & sun-dried tomatoes in phylo pastry, cheese, and paté; and the bounty will go on through the evening.

Sign up now and don't miss out on this extravaganza of gastronomic delight.

Space is limited, and early-bird tickets are \$45, so don't delay. Take notes on your favourite wine accompanied by gourmet treats for the inner person, interesting displays, and seminars for the mind. For further information, please contact Steve Gunning at F (905) 823-4448.

CHIEF JUDGE'S COLUMN

by Peter Pigeon

I am delighted to announce that four capable and fresh new palates have been

qualified as members of the Judges' Commission. Elia Gallo, Peter Ferguson, Don Panagapka and Terry Rayner successfully completed the final testing and training session on January 9th, 1997. They displayed a high level of competence that I know you the winemakers will benefit from, and we are delighted to have them join our team. Several more from our dual training program (east and west) are likely to graduate in the near future.

The AWO InterVin Wine Taster of the Year contest will again be offered at the Toronto conference. Make sure that your club has at least one representative for this prestigious award.

The Commission will recommend to the AWO Annual General Meeting that a modification be made to the double Gold Medal entry rule to include double entries from other medal wines that show every possibility of placing at the finals. Our desire is to reward exemplary winemaking and not let restrictions get in the way where possible.

The Commission has initiated an important part of our professional development program, the "Master Judges Program", by establishing a Wine Cellar. We have a need to assess and compare wines that are "ready to drink".

This is impossible to do, as you have probably experienced, through LCBO current stock. We will be collecting both commercial and amateur wines for future tastings. Your support of the "Silent Auction" at the Convention makes this valuable experience possible. Our goal is to actively upgrade our judging skills to better serve you, the ever-improving winemakers of AWO.

The date for the AWO judging finals is May 10th and 11th. Once again the judges will use a two-day format and enjoy the Passmore Ranch wine assessment area.