



AWOnews



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A forum for the exchange of news and opinions on home

winemaking in Ontario

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The 1998 Winter edition

"Come, ye thankful people, come,

Raise the song of Harvest-home;

All is safely gathered in,

Ere the winter storms begin."

- Henry Alford"

IN THIS ISSUE:

by Paul Dunseath



As the winemaking season winds down, at least for those who use fresh grapes exclusively, the club scene is by contrast moving into high gear. In addition, planning continues apace for upcoming Festivals and competitions. Inside you will find further information on AWO 1999 in London, as well as an entry form for the 14th annual Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition. This "regional" competition is open to all amateurs, wherever they live, and without the requirement for club membership. Wines are assessed by qualified judges, and awards are made of Gold, Silver and Bronze medals in the

same manner as in AWO.

Meanwhile, plans are also firming up for AWO 2000 in Ottawa. The host site/hotel has been selected, a source of souvenir ISO-standard wine glasses identified, and the wine for the meals is already fermenting.

In this issue we also include the always-welcome insights by our President, Dan Ostler, and Chief Judge Peter Pigeon, as well as an analysis by Gord Barnes on the sources of wines entered in AWO 1998. Our feature article as well tells you more than you ever wanted to know about nutrients, an essential ingredient in good winemaking. And, as Christmas and Hannukah approach, best wishes for fine wines and successful ferments.

THE WINES OF 1998

by Gord Barnes

Once again Lailey Vineyard tops the list of suppliers for entries in the 1998 Competition of the Amateur Winemakers of Ontario. Second place went to

Wine-Art, followed by Peter Brehm (California), Watson Vineyards, Lenko, Funk, Eastman and Kamil Juices.

The annual competition drew 571 entries in the 29 classes - sparkling cider, 6 beers and 22 wines. Entrants were requested to list the major ingredients and the suppliers where they got them. One or more sources were listed by 75% of the entrants. For these 429 entries, 611 suppliers were reported. Note that a three wine blend would list three suppliers - perhaps three different suppliers. A total of 80 different suppliers were mentioned, but the top eight listed here accounted for more than half of the total listings.

The chart below lists the top 8 suppliers, the total listings for each and a distribution of the awards given the entries that contained them.

1998 AWO Competition = Suppliers Reported

Supplier Gold Silver Bronze Merit Total entered %

Lailey 7 27 33 17 47 131 21.4%

Wine-Art 2 15 8 7 32 64 10.5%

Brehm (CA) 1 6 10 1 17 35 5.7%

Watson 1 1 6 10 13 31 5.1%

Lenko 3 3 8 5 9 28 4.6%

Funk 1 1 6 4 12 24 3.9%

Eastman 4 0 1 2 11 15 2.5%

346 56.6%

Total entries 571

Reported Supplier(s) 428 75.0%

Total suppliers Listed 611

Different Suppliers 80

Note: If one wine is a blend of Cab Franc from Watson and Merlot from Lailey, each supplier gets credit for 1 listing. For further information contact Gord Barnes.

NUTRIENTS AND ENERGIZERS

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W@inemakers who habitually use concentrates are accustomed to adding perhaps one teaspoon per gallon or a few millilitres per litre of something called "nutrient" to their must. Followers of old "country wine" recipes, or those dabbling with garden fruit, often do not, simply because no-one suggested that they should. The result, in the latter case, can be a wine which fails to ferment out completely, with the unfortunate "traditional" home-made wine characteristics of being overly sweet and unbalanced. It doesn't need to be that way, and a little knowledge of what nutrients are all about can help to ensure that it is not.

The average suburbanite realizes full well that the secret to a healthy lawn is the judicious application of fertilizer, at the right time and with the right formulation, with the various chemical balances chosen on the basis of the need for root growth, leaf growth, or general nutrition. This is actually a lot more complicated than the use of nutrients in wine-making, but the basic concept remains the same, that of ensuring healthy growth and a good crop, although in winemaking the "crop" in question is the yeast we use to ferment the must. In

addition, as we are all aware, a balanced diet high in vitamins is essential to human and animal health; an unbalanced diet can easily lead to poor growth or illness due to vitamin deficiency.

Plants build carbohydrate - sugars and starches - out of the basic building blocks of air (in particular the carbon dioxide component of air) and water, using sunlight as the energy source for this miraculous process of photosynthesis. In addition, vegetable protein is created from nitrogen, phosphorous and potassium, which is why we spread either chemical or organic material rich in these nutrients on lawns and gardens at the appropriate time in the growing season.

Animals in turn consume plant materials, extracting the stored energy from carbohydrates and returning them to their original state of carbon dioxide and water; and breaking down the vegetable protein into amino acids which are then rebuilt into animal protein.

Yeast exhibits some of the characteristics of a plant, and some of those of an animal. It consumes carbohydrate - in winemaking, sugar - as does an animal, and requires nitrogen, phosphorous and other nutrients from which to build

protein, as does a plant.

The important point to realize is that, from the yeast's point of view, this is not optional. If it is to grow, it must have access to nutrient material. Ideally it will find this in the juice which it is fermenting, supplemented as required by nutrient which has been added by the wine maker. If there is insufficient nutrient present from the beginning - as would be the case with musts made from flowers or honey, without additional nutrient - the yeast simply will not grow to a viable size, and either will not ferment the must at all, or will only be able to do a partial job of it, leaving the wine sweet, weak, and prone to infection or acetification. In addition, wine yeast faces the prospect of what, in its world, is the equivalent of weeds. "Wild" yeasts, moulds and bacteria are prevalent in nature and - given the opportunity - will dominate the ferment to the detriment of flavour and alcohol development. Nutrient, in a form favoured by the yeast, is essential to establish a strong and viable yeast colony which will win out over the "weeds".

A second scenario occurs if there was enough nutrient present to start the ferment, but not enough to sustain the yeast throughout the entire process.

During the course of a 3 to 4 week fermentation, many generations of yeast are created, live, reproduce and die, and each one will require adequate nutrients for healthy growth. If the later generations are starved of nutrient because that which was present at the beginning has all been used up, they will go looking for it wherever they can find it. Where do you think that might be? Well, clearly, the most readily available - in fact the only - source of the material it requires to build protein is that of the cells of dead previous generations of yeast. Lacking a high moral standard the yeast will, if it must, revert to cannibalism and digest and rebuild this protein source. This process, which is known as autolysis, is, however, imperfect. In the process some amino acids are left unused, and this results in bad flavours in the wine - a persistent staleness or mustiness - as well as the likelihood of production of higher alcohols, or "fusel oils", which in low concentrations are headache-making, and in high concentrations dangerous to health. Besides the evident off taste, the presence of autolysis can be detected by the formation of a series of "dimples" in the layer of yeast at the bottom of a carboy.

If the yeast has sufficient nutrient in the must for growth, it will take the lazy person's route and use it, resulting both in protection of the basic flavour, and

healthier growth as well, so it is obviously in the wine maker's best interest to add a reasonable quantity of nutrient salts to the must.

Many of these nutrients are similar to those used on lawns, although since the "plant" is different, with different needs, there are some differences. Those for lawn and garden, for example, may contain nitrates; yeast is unable to use these, and instead prefers ammonium salts which are high in nitrogen, such as ammonium phosphate, as well as small amounts of potassium and magnesium.

These are generally available in wine maker's stores, already formulated to give a balanced amount of each of the major nutrients. A word of caution is, however, in order. Used in accordance with the recipe, these products are entirely safe. If used to excess, they may not be. News reports indicate that some commercial wine producers have, in the interest of coaxing the maximum alcohol content possible from a must, employed urea-based nutrients at as much as 26 times the level considered to be safe. The result has been a wine which contains levels of an intermediate product - ethyl carbamate - which is potentially capable of causing severe health problems. While urea-based nutrients are suspect, other nutrients appear to be free of side effects.

Some additives such as vitamin C are necessary for wines which are light in this vitamin (such as Apples), while other ingredients have a sufficient quantity to preserve flavour and colour, such as grapes, blueberry, elderberry, and so on. These will require some supplementing with nutrient, with the amount dependent on the type of juice one is using. If in doubt, however, from ½ to 1 teaspoon of nutrient per gallon of must is a reasonable amount for these wines, and at least double this amount for honey and flower musts.

In addition to nutrient salts, a fermentation will also benefit from a good supply of other vitamins; dried yeast, as many readers know, is an excellent source of B vitamins, so it is not surprising to learn that B-complex vitamins can have a pronounced effect on fermentation. The "yeast-based" nutrients to which we have alluded earlier are primarily a product which contains both nutrient salts and vitamins; they are sold as a "Super Nutrient" or "Yeast Energizer". This product also has the useful capability of being helpful in restarting a stuck ferment. Commercially, yeast nutrient as used by commercial operations, and available in better winemakers' supply stores, provide the following:

C Nitrogen, from such sources as Di-Ammonium Phosphate (also known as

DAP) and possibly malt extract

C Usually, yeast hulls (the dried protein outer wall of yeast cells)

C Vitamins, such as calcium pantothenate, thiamin, niacin and biotin

C Minerals such as zinc and magnesium

Amateurs without access to the proprietary products can achieve more or less the same results by using equal quantities of diammonium phosphate and yeast hulls, generally available from winemakers' suppliers; failing this, use Vitamin B1 at the rate of 3 mg per gallon (1 gm in 1.5 litres), or alternatively B-complex tablets (not the ones containing liver extract!), with the optional addition in each case of vitamin B3 and a pinch - a small pinch - of Epsom Salts.

The use of nutrient is particularly important if you are a compulsive racker, since each time a must is racked the size of the yeast colony is severely reduced, and the yeast must again rebuild its population. While the original nutrient supply may have been sufficient to support the original yeast colony during fermentation, it may not be adequate in addition to supply a second or subsequent colony from the ground up, and when this happens the yeast either

goes dormant, stopping fermentation, or turns to autolysis if enough dead cells made it over in the racking. The same applies when the wine maker practises "pitching", or using fermenting yeast from one batch to inoculate a second, rather than starting over again with fresh yeast.

The bottom line is that an adequate supply of nutrient - based on the type of must you are using - is essential both for a healthy ferment and to avoid the unpleasant effects of autolysis. In addition, nutrient, and a shot of energizer, can be helpful in reviving a stuck ferment. If the yeast has already picked up its marbles and gone home you may not be able to restart it, of course; but if it's only thinking about it, giving it a good meal may well change its mind. Good luck!

CHIEF JUDGE'S COLUMN

by Peter Pigeon

It sure is nice to add acid instead of sugar to the must. I'm looking forward to tasting the rich, ripe wines of '98 in future competitions.

This appears to be an extremely busy year ahead for many of us. Unfortunately, the New Judges Training Program will be delayed awhile, but hopefully not long. If you have qualified for entry, we will advise you well in advance of the details once time permits. If you would like to sit the taste test, there will be ample notice in advance.

The Master Judges Program continues, with several more class presentations (Ice Wine, Cab Family, and Other Red) scheduled in the next few months. The Eastern Ontario Judges just completed a Sparkling Cider presentation by Paul Dunseath. It will soon be time to assemble all of the class presentations into a book as a resource for AWO winemakers. There is a lot of great material here that should prove extremely valuable, both in winemaking and for a better understanding of the AWO competition classes.

By the next newsletter I expect to announce four to five new "Masters" as well as the results of the election of officers in the Commission, as the three year term has now expired. The Judges Commission Seminars Booklet is now residing on the AWO website, with lots of topics and presenters for your coming club meetings.

The new multiple entries rule for the Ontario finals will likely add to the demand, so be sure to book your club competition judges early for this coming year's club competitions.

INTERNATIONAL WINE AND FOOD FESTIVAL

Judging for the thirteenth annual "Wines of the World" International Food and Wine Festival in Ottawa took place over the Thanksgiving weekend.

Twenty-three knowledgeable wine judges, including 3 members of the Wine Judges' Commission of Ontario, examined 292 wines in a blind tasting; when the results were announced, Canadian commercial wines had won thirty-eight medals out of an overall total of 89. Since it is a blind tasting process, the judges have no idea what wine they are examining, apart from knowing the category.

Ontario's Stoney Ridge under winemaker Jim Warren received the lion's share of awards: a total of 8 medals of which two were Golds: one for his "Private Selection Bench Riesling 1997 in the Dry White category and the other for his

Bench Pinot Noir 1997 in the Pinot category. Cave Spring was also no slouch, with 3 Golds and a Silver; their Riesling Off-Dry 1997 Best scored as Best in Class in the Medium/Late Harvest White wine category. Cave Spring also realized Gold with "Indian Summer" Riesling 1997 in the Medium/Late harvest White wine class, and with a lovely Gewurztraminer 1997 in the category of Dry White.

Former amateur Eddie Gurinkas of Lakeview Cellars was judged to have the Best Icewine at Cellars of the World for two years in a row. This year's winning entry was his Vidal Icewine 1997.

Other Canadian Golds also went to Peller Estates "Founder's Series" Dry Riesling; Henry of Pelham Sauvignon Blanc 1997; B.C.'s Calona "Artist series" Chardonnay 1997; Inniskillin "Founder's Show Reserve" Pinot Noir 1995; and Marynissen Baco Noir 1997, a wine which a local wine columnist described as his personal favourite.

Australia and France tied for second place in the medal race with 13 each, including (in both cases) 4 Golds. Next was the U.S. with three Golds, including a Best Dry White for Calera Central Coast Chardonnay.

This prestigious event attracts entrants from around the world, and wine authority Michael Botner has been very active in promoting this event as the star attraction that it is.

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Dan Ostler

First I would like to thank the Kawartha Krushers for the excellent financial management of last year's Festival, which resulted in the presentation of a cheque to AWO for over \$1600. Well done! The '99 Festival in London is well underway (see elsewhere in this issue) and Paul Dunseath reports that our gathering in Ottawa in 2000 already has many of the key components in place.

There is even a hint that the Millennium convention in 2001 may have committed hosts.

At the recent Executive meeting we voted to support a proposal from the Judges' Commission to increase the fees charged for judging, at both the club and Ontario level. The club fee of \$1 has remained unchanged for many years, as has

the \$3 fee for Ontario entries. Peter Pigeon and the Judges' Commission are carrying out a very professional programme of continuing education (re-qualification every 2 years and the Masters programme). These activities take a lot of time and are expensive to run. Presently many of the requisites are donated by Judge members (in particular Ludvik's preparation/donation of the trial wines). Also when Judges attend your clubs they usually do not charge for mileage. Without the Passmores' support of the Ontario judging at their "ranch" the Judges' Commission would be a big deficit! When you consider that it costs \$25 to enter a wine to Intervin, the new club fee of \$2/bottle and \$5 for Ontario entries is not unreasonable. Please continue to support the efforts of the Judges' Commission.

Another topic under discussion is the Concentrate Class. There are so many variations of concentrates for sale, varying from as little as 10% volume reduction to the old standard form of concentrate. Some members are wondering if the concentrates should compete with other entries in the appropriate grape class, eg. Chardonnay, Cabernet. Our Class Description Committee will be dealing with this issue as well as many others. Please provide your thoughts to the Committee through its Chairman Gord Barnes.

Last year the K-W club proposed that AWO add a new competition "class" for wine tasting. The issue of points is open to much discussion but the Executive has endorsed the principal of this motion, which is that a better educated palate will help you produce better wines. At the '99 Festival in London there will be a session designed to evaluate tasting abilities (in the past we had the Winetaster of the Year). For '99 there will NOT be any points awarded but medals will be presented on Sunday.

Our Winetalk email forum now has 59 members representing 22 clubs. If you have email and are not yet a member just send me an email (awo@makewine.com) and we will add you to the list. There have been many interesting discussions over the last few months - I am sure you would find it valuable.